

Don't Stop Electing State Board Members Friday, Jan.24, 2003 *The Wichita Eagle* 11A

Suggestions that Kansas switch to an appointed State Board of Education make some wrong assumptions and fail to consider what would have happened in recent Kansas history under an appointed system.

Appointment-advocates falsely assume that a governor would not appoint Board members that held viewpoints counter to mainstream opinion. But appointed education officials can be very extremist. And those who would be comfortable with likely appointees of Governor Kathleen Sebelius probably would not be comfortable with appointees of Republican Tim Schallenburger, had he won the election.

An appointment process simply adds another litmus test—along with stances on abortion, taxes, and so on—to each gubernatorial election. Each round of appointments could dramatically tilt the board in different directions

Under our elected system, rarely do just conservatives or just non-conservatives sweep all five seats in each two-year election cycle.

Appointed board members likely would be hand-picked to promote the latest educationist fads. American public school teachers have suffered a continuous onslaught of education cure-alls for the past 30 years. Each one was promoted as an education miracle cure and each failed miserably.

An example in Kansas from the early 1990s was the proposed redesign of teacher education that would have reduced nearly 200 teaching fields to just 13 one-size-fits-all fields. If the previous education commissioner had a handpicked board behind him, Kansas would have begun training shallow teachers by 1995. But thanks to elected Board members with common sense, and a half-decade of 5-5 split votes, some depth of training was maintained and the damage was limited.

Generally, states without elected boards are whipsawed by every education “vision” that comes along. Elected boards are more diverse, critical, and likely to use commonsense, making educationist reformers frustrated with the slowness of the reform process. Most of my veteran teaching colleagues are thankful for the stability.

In 1987, we got a sex education mandate but we also got a special sex-ed opt-out provision. In 2001, macroevolution went back into the science curriculum, but it also included an anti-dogmatism policy promoting tolerance.

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split votes on the state board. On a ten member Board, it takes six votes to win. But if we had eleven members, it would then take six votes to win. Except for a few situations, such as the recent election of the board chairwoman, 5-5 is not a deadlock but simply a failure to approve some new reform. In a state that already has a solid educational system in place, that is not a bad policy.

–John Schrock Richard

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Suggestions that Kansas switch to an appointed State Board of Education make some wrong assumptions and fail to consider what would have happened in recent Kansas history under an appointed system.

Appointment-advocates falsely assume that a governor would not appoint Board members that held viewpoints counter to mainstream opinion. However, several decades ago Arizona Governor Meacham appointed Jim Cooper as state education advisor. Cooper was reported as saying that if a student "wants to say the world is flat, the teacher doesn't have the right to try to prove otherwise. The schools don't have any business telling people what to believe." This and other cases show that [But] appointed education officials can be very extremist. And those who would be comfortable with likely appointees of Governor Kathleen Sebelius probably would not be comfortable with appointees of Republican Tim Schallenburger, had he won the election.

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~~Finally we need to keep public education public. There are many home school parents who are not satisfied with public school. That number can grow if a state board fails to represent voices from across the political spectrum. Diversity on the state board serves to represent the interests of all sides. In 1987, we got a sex education mandate but we also got a special sex-ed opt-out provision. In 2001, macroevolution went back into the science curriculum, but it also included an anti-dogmatism policy promoting tolerance. An appointed board can fail to represent everybody. That can lead to more home schooling. And that weakens public education.~~

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Note: the Jan 24, 2003 *Chronicle of Higher Education* provides a exact case of handpicking "visionary" boards.

Copies sent to all KSBE members.

