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News Nuggets

"Fail to the Chief": Neither Candidate gets NCLB

After eight years of failed education policy, two candidates vie for the title as "Your Education President for Change." But neither candidate understands education, and neither candidate realizes what a negative impact that the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) perpetrated upon American education.

"Clueless" might be a word that describes both candidates' acumen in the education arena. It's not Education this Election Year. Money and War (also a topic about money) are the issues that predominate in "water cooler and back fence" discussions during this election year.

Health care really is a discussion of what is affordable because no one believes that millions of folks without access to health care is desirable.

In a way, the discussion about education issues is like the health care debate; i.e., everyone agrees that quality education is important and desirable. But, beliefs "head-but" when discussions focus upon how to deliver quality education in a way that meets needs and solves problems as cheaply as possible. NCLB Uniformity Teachers, and the students they foster, suffered under the auspices of the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB); and neither candidate has a "plan" (or a pledge) to end that misery and pain.

The prospect is for continued despair and doom because this sad political meddling in the affairs of education. This occurs because education concerns fail to rise to the level of importance that this cornerstone of our nation's future deserves. What's More Important than the Education of our Children? The "Economy" and a two-fronts war are on the minds of voters during this election season.

Gas pump sticker shock, "Pain at the Pump", keeps this issue in the face of both the voters and the politically disaffected.

Every stop at the grocery store produces a teeth-clenched, tooth-grinding reaction to the tag price on basic food staples. The paradox is that the same pocketbook pain that families feel impacts schools at an accelerated level. If parents find it difficult to afford two children, imagine the issues involved in providing services and caring for 20,000 children. You're invited to a Party, but no Need to Celebrate Party politics outranks common sense, good judgment and the common good when presidential politics roll around. (No pun intended. No one is rolling around on the floor because of laughter.) Rabid party loyalty skews the normal sound judgment and cautious optimism of our citizens into "howling at the moon", radical platform-following zealots. Only the rush to grab their "imagined share of inheritance money" makes some people more crazy than a presidential election. Catch Phrase Change, but "Business as Usual" And as usual, "teachers and students get the business."

Obama is apt to come up with a more creative name for the NCLB than McCain, but a new catch phrase is only rhetorical slight of hand.

"Slogans do not an improved education make!" "Platform Nuances a Difference Don't Make" Minor variations on a theme amount to dressing the political wolf in "off the shelf" discount store suits.

Here are some of the differences in the political stance of the candidates.

Note: The positions are left scrambled so that you can guess who is in favor of what "innovation and change" (Sarcasm intended).

One candidate thinks that NCLB was a major breakthrough and would like new rules for testing non-English-speaking and Special Ed. students while the other thinks that NCLB was a good first effort that should be revised, not dismantled. One candidate believes that technology funding and technology access should be increased and that low-wealth school districts should have more technology while the other candidate thinks that local choices for technology programs are more important.

One candidate supports summer learning programs while the other supports after-school programs.

Both candidates support an increased math and science curriculum, both would boost funding for Head Start programs and both support some version of "Merit Pay" for teachers.

Describing these differences in the candidates is like comparing and contrasting the difference between Tina Fey (portraying Sarah Palin on Saturday Night Live) and Sarah Palin (playing a candidate) on Good Morning America.

These differences are not like the Danny DiVito and Arnold Swartzeneger style of twins, but more like the difference between two pieces of pork that are turning rancid in the same barrel. The Real Difference between Candidates:

Slashing Cows in the Amazon In the Amazon, cattle herders have to drive livestock across piranha-infested streams to get to market. This operation can create mayhem for the farmer's investment and diminish the overall market value of the herd.

What to do?

So, these enterprising Amazon ranchers take a sickly, puny cow upstream of the ford site, slash the animal and drive it into the river. The bleeding cow attracts the school of piranhas to the feeding-frenzy party; and the healthy cattle ford the

stream in temporary window of safety…downstream from the distracted piranhas.

Sacrificing one cow for the sake of the herd, and for the sake of overall profits makes economic sense.

NCLB operates on the same principle, although in operation the process is more bruising than bloody.

The intent of NCLB is to sacrifice our public school systems so that some folks can get public money to send their children to church schools.

Of course, this financial maneuvering is illegal, but not if the public schools can be shown to be incompetent and harmful to our students.

So, like the puny cow that is sacrificed to the piranhas for the sake of all, some school districts need to be sacrificed so that voucher-based schemes can be marketed.

Support for public schools vs. support for a voucher system for dismantling our public schools is the one educational policy area that separates the candidates.

The corollary of the NCLB attack on public school teachers, the support for standardized testing, also differentiates the candidates.

One candidate favors continued focus upon standardized testing to hold teachers accountable, while the other candidate only notices that teachers are "teaching to the test." (Imagine that?)

But, in this time of financial turmoil, few people are focused enough upon educational issues to notice.

In fact, school districts are so focused upon financial challenges that there isn't enough energy to raise a national conversation about this political dirty-double-dealing.

Neither candidate is taking the leadership in exposing this double-crossing of our public school system by the political leaders that demand our trust.

During this election cycle, incumbents of both parties are apt to be turned out in record numbers. Unfortunately, it will be for economic issues, not their lack of vision and support for public education.

For voters who are looking for a clear choice in presidential leadership based upon a vision and focus for education and the future of our children; wait four years, and see what the political machine has to offer at that time.

Neither candidate has an education program to offer this time around because neither candidate understands how detrimental the NCLB is for education.

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