

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

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Washington, D.C., is not where education starts; it is actually a minority partner in the education enterprise. The word “education” is not mentioned in our Constitution. Education is a state and local responsibility. As a country we spend about \$480 billion per year on K-12 education and another \$330 billion a year on higher education. So collectively the education business, if you will, is an \$800 billion business. It’s projected to hit about \$1 trillion per year by 2006. This is a very big enterprise, a sector second only to healthcare in our gross domestic products, and it is a big business—a very important business—primarily in the public arena, but with important private institutions, such as BYU-Idaho.

At the federal level, for K-12 education, we spend a little more than \$8 billion. About 92 percent of the money, \$440 billion per year, comes from local and state spending through state property taxes, local property taxes, state income taxes, and other revenues. So the federal government has about a 7 or 8 percent role on K-12 education. In higher education it’s a much bigger role. About one-third of the dollars come from Washington and in the form of student financial aid. Any of you students who have a Pell Grant or a student loan know what I’m talking about. About \$65 billion in student aid from Washington supports our higher education system every year.

The Department of Education is not an old organization. It was created in 1979 and involved a very acrimonious debate about whether we should have a federal Department of Education. The vote in the House of Representatives was (I think) 212-211. You would think the vote might have been polarizing and partisan, but it wasn’t. The 211 “no” votes were split right down the middle—the 100 most conservative members of congress and the 100 most liberal members of congress. It was one of those strange phenomena where liberal and conservative individuals, for different reasons, both thought the federal government would mess up education if they got involved.

The Department of Education was not created whole cloth. It brought together separate programs from around government. We already had a program for special education housed in the Department of Health and Welfare. We already had student aid programs. We had Indian education programs in the Interior Department. This law brought all the random education programs from around government and housed

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them in one department. The mission of the Department of Education was simple: 1) to help increase educational opportunities for the most disadvantaged in this country and 2) to promote educational excellence throughout the country.

This is important to keep in mind as we talk about the new law—No Child Left Behind—because we are at a critical stage in the history of our country. Our education is working in this country. We have a decentralized system. I have met with ministers of education from countries around the world and traveled overseas to see how their systems work, and we have a unique system. Many countries have a centralized system that dictates what is taught and how it is taught and what the curriculum will be. In the law creating the Department of Education there is a line declaring that no curriculum can be created from the Department of Education. The federal government is not allowed to participate in curriculum. We have a country that is a wonderful fabric of fifty unique and autonomous states. Each of these states has its own standards, its own testing systems, its own ways of teaching, but as a country we still need to be internationally competitive. We have laws that say every handicapped child is entitled to a free education. We have Civil Rights laws, like Title 9 and Title 6, that have to be adhered to. And we also have a need to make sure we are competitive internationally. So there is a delicate mixture of what the federal role is. Washington, D.C., has a reputation for getting things wrong, especially when it comes to education. We'd much rather trust a local teacher, a local principal, a local school board to get it right.

We have the best system in the world for the top people in our country—for people in this room who have the opportunity to go to college. For those of you who received a great education, you probably had a wonderful home, with great parents as your first teachers, a good school system to help get you along the way. But throughout this country we also have some serious challenges culturally and from a societal standpoint because of the breakdown of the home. That's not to say that we don't have some incredibly good work going on in our education system. I have been to Harlem. I have been to North Little Rock, one of the poorest schools in Arkansas. I have been to some of the most disadvantaged schools, and they are oases of learning. Talented, loving teachers and administrators are helping kids who are the most disadvantaged. They are a hundred percent challenged with children who have the toughest problems, and they are succeeding.

You can't make a correlation between money spent and academic quality. There is a school system in Mississippi that spends about \$4200 per child. Their academic scores are through the roof. Go to Washington, D.C., where we spend about \$12,000 per child and the dropout rate is about 70 percent. It's just scary. The human tragedy behind those

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numbers is incredible. But when talking about education, I love to look at the glass as half-full and not half-empty. I was blessed to hear from Alex Hailey about a dozen years ago. He said, "Find the good and praise it." This is a wonderful example of what I think we need to be doing as we try to look for solutions in public policy. There are a lot of people in Washington, D.C., who love to throw bombs at one another and love to beat each other up. As we are engaged in public policy about how to teach, how our school systems should be preparing our students to learn, what we've been about, from day one in my tenure with the Bush Administration, was to find what's working and build upon it, replicate it, and make sure every child has a safe learning environment.

Let me tell you about the "No Child Left Behind" law. I had the blessing of working with President Bush during the campaign. He had an incredible track record in Texas on education and working to reform their state standards, to reform their testing, to make sure that the curriculum was tied to the state test. Secretary Paige was the superintendent of Houston and helped champion the changes that were made in Texas. At the same time I was in Virginia doing the same thing. We took the Texas model, took the Virginia model, took other models that were working well around the country, and tried to leverage them to federal monies.

If you take the Department of Education, for example, the biggest programs that we have were created back in 1965. When Lyndon Johnson was president, he had a set of major initiatives called the Great Society. He had housing initiatives, transportation initiatives, education initiatives, health initiatives, welfare initiatives. President Johnson was working diligently to end poverty, and education was a big piece of his approach. If you take all of the federal education programs and look at how much money was spent from 1965 to the year 2000, it was about \$400 billion. Then you look at our test scores, and instead of going up for all kids (or even minority kids), test scores for white kids have been flat, exactly flat, for about 35 years. Test scores for Hispanic kids and test scores for black kids have gone down. This gap President Bush calls "the achievement gap." We're spending more and more money that should be targeted to the special needs kids, to the populations that need the help. Actually, all this money we're spending has resulted in a widening, not a narrowing, of the gap.

President Bush wanted to take what he had done in Texas and other great works from North Carolina and Virginia and shape the federal legislation in a new way to make sure the 8 percent of the money coming out of Washington, D.C., will leverage change and not just keep resulting in declining test scores for the population of kids that are actually supposed to be improving. This was the genesis of the law called No Child Left

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Behind. It may sound like a trite and political phrase, but President Bush means it. Some school systems are recognized as blue ribbon schools because their test scores in the aggregate are going up. But if you look beneath the numbers, the test scores for 80 percent of the white children or the upper economic spectrum kids are going up, but those in the lower rungs are going down. This new law requires school systems to look at all the children. This new law requires, for the first time, every school in the state to produce an accountability plan. These accountability plans must be drilled down to the local school district, which must be drilled down to the schoolhouse door, which must be drilled down to each student. We are trying to come up with a data management system that can work with every state in this country to make sure there is a way to connect the data from the student all the way back up to the federal level. This is a very difficult challenge, but it is one we need to overcome so kids do not fall through the cracks.

There are a lot of challenges with No Child Left Behind, but let me tell you the top two or three issues to come out of this law. Right now, every teacher is required to be deemed “highly qualified.” Every state is required to come up with its own definition of what “highly qualified” means. Our colleges of education in this country are not producing the type of teachers we need. Also, this new law requires—and this is a very important word—accountability. There is accountability at the federal level, at the state level, but the real accountability is going to be at the schoolhouse level, and the accountability comes from testing. A lot of people don’t like testing, but this new law does not require a federal test. What it does require is that the tests have to be tied to the curriculum and tied to the standards. They have to be offered every year in grades 3 through 8 in math and reading. President Bush has said many times, “If a kid can’t read by the third grade, geography doesn’t matter, and math doesn’t matter.” You’ve got to get it right with reading by the third grade. We think of that as given, but three out of four students are not reading at a proficient grade level by the time they enter the fourth grade, and for minorities the statistics are much worse.

For twelfth graders taking the SAT, one out of six black students were reading at the proficient level. One out of six! Not five out of six, one out of six. And one out of five Hispanics are reading at proficient level by twelfth grade. You get into math and it is even worse. Three percent of Blacks are at a proficient level by the twelfth grade, and 4 percent of Hispanics. Quite simply, we have major challenges in our educational system. There are some things that need to be fixed. And No Child Left Behind is designed to make sure we have a reporting system and a tracking system in place so every child will be able to read by the third

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grade and will show improvement each and every year thereafter through the eighth grade.

There is a lot of debate about No Child Left Behind, and there are four myths out there. The first myth is that No Child Left Behind is intended to ruin the public school system. This is not true. The law is intended to strengthen the public school system and make sure all children learn. There is a very important provision in this law—for the first time schools not making the grade will be publicly disclosed. We have already seen articles in Idaho about schools in need of improvement. This does not put a scarlet letter on the school but swarms resources to help the school improve. If you are sick, you go to the doctor. You need to be diagnosed. The only way we can do that is through testing. So the kids, both at a school level and at an individual level, will be able to see what needs to be done to improve.

Also, if a school is not performing, two things are going to kick in. First, the school is going to get swarmed, and it will receive the help it needs. Second, the parents of the children in that school will have an opportunity to send their children to another public school. For some places in Idaho, some rural areas, that may not make sense. There may not be other concrete bricks-and-mortar buildings for them. But there are other options. There are virtual education options. At the university level, the University of Phoenix has 175,000 students online. And at the K-12 level, there are new schools that have incredible curriculum and can help supplement a child's learning environment. Also, under this new law, if you can't go to another school, you can receive something called supplemental services—mentoring or tutoring through some entity like Sylvan or Kaplan—and federal funds will help pay. So when you see newspaper articles saying this new law is intended to tear down our public school system, it is absolutely the exact opposite. The law will make the public school system stronger.

Another myth concerning No Child Left Behind is that the law is an “unfunded mandate”—the federal government putting a law on state and local governments and then not providing money for it. I would turn that around and note that over the last 35 years all of this education money coming out of Washington has been a “funded non-mandate.” We have put a lot of money out there and have nothing to show for it. Nevertheless, President Bush committed more education spending as part of this bill. He doubled the amount of money that was spent on education. The amount of money supporting K-12 education has gone up about 6-12 percent since 1996. It has gone up a full 50 percent in just the last two years. President Bush wanted to make sure school districts and states had the money they needed to make these changes. Most cuts in education budgets have been occurring at the higher education level.

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In Maryland, for example, they cut back on state subsidies to higher education and then doubled the tuition. These are tough budget times and yet the amount of money the Department of Education provides is twice what it was when President Bush stepped into office.

A few weeks ago, the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development its annual report that ranks countries around the world on how much they are spending on education and what they are getting out. The report said, “There are countries that do not get the bang for the buck, and the United States is one of them.” As a country we are spending over \$10,000 per student, and the average among the other industrialized countries is about \$6300. Yet, when you stack us up on how we are performing, we are right in the middle of the other countries. So we need to make sure we’re spending our money more wisely. That is what this new law is about as well.

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One last myth is that testing special education students is unrealistic and unfair. The reality is that these are the students who need to be tested the most. We have 54 million kids in the K-12 environment. Six million of those students are special education students. About half of those have physical or emotional disabilities. The other half are reading disabled. Half of those students are African American students. It is very difficult for those students to ever get out of the system once they are labeled. One thing this law requires is that these kids are tracked and ultimately they succeed. This is a very important reality we need to keep in mind.

The bottom line is that President Bush and Congress firmly believe we need to ensure that every child in this country has an opportunity to learn. The first year of President Bush’s administration saw the political maneuvering to get the bill signed. In the second year the goal was to get the states to step up to the plate and get their accountability plans in place. Now we are at the execution phase, and there will be a lot of false starts and stops. But the bottom line is that the President is firmly committed to making sure all children (and he really is focusing on the disadvantaged children) have a system that does not leave them behind, does not put them in a corner and forget about them. ☺