

# Education bill just another bandaid

Part 1, by Joyce Fredman

The U.S. Senate passed the Neighborhood Schools Improvement Act by a vote of 92-6 in late January, the same week that the "Education President," George Bush, delivered his State of the Union address. The bill, whose principal sponsor was Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and which is meant to address the crisis facing American children and their schools, allocates \$850 million to poor communities and schools with "experimental" programs. It amounts to no more than a gimmick in the face of the demise of education fueled by the economic depression and the collapsing tax base.

The amount of money itself is ridiculously small for a system badly in need of a major overhaul: \$850 million translates to roughly 4,000 of the country's 80,000 public schools receiving \$200,000 each. More importantly, there are no fundamental operating changes asked for in exchange. What is called for, in general terms, is more teacher training in science and math, expansion of the Head Start program, and an extension of adult literacy programs. While these are laudatory goals, how they are to be brought about is another question. One of the more dubious aspects of the bill is its call for a council of political leaders and education experts to develop a national academic report card. Which "experts" will be asked to set what kind of standard is not defined.

The recent legislation is the culmination of a years-long process. During the past four years, education has been one of the favorite topics on Capitol Hill. As the country's abysmal test scores and dropout rates have made headlines, politicians have held forth *ad nauseam* about the urgency of turning the situation around. Recently, a three-part series putting American education on trial was aired on nationwide television; the results of a recent study out of Stanford University showing the tripling of teenage suicide and the doubling of teenage homicide, gave grist to the mill.

But not one of these experts on either side of the political spectrum has called for adequate funding for education. As Bush's State of the Union address made clear, citizens are being offered nothing but jingoism.

## Bush, Alexander, and 'choice'

When Lamar Alexander replaced Lauro Cavazos as secretary of education, there was great fanfare from both Bush and the media about the "revolution" that was going to take place in U.S. education. "Alexander brings a degree of political acumen to his job that was never seen under his precedes-

sors," wrote *Time* magazine on Sept. 16, 1991. This was the man to sell the President's program for "choice" schools. Since he took his position in the cabinet in December 1990, Alexander has made no secret of his disdain for the public school system. His younger son William attends a private school in the Washington area. He was the leading spokesman for Bush's program to allocate money for parents to send their children to the "school of their choice."

Last year in Iowa, Alexander was the main pitch man to the governors for the President's national goals. Even as Senator Kennedy's bill passed, Alexander reiterated his resolve: "The President will keep fighting for more radical change in the American system. We will especially keep fighting to give middle and low income families more of the same choices of all schools that wealthy families already have."

What Alexander has never addressed, is the economic environment in which these schools operate. As 93% of their budgets come from state and local sources, a good deal of the "choice" is predetermined. Across the country, de facto decisions are being made about the quality of education, thanks to state and city budget crises.

One hideous example is the Windy City. The Chicago School Board was granted the right to use \$13.2 million in future state appropriations to offset state budget cuts now. But the board *still* must cut about \$3 million to plug a hole in its budget left by state budget reductions, and it still faces a projected \$275 million deficit in next year's budget.

## No more schools, no more books

Jonathan Kozol, in his book *Savage Inequalities*, describes some of the schools that will be asked to cut back:

"But even substitute teachers in Chicago are quite frequently in short supply. On an average morning in Chicago, 5,700 children in 190 classrooms come to school to find they have no teacher. The number of children who have no teachers on a given morning in Chicago's public schools is nearly twice the student population of New Trier High School in [the wealthy suburb of] nearby Winnetka.

" 'We have been in this class a whole semester,' says a 15-year-old at Du Sable High, one of Chicago's poorest secondary schools, 'and they still can't find us a teacher.' . . . The shortage of teachers finds its parallel in a shortage of supplies. A chemistry teacher at the school reports that he does not have beakers, water, bunsen burners. He uses a popcorn popper as a substitute for a bunsen burner, and he cuts down plastic soda bottles to make laboratory dishes.

"Many of these schools make little effort to instruct their failing students. 'If a kid comes in not reading,' says an English teacher at Chicago's South Shore High, 'he goes out not reading.'

"Another teacher at the school, where only 170 of 800 freshmen graduate with their class, indicates that the dropout rate makes teaching easier. 'We lose all the dregs by the second year,' he says.

“ ‘We’re a general high school,’ says the head of counseling at Chicago’s Calumet High School. ‘We have second and third grade readers. . . . We hope to do better, but we won’t die if we don’t.’

“At Bowen High School, on the South Side of Chicago, students have two or three ‘study halls’ a day, in part to save the cost of teachers. ‘Not much studying goes on in study hall,’ a supervising teacher says. ‘I let the students play cards. . . . I figure they might get some math skills out of it.’

“At the Lathrop Elementary School . . . there are no hoops on the basketball court and no swings in the playground. For 21 years, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, the school has been without a library. Library books, which have been piled and abandoned in the lunch room of the school, have ‘sprouted mold,’ the paper says. . . .

“The school board president in 1989, although a teacher and administrator in the system for three decades, did not send his children to the public schools. Nor does Mayor Richard Daley, Jr., nor did any of the previous four mayors who had school-age children.

“ ‘Nobody in his right mind,’ says one of the city’s aldermen, ‘would send [his] kids to public school.’ ”

## Experimental curriculum

If the funding for these proposals is absurd, the discussions of curriculum and teaching techniques are an even bigger farce. In Texas last year, eight new American history textbooks were held up from adoption because of 195 factual errors pointed out by a *citizens committee*.

These were not minor details, but they were, rather, fairly egregious bloopers like, “The United States easily settled the Korean conflict by using the atomic bomb,” or, Sputnik was “the first successful intercontinental ballistic missile launched by the Soviet Union; it carried a nuclear warhead.”

Besides the sheer incompetence is the pervasive suffocation of “political correctness.” In the state of Illinois, there is an English test that must be passed by anyone who teaches English in the sixth through twelfth grades. The questions deal with material drawn from books by feminist, Asian, Indian, or African authors. However, authors that one need not have ever heard of include: Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, John Donne, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Jonathan Swift, William Wordsworth, and Alfred Lord Tennyson. *To be continued.*

## 100,000 march for life in nation’s capital

Over 100,000 Americans poured into Washington, D.C. on Jan. 22 to mark the 19th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s legalization of abortion, with the annual March For Life. This year, scores of religious, political, and pro-life leaders joined thousands who traveled from as far as Hawaii, Alaska, and Poland, to remind the nation’s leaders that they once “took an oath to protect their people.” The nation was reminded of the 28.5 million lives lost to abortion since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling. March For Life president Nellie Gray told the rally: “The Nuremberg Tribunal told us that a country that engages in killing its children, is engaged in crimes against humanity.”

Endorsing that message were a number of religious leaders, including Bernard Cardinal Law (Boston); James Cardinal Hickey (Washington, D.C.); Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua (Philadelphia); and Bishop René Gracida of Corpus Christi, Texas; Bishop Herman of the Orthodox Christian Church of Pennsylvania; and Dr. Robert Rea of Lincoln Christian College and Seminary in Illinois. In addition to several leaders of the Rabbis For Life of New York, 100 Jewish leaders, including Rabbi Abraham Abraham of the International Rabbinical Council, joined the rally.

President George Bush, in a two-minute message via

telephone, told the rally, “I want to reaffirm my . . . commitment to the simple recognition that all life is a precious gift.” As the crowds were handed leaflets exposing the truth about Bush’s role in enforcing National Security Study Memorandum 200, which policy caused the sterilization of millions of Brazilian women (as revealed by *EIR*), U.S. Reps. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) and Robert Dornan (R-Calif.) exalted Bush’s remarkable “moral courage” for vetoing several pro-abortion bills.

Among the speakers were Reps. Romano Mazzoli (D-Ky.) and Paul Kanjorski (D-Penn.), Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), and Pennsylvania legislator Steven Freind, who crafted the Pennsylvania abortion restriction law that the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear this term.

Groups at the podium included National Doctors For Life; National Association of Pro-Life Nurses; Baptists For Life; National Organization of Episcopalians for Life; Afro-Americans Against Abortion; American Life League; Republican National Coalition For Life; Operation Rescue, National Right to Life Federation; Eagle Forum; United Federation of University and College Faculty For Life; Feminists For Life; Christian Action Council; and Southern Baptists Convention Christian Life Commission.

None, however, other than “LaRouche in ‘92” and Club of Life representatives in the audience, demanded the termination of malthusian economic policy and an economic program which would ensure the inviolability of human life.