



Testimony against the Senate – Posted Alternative Social Studies Standards

March 18, 2004

Testimony before the Senate Education Committee

My name is Michael J. Chapman. I live in Eden Prairie and serve as a volunteer on the executive board of Edwatch.

I'm here to testify against consideration of these three alternative social studies standards.

These standards do not reflect the public's desire to adopt objective, knowledge-based, academic standards. Instead they represent a return to the philosophy of education represented by the repealed Profile of Learning.

In fact, version 3's Goal is taken verbatim from the Curriculum Standards written by the National Council for the Social Studies, which formed the basis for the Profile of Learning. The Goal is NOT the transmission of facts and knowledge for the purpose of preserving and promoting American principles of freedom and IN-dependence, but "helping" students make DECISIONS for the public good as citizens of an "INTER-dependent world." (v.3., p.1 & 2)

The NCSS book explains what this really means: [QUOTE] "the dominant social, economic, [and] cultural...trends that have defined the western world for fives centuries are rapidly leading in new directions". (NCSS, p. xix) [Let me interject here that the "dominant trends" that defined the western world also helped define America.]

The NCSS book continues [QUOTE]: "a diverse...yet globally interdependent world calls for citizens with a new sense of purpose" and requires "a new vision for social studies educators." [END QUOTE] (NCSS, p. xix)

The goal of creating citizens with a new sense of purpose explains why these "alternative standards" mention the themes of "Transformation, social and cultural change, global interdependence and trends" over 170 times, but national sovereignty is mentioned only twice as "possible topics" and twice for discussion on how international agreements effect sovereignty. [see v.3, p.14 #13. and v.1, p.64, 9-12 Gov, III.E.6.; also see v.2, B.12.16]

I'm not surprised to see lip service paid to principles of the Declaration within these alternatives. However, as Julie will explain [or "has explained"], the founding principles of America are watered down, defined incorrectly, listed as "possible topics" or just plain missing.

But it's not just the Declaration that gets short shrift. For example, left off the list of "possible topics" under the Bill of Rights, is the 2nd amendment right to keep and bear arms, and the 9th and 10th amendments, which reserve un-enumerated rights to the people or states. Also, the term "Free Market" is missing from economics. [There is one place where the word free is balanced with a "fair" market, explaining that it is government that provides for a free and fair market. (v.2, p.13. D.8.5.)

But the goal, as stated, is to help students: "develop the habits of the mind," or shape proper "civic dispositions" (v. 1, p.1) indicating a return to measuring subjective ideals rather than objective knowledge. Even the old Profile term "Performance Standard" returns. Especially troubling is the inclusion of performance standards in "Behavioral Sciences" (v.2. p.15). For example, students must again demonstrate the racist and sexist notion that "values and beliefs," (v.2, p.16, #8), or "points of view" (v.3, p.9,#9) are determined by one's group affiliations, including race, culture, family, gender, or socioeconomic status. (v.2, p.17, E.8.2.3.6.)

But my main point is not to list the grievances contained in these standards. The main point I wish to make is well illustrated by the irony I find in the choice of quotations used to introduce these alternatives. On page one of alternative one Thomas Jefferson is quoted, stating, "I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education." [END QUOTE]

And yet, are not these alternatives an attempt to take the writing of educational standards out of the hands of the people themselves [?] - who, over the course of several months of public meeting and debate, did in fact produce the means to inform their educational discretion?

Jefferson also wrote, "To inform the minds of the people and to follow their will is the chief duty of those placed at their head." [To Isaac Tiffany, 1816, Writings, Vol. X]

It seems obvious that the process followed by the citizens committee will have produced a closer reflection of the general will of the people, than is represented by these "alternatives" written in conformity to the NCSS.

I find it doubly ironic that in the full context of Jefferson's 1820 letter to William Charles Jarvis, quoted by the alternative standards, that Jefferson's main topic was not education at all, but a warning against the abuse of constitutional power by the judicial branch.

And yet, without acknowledging that our rights come from a creator God, as stated in the Declaration of Independence, but left out of the alternative standards, the judiciary becomes the ultimate authority and definer of our rights. (v.1. p.61, also p.52, I.B.1. "law defines rights") Jefferson ended that letter with an appeal to "the longest possible continuance of our government [based] on its pure principles;"

Those pure principles of freedom, that Jefferson held so dear, are included in the citizens' draft, but they are missing from these "alternatives."

Therefore, I respectfully urge you to vote against these alternative standards, adopt the citizens' draft, and finally give true academic education back to the citizens of Minnesota.

Thank you,
Michael J. Chapman

VOL X:

" Every society has a right to fix the fundamental principles of its association." (To W. H. Crawford, 1816.) `` Writing to Edward Carrington in 1787, he says : (To Isaac H. Tiffany, 1816.)

To the same purport are the following apothegms:

" To inform the minds of the people and to follow their will is the chief duty of those placed at their head. "

TO WILLIAM CHARLES JARVIS:
MONTICELLO, September 28, 1820.

[Jefferson responding to Jarvis' "The Republican"] ...I feel an urgency to note what I deem an error in it....

[277] You seem, in pages 84 and 148, to consider the judges as the ultimate arbiters of all constitutional questions; a very dangerous doctrine indeed, and one, which would place us under the despotism of an oligarchy.

[279 Jefferson's Works]...When the legislative or executive functionaries act unconstitutionally, they are responsible to the people in their elective capacity. The exemption of the judges from that is quite dangerous enough. I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power. ...My personal interest in such questions is...for the longest possible continuance of our government on its pure principles; if the three powers maintain their mutual independence on each other it may last long, but not so if either can assume the authorities [279] of the other. I ask your candid re-consideration of this subject, and am sufficiently sure you will form a candid conclusion. Accept the assurance of my great respect.