



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on October 10, 2011

GOP Candidates Pledge to Expel Education Dept.

“For a generation,” the *Times* writes, “there has been loose bipartisan agreement in Washington that the federal government has a necessary role to play in the nation’s 13,600 school districts, primarily by using money to compel states to raise standards.”

Of course, many observers note that the bipartisan consensus on any subject can be — and usually is — wrong. Constitutionalists point out that there is also a bipartisan consensus in favor of Social Security, Medicare, and an interventionist foreign policy — all of which, like federal involvement in education, are both unconstitutional and unwise. There is no shame, they say, in challenging Beltway orthodoxy.



Thus, critics contend, rather than being derided, candidates should be applauded for, in the *Times*’ words, “arguing that education responsibilities should devolve to states and local districts, which will do a better job than Washington.” Specifically, writes the newspaper:

Representative Michele Bachmann promises to “turn out the lights” at the federal Education Department. Gov. Rick Perry calls it unconstitutional. Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker, would allow it to live but only as a drastically shrunken agency that mainly gathers statistics.

How many of these candidates would make a serious effort to shutter the department remains an open question. As the *Times* notes, “closing the Education Department has long been a talking point of some Republicans, though it was ignored in practice.”

Even among those currently arguing for its elimination are some who seem to have undergone a road-to-Washington conversion. Romney, for instance, defended the federal No Child Left Behind law during his 2008 presidential campaign and has praised both President Barack Obama’s similar “Race to the Top” program and his Education Secretary, Arne Duncan. Perry, too, was once a proud supporter of No Child Left Behind, though now he “complains of ‘unfunded mandates’ in federal education laws” and “was one of four governors who refused to compete in Race to the Top,” according to the *Times*.

As the *Times* points out, one of the main purposes of the Department of Education is to ensure that states and local school districts that take Uncle Sam’s money do as he says. “The question,” avers the paper, “is whether states and local districts, without Washington’s various carrots and sticks, will continue to raise academic standards and give equal opportunity to traditionally ignored student populations.”

The *Times* quotes some self-proclaimed conservatives to make the case for retaining the Education Department specifically to see to it that schools toe the line. Former Reagan administration education official Chester E. Finn, Jr., for example, told the newspaper: “People want government money, they



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want higher standards, they want greater accountability. None of those things in most places comes from local control.”

Similarly, Idaho’s superintendent of schools, Tom Luna, said, “If you’re a conservative Republican like I consider myself, there has to be accountability for how those dollars are spent. We can’t send them to schools or states with no accountability.”

Constitutionalists point out that this assumes, of course, that the federal government should be sending money to states and local school districts for education in the first place — something forbidden by the Constitution. It also assumes that federal spending actually improves education when, in fact, student performance has, in general, declined continually ever since the federal government became involved in education. Certainly Americans aren’t getting their money’s worth, as *The New American* reported recently.

Constitutionalists contend that it should, therefore, be a no-brainer to call for an end to the Education Department and to all education-related federal spending. The *Times* remarks that it is “unclear” how many of the Republican candidates would actually adopt this position, suggesting that “not many” would. The paper did find that Bachmann “appears to” have taken this tack, promising “‘the mother of all repeal bills’ to undo education laws dating from the Great Society.”

One candidate the *Times* chose not to mention has also stated that he would eliminate both the Department of Education and all other federal education laws. Texas Rep. Ron Paul — who, unlike other candidates in the race, has not changed his position on the subject to conform to voters’ whims — told [Freakonomics.com](#) in 2008:

I do believe in eliminating the Department of Education.

First, the Constitution does not authorize the Department of Education, and the founders never envisioned the federal government dictating those education policies.

Second, it is a huge bureaucracy that squanders our money. We send billions of dollars to Washington and get back less than we sent. The money would be much better off left in states and local communities rather than being squandered in Washington.

Finally, I think that the smallest level of government possible best performs education. Teachers, parents, and local community leaders should be making decisions about exactly how our children should be taught, not Washington bureaucrats. The Department of Education has given us No Child Left Behind, massive unfunded mandates, indoctrination, and in come [sic] cases, forced medication of our children with psychotropic drugs. We should get rid of all of that and get those choices back in the hands of the people.

Critics note that choices in the hands of the people are what frighten believers in central planning such as those at the *Times*.



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