

The “Choice” Charade

The Threat to Homeschooling

A 3D Research Report¹

[This multi-part report was authored by Sarah H. Leslie circa 2000-2003 as part of an effort to warn the nation’s homeschoolers of a newly forming false “choice” initiative in education reform. The original concerns are still in effect to this day.]

Part 1: The “Choice” Charade

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Part 3: Bill Bennett and the De-Valuing of America: Accountability and Homeschooling

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The “Choice” Charade

He who has an ear, let him hear.

Introduction

The public has been misled to believe that “choice” in education means more parental freedom to determine the best educational placement for their children. This is not what “choice” means to education reformers. “Choice” to these reformers is a tool -- a tool to advance education reform from point A to point Z.

The public school system in America has maintained, until now, a representative form of government. Localities would elect a school board which had legal oversight over the curriculum, staff, budget, programming and planning of the community’s school, being directly accountable to parents, taxpayers, voters and citizens. Each new phase of education reform in the past three decades has adversely impacted this original system of accountability and oversight. But the worst is yet to come.

Parents traditionally have had the right to educate their children at a public, private, religious, parochial or home school. But this is not what the reformers mean by “choice.”. Their “choice” is a Trojan Horse entering society under the guise of vouchers, tuition tax credits, charter schools and their many hybrids. Reformers’ “choice” is not free choice. Reformers’ choice *always* places additional governmental structures between parent and child, voter and representative, citizen and state. The reformers’ “choice” will only reveal

its true nature in the end, when it becomes manifest as a rigid, intrusive, and controlling plan for children, families and society.

This report will reveal what some leading education reformers have written, spoken and worked their entire lives to achieve. These reformers are change agents who intend to use “choice” to maneuver reform towards their pre-determined goals. This purposeful deception has been wildly successful. So successful, in fact, that some reformers have noted that they are well ahead of schedule in implementing their planned transformation. In a few short years this “choice” will be fully operational. *All* families with school-age children (public, private and home) will feel the brunt of this deception. Recall the title of the latest bi-partisan Washington education mega-bill, *No Child Left Behind*. *No* child will escape. *Every* child will be affected.

The “Choice” Charade

It is first necessary to understand the game that is being played. Reformers employ a variety of diversions in the media which perpetuate the illusion that they are talking about a parent’s right to choose the best education for their children. They do not want the public to figure out what they really mean by “choice.”

A primary ploy is to set up artificial turf battles based on political differences. “Choice” reformers have successfully staged a polemic battle in the press. Leaders of the Conservative Republican Right and Liberal Democrat Left enter a public boxing arena and routinely engage in verbal fistfights over an assortment of contrived economic (who pays) and political (who’s in charge) issues. While this public sparring is going on, Left and Right reformers have been working closely together behind the scenes for decades.

This polarization of the Right and the Left serves as a red herring. Speakers for each side swallow the indoctrination speech and grab a microphone to lambast the other side. “Rush is right” and that’s that. Those who have genuine concerns about civil liberties, parental rights and human rights are cut off from entering the debate. This is handily accomplished by labeling critics of “choice” as “radical fringe” or “extremist.” It is relatively easy to smear opposition by casting inventive aspersions about political sympathies, economic leanings and religious beliefs. Another tactic questions credentials. No critic of “choice” ever has possessed sufficient academic credentials to satisfy the elite.

In these orchestrated skirmishes over “choice,” reformers regularly posit issues in convenient molds, parameters which narrowly define the debate so as to avoid the real issues. Much tweaking over insignificant and incidental matters ensues. A long and protracted dispute over whether “choice” chocolate cake should be served on a blue plate or a white plate follows. These debates are intended to distract attention away from the bigger picture, which if examined closely would reveal a poisoned cake.

A major goal of the “choice” reformers is to maintain the appearance of status quo. In order to reassure the public that nothing major is amiss, Potemkin “choice” is propped up

in the public square. It looks like real local control and conveys the illusion that everything is normal, safe and sound. In order for “choice” to progress on schedule, without alarming people as to its hidden purpose, it is essential that people believe these “choice” artifices.

What is this “choice” that the education reformers are planning? What does it look like behind the façade, devoid of the accoutrements and devices of deception? The answer to these questions is startling and alarming. It is time to set aside the distortions and look at the reality. Before it is too late.

PART 1: William Bennett’s Cyber Charter Express

Several years ago William J. Bennett, esteemed “Virtues Czar” and former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, launched his own curriculum (*K12*) with great fanfare in the homeschooling community. Once his curriculum was firmly established, Bennett then launched a cyberschool charter concept which he called “virtual academies.” Cyberschools, or “e-schools” as they are sometimes called, are the latest manifestation of “choice” to enter the private education realm. Cyberschools hook children up to a computer with internet access, thus enabling them to become part of a “virtual” classroom. Bennett began his marketing effort by targeting homeschoolers.

Homeschoolers in key states across the nation were inundated with a lengthy series of advertising pieces. Sophisticated state-of-the-art direct mailing solicitations revealed that homeschool names were obtained through government databases, homeschool curriculum companies, and other unknown sources. Some homeschoolers were identified with names they only use on official government records. This minute tracking down of homeschoolers was the first red flag for a community that by and large seeks to protect its own privacy. This was not to be Bennett’s only blunder.

Bennett’s initial literature advertised that families would receive curriculum, computer, materials, “Placement, Planning, Progress, and Assessment Tools,” a teacher and outings (field trips or group activities). Pennsylvania homeschoolers received a mailing in May 2001 which stated: “As part of this comprehensive program, you receive – at no cost to you – a computer system....” Only later did mailings reveal that the computer was a loaner. A few rumblings could be heard within the homeschool community about Bennett’s apparent lapse in integrity, evidenced by his use of this common deceptive marketing technique.

Many homeschoolers had purchased or were familiar with *The Book of Virtues: A Treasure of Great Moral Stories*, edited by Bennett in 1993. The letters to homeschoolers built upon Bennett’s reputation as the country’s “Virtues Czar.” In the Pennsylvania letter, Bennett says, “I have devoted my professional life to improving education and writing books like *The Book of Virtues* and *The Educated Child*. This experience has influenced the development of K12’s curriculum every step of the way.” An Ohio letter to homeschoolers states, “As Chairman of K12, he has been personally involved in the

development of the school's curriculum." The implication here is that the curriculum will be "classic," religious, or philosophically and politically conservative, an obvious marketing appeal to homeschoolers who tend to be religiously and politically conservative.

In actuality K12 is based on a curriculum that was at the centerpiece of many education reform initiatives around the country this past decade, a curriculum aligned with the new national and state reform standards. *K12* is based on University of Virginia Professor E.D. Hirsch's "Core Knowledge" curriculum. Bennett had previously used Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* as part of the "core curriculum" for his Modern Red Schoolhouse Design Team. As background, in 1992 the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) funded school reform experiments, which they called "design teams." These experiments were to demonstrate by example how schools would meet the goals outlined in President Bush's *America 2000* education reform strategy. An emphasis was placed on creating "fundamental institutional change," meeting "new national standards in five core subjects," preparing "students for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment." Bennett's Modern Red Schoolhouse project was composed of individuals associated with the Hudson Institute, a policy institute committed to investing its resources into the transformation of education. Claims were made that this was "classic education." The project was selected, however, because it so excellently fulfilled all of the requirements of radical education reform.

Bennett placed E.D. Hirsch's curriculum as one of three curricular pillars in the Modern Red School House Design Team. In the mid 1990s debates over outcome-based education (OBE), Hirsch carefully positioned his curriculum as a "conservative" alternative, emphasizing academics and minimizing "outrageous" outcomes. Hirsch's ideas about cultural literacy, however, bear much evidence of OBE philosophy.

The Core Knowledge Foundation is a non-profit organization founded by Hirsch in 1986. It is based on the idea that children need to share a common core of knowledge, which "makes up the common ground for communication and cooperation in society." This "core knowledge" was arrived at through the process of "consensus" with "diverse groups and interests," according to a Core Knowledge Foundation paper. (Some readers will recognize the managed consensus dialectic process in this description.) Hirsch's "common knowledge" philosophy is based upon a communitarian ideal that "all" children should drink from one democratic cistern, and that without this inculcation of universal "truths" and "values" children will not be prepared for the global workforce community of the future.

Another curricular pillar for Bennett's Modern Red Schoolhouse came directly from Bennett himself. As Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, Bennett authored the *James Madison High School: A Curriculum for American Schools* (Dec. 1987). While admitting that the "authority to mandate a secondary school curriculum for American students does not belong to the federal government," Bennett acknowledged that he did use his position as a "bully pulpit."² Bennett wrote that "every American child has an equal claim to a common future under common laws, enjoying common rights and

charged with common responsibilities. And there follows the need for a common basic education” (cover letter, dated January 1988). The introduction to *James Madison High School* states that

We want our students – whatever their plans for the future – to take from high school a shared body of knowledge and skills, a common language of ideas, a common moral and intellectual discipline.... And we want them to be prepared for entry into the community of responsible adults. (p. 4)

One can readily see the compatibility of the philosophies of Hirsch and Bennett in these statements. It is this inoculation of “classic academics” that misleads the public into thinking that these are conservative curricula. But both men believe there is a need for a “common” knowledge and “community” values. These beliefs have far more to do with the doctrines of communitarianism than conservatism, as shall be explained in depth later.

In 1992 the Bush Administration’s U.S. Department of Labor issued *Learning A Living: A Blueprint for High Performance: A SCANS Report for America 2000*. This controversial bi-partisan report became the third pillar of curriculum used in The Modern Red Schoolhouse. Skills for the workplace would become the major focus of education -- preparing children for lifelong labor and culminating in a “certificate of mastery.” A Hudson Institute brochure promoting The Modern Red Schoolhouse stated: “A distinguishing feature of the [SCANS] curriculum is its reliance on performance as the measure of student progress....” The other distinguishing characteristic of SCANS was a switch from traditional academic content to a workplace skills-oriented education. Current state and federal standards and assessments track back to this important SCANS report.

Bennett’s description of the K12 curriculum, in a document prepared for the Department of Education in Ohio, reveals that his curriculum must be aligned with the state’s academic content standards, which are aligned to the state’s assessment test. Ohio’s proficiency tests have been the source of widespread contention across the state for years. Constructed from the old “outrageous” outcomes of OBE (now called state “performance standards”), these tests delve into a child’s private attitudes and values. The Ohio state standards, from which the tests are derived, incorporate evolution, another hot button for religiously conservative homeschoolers. Bennett’s Ohio charter application lists five academic goals, three goals for “higher order thinking skills,” preparation for college, and music and art. Five additional “non-academic” goals to help “students develop into active, thoughtful and responsible citizens” and “build commonly shared values” are added. All of these goals effectively align Bennett’s curriculum to the state’s tests.

This New “Choice” Entity

The launch of Bennett’s K12 “virtual academies” was accompanied by controversy over misrepresentation. An August 2002 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine featured a typical article about homeschooling, mentioning Bennett’s K12 “for-profit

online service for homeschoolers.” The article featured a prominent picture of William Bennett, which gave the impression that he was a national spokesperson for homeschooling. A March 2002 curriculum review on *The Old Schoolhouse* magazine erroneously reported: “Some people mistakenly believe K12 is a charter school.” Letters and brochures sent to Ohio homeschooling parents failed to mention that the Ohio Virtual Academy was a charter school, saying only, “Because the Ohio Virtual Academy is publicly funded, there is no tuition.” Fearing that further serious misinformation could be disseminated at the dozens of public K12 open houses around the state, Ohio Home Education Coalition issued an alert:

 Serious questions were asked of Bennett during his afternoon presentation on June 13 in Columbus, Ohio. Challenged to answer whether K12 was purposely trying to confuse the public that enrollment in OVA was homeschooling, he specifically said that OVA is a charter school and, therefore, students would be in a public school.

 During the evening session, Bennett did not wait for the questions to arise on the distinction.... He made things perfectly clear right from the start.... Bennett said: “Make no mistake. If you enroll in the Ohio Virtual Academy, you will no longer be a homeschooler. You will be enrolling in a public charter school.” (August 2002)

Bennett originally planned to take his K12 show on the road to homeschool conventions. It was reported that he waived his customary speaking fees. The Christian Home Educators Association of California (CHEA) cancelled Bennett’s speaking appearance at their state convention. K12’s requests to be included in homeschooling conferences as a curriculum vender were denied in Ohio, California, and Illinois. In an interview with the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (8/25/02), Bennett stated, “I will not stop being a defender of home schoolers, even if they are being unfair to me,” in speaking about being “disinvited” to these three state conventions.

Then Bennett changed his strategy. He set up K12 open houses simultaneous with state homeschool conferences at competing locations in a obvious attempt to pull away homeschoolers. An alert from Christian Home Educators of Ohio last summer warns:

 The CHEO Convention, as well as many other state conventions, have been declining K12 an opportunity to participate in their Exhibit Halls. However, in a visit to the K12 website, many people are finding that K12 will be in Columbus the same weekend as the CHEO convention. This is because they are piggybacking off of our convention and having an open house in a nearby hotel. However, they are NOT in any way associated with our convention.

Why would Bennett employ such an aggressive marketing strategy to recruit homeschoolers? Why would he risk his reputation as a man of “virtue” by purposefully using deceptive marketing strategies and techniques? This is not a situation where he could “pass the buck” and claim that someone else in his organization was acting without his authority. Rather, Bennett placed himself in the spotlight, promoting his virtual academy idea to the homeschooling community in person, live, at scheduled open houses.

Why would the homeschooling community go to such great lengths to distance themselves from Bennett, who asserts he is their friend? For one significant reason: Bennett's K12 cyberschools are in actuality *charter* schools. Charter schools are *public* schools. Homeschoolers who enroll in Bennett's program effectually give up their legal status as homeschoolers. Under the law they become public schoolers. Public moneys mean mandatory state testing, vaccinations, attendance records, and following state curriculum guidelines. No religious instruction is permitted, a fact which runs contrary to one of the few widely shared beliefs among religiously-motivated homeschoolers, that leaving God out of the curricula is a denial of Deuteronomy 6.

An article by Chris Moran in the *San Diego Union Tribune* ("Cyber Classrooms," 11/10/02) explains some homeschoolers' concerns:

Some home-school leaders see in K12 and other cybercharters a threat to the academic freedom that motivates people to home-school in the first place.... If too many homeschoolers are seduced by K12's free computers, textbooks, art supplies and science equipment, "a lot of home-school freedom could be in jeopardy," said Tom Washburne of the Home School Legal Defense Association. "What has made home schooling as successful as it is today is its wide freedom to do what's successful for your children." And if too many families are co-opted by the public schools, he said, there will be no constituency left to defend home-schoolers' rights.

The confusion over charter, public and homeschooling arises in part because of the nature of Bennett's virtual academies. Charter schools are publicly funded schools that operate outside of many normal boundaries and constraints. Bennett's virtual academies are "cyber" charters. They represent a new breed of public charter schools that is unencumbered by "bricks and mortar" (buildings) and other traditional classroom expenses. Cyberschools, as the name implies, link children to a computer and the internet to join a "virtual classroom," spanning distance barriers.

Cyberschools are not necessarily cybercharters. There are many private "virtual" classroom options available for homeschoolers. One can sign up for a *cyberschool* and still technically and legally remain as a homeschooler; however, one cannot sign up for a *cybercharter* without changing their legal status and becoming part of the public system.

The idea behind a cyberschool first came to the attention of the nation's homeschoolers in another NASDC Design Team experiment, The New West Learning Community Project, which was proposed concurrently with Bill Bennett's Modern Red Schoolhouse. The New West Design Team proposal included a plan and diagram showing how homeschools, alternative schools and private schools could be linked to the government school system through computers. The New West Design Team was the brainchild of William Spady, known around the country as the "father of OBE."

Following the Money Trail

Cybercharters, like homeschools, take students off of the public school rolls. Homeschoolers don't show up in the public coffers unless they are part of a hybrid public plan such as "dual enrollment." Cybercharter schools, however, because they are public schools by definition, *take* existing public monies out of the public schools and pocket this money in the charter organization's bank accounts.

At issue is the very definition of homeschooling itself. Homeschooling is traditionally defined as a parent educating their child(ren). Some homeschoolers point back to Biblical foundations, church creeds and Scriptures which speak plainly to a parent's direct responsibility, authority, oversight and accountability to God in this matter. Other homeschoolers point to Constitutional foundations and historical legal provisions in parental rights. Other "options," fashioned in the last decade or so, have not been true homeschooling, but rather hybridized public school models. Cybercharters, while superficially appearing to be homeschooling are, in reality, public schools in the home.

One might think that traditional homeschoolers would be naturally wary of a plan that sucks them back into a public system, which most of them have fled or sought to avoid. In reality, cybercharters are very enticing to homeschoolers. A recent letter published in the Private and Home Educators of California's *Legal-Legislative Update* newsletter (Jan./Feb. 2003) explains:

[Related to your questions about] ..."Charter Schools" and Public Schools ISP's, it is a staggering trend if the home educators in our church are any indicator. We feel helpless against the onslaught as most of our closest home educating friends are involved in one of these two governmental control options. It has been pointless to try to discuss the matter with them once they find out that they will be "given" money. There are always a variety of excuses why they have chosen this option.

We struggle financially every single month. So we understand. We see that many in our affluent culture just aren't used to not being able to give little Johnny and Suzie every class and activity that is available! But the Government will pay for it, so now they can. "All things are lawful," Paul said, "but not all things are expedient." Just because it is available doesn't mean we should be involved. The question when it comes to Charters and Public School ISP's (and now "Virtual" Charters i.e. K12) is not CAN we -- it isn't spelled out in Scripture -- but SHOULD we. And, why would we?

In a classic "carrot and stick" approach, cybercharters promise one-income, financially strapped families an easy way out with free curriculum, "free" computers, and professional assistance. The downside is that all of the state restrictions and requirements have to be met. Privately, K12 mothers have complained about the amount of time required on-line, the inability to have flexibility with the schedule and the curriculum, the lack of creativity, and the pressures to conform to rigid requirements. Many have regretted they didn't ask the right questions before they signed on the contract.

The aggressive recruitment of homeschoolers into charter schools also poses challenges to public school officials. An article posted at www.rethinkingschools.org, referring to cybercharters, explains that

These cyberschools take advantage of charter school laws. However, by appealing largely to homeschoolers, the cyberschools present unique funding problems and special concerns over whether tax dollars are being used for religiously based education.

Because homeschooled students are not counted in a public school district's budget or oversight, critics charge that the cyberschools have become a new way to funnel public dollars into what is essentially a private education. The cyberschools increase the number of children receiving public dollars for education without necessarily increasing overall funding: in the process decreasing the amount of money available for existing public school students. ("Coming Your Way: Cyberschools" by Stacie Williams, Summer 2002)

Cybercharters are also lucrative for public schools. So lucrative, in fact, that public schools are jumping into the act wherever they can legally set up their own charter schools. School officials have begun to recruit the homeschoolers in their local district. By doing this, superintendents ensure that the monies stay "in house" and don't go into the pockets of an outside corporate firm such as K12. An article from Pennsylvania, appearing in the *Gazette News* ("CASD to offer younger students online courses" by Terry Talbert, 1/22/03) demonstrates how this works:

The Chambersburg Area School District hopes by this fall to be able to offer at least some basic elementary/middle level courses online to parents of students in the district who are being homeschooled or are considering cyber school.

"Our homeschooling population is our target group," [District Superintendent Eric Michael] said.

It's hoped that parents will opt to take the online courses offered by the district, rather than use other source materials, or enroll their children in a cyber school, according to Michael.

The confusion over "cyber," "charter" and "home" schools is exacerbated by the growing list of hybridized, nontraditional schooling. These include a mixed bag of homeschool co-ops and private dual enrollment options. Wherever the door has opened for charter expansion, some of these alternatives have jumped on board the cybercharter express, seeking funding help to underwrite their programs and cut back on expenses. Many of the most innovative schools, which started out as private ventures, have now submitted themselves to state oversight and regulations. A pot of gold lies gleaming at the end of the cybercharter rainbow -- or so they think.

In truth, cybercharters will come back to bite not only homeschoolers, but also the public schools that feed them.

K12 and Michael Milken

William Bennett is chairman of K12, a company which markets curriculum packages to private purchasers as well as his growing virtual academy empire. K12 began with \$10 million in start-up money from Knowledge Universe. K12 is a majority shareholder in Knowledge Universe. Remember Michael Milken, the former “junk bond” whiz who spent time in prison? A *Forbes Magazine* account revealed Milken is now “sitting on the throne of a \$1.75 billion private education empire” known as Knowledge Universe which “oversees nearly 50 companies, many of them interlocking. Employing over 14,000 persons worldwide, Knowledge Universe is already on the brink of dominating several sectors of what is being called the Internet’s next killer app: e-learning.” According to *Forbes* (“Master of the Knowledge Universe” by Stephen P. Pizzo, 9/10/01) “Knowledge Universe was born in 1996 with a \$250 million investment from Milken and his brother Lowell and another \$250 million from Oracle Chairman and CEO Larry Ellison.” *Business Week* tells the next part of the story:

When Lowell Milken and Ron Packard, executives at education investment company Knowledge Universe, approached Bennett in November, 1999, about heading up K12, Bennett insisted that he would chair the company only if Yale computer-science professor David Gelernter, a fellow computer-in-the-classroom skeptic, signed on as the company’s technical advisor.

...K12 was formed in February of last year, when Bennett signed up as chairman and Packard became CEO. (“Bill Bennett: The Education of an E-School Skeptic” by Alexandra Starr, 2/14/01)

The previously cited *San Diego Union Tribune* article credits Bennett’s “star power” and Packard’s determination to put Bennett’s name and philosophy behind the endeavor. Packard read Bennett’s book, *The Educated Child* and became enamored of its concepts. *Business Week*’s account of the arrangement notes:

Some industry analysts... caution that Bennett’s high profile will not be an unalloyed asset. “Having a prominent personality at the helm can have a downside,” says EduVentures.com’s Stokes. “When the conversation ends up focusing on Bennett, it can eclipse the business.”

Milken’s philosophy of “cradle to grave” education is the driving force behind his current business ventures. *Forbes* relates

It is in early childhood development and K-12 that Milken has made some of his most daring and visionary acquisitions. Knowledge Universe has either started, acquired, or invested in an array of preschool through middle school companies that provide online curricula, testing, test preparation, tutoring, and even management of schools.

The companies also share databases and resources and contract among themselves for value-added services. While providing education services for its companies, Knowledge Universe is also amassing what could become one of its most valuable assets: a data bank on childhood learning, skill levels, and online learning behavior.

A sidebar to the *Forbes* account details questionable ethics in several of Milken's business dealings, especially in the acquisition of an on-line accredited university. It seems strange that William Bennett would associate himself with a man of such dubious integrity. Again, why would he risk his own excellent "virtuous" reputation by becoming part of an empire formed by a man whose name is so tainted?

The *Forbes* article, with accompanying graph, describes how Milken's acquisitions are intended to work together to form a seamless lifelong education system, including college and workforce training. Beginning at the pre-school level, LeapFrog, a Knowledge Universe company, makes programmable interactive tutorial toys that link to online resources. This toy then feeds information to the company's database "where the child's skill level and progress are assessed and tracked." The ultimate goal "is to engage children in lifetime learning provided by Knowledge Universe – even through their careers and into retirement."

This brings to mind some serious questions. Will the children enrolled in Bill Bennett's K12 virtual academies become part of Knowledge Universe's "most valuable assets." Will these children be in a databank with Michael Milken holding the key? Will a K12 student's online learning behavior be monitored and tracked? Will this personal information be sold to outside vendors for other uses? The Ohio Virtual Academy charter application states that the "school will use technology in conjunction with traditional assessment techniques to assess student achievement." In addition to participating in the Ohio Proficiency Tests, "a unique component of our on-line student learning system is its ability to generate detailed and ongoing data on academic achievement.... Data from the assessments will be collected and regularly analyzed and reported to parents, teachers, the school administration, and the board." The online system "tracks the number of minutes logged each day in each school subject." No guarantees of student privacy in Bennett's proposal could be found.

Techno-Future Cyber Charters

It is no accident that K12 signed on David Gelernter as technical advisor. Gelernter may not be a household name to many, but he's a big fish in the high tech computer pond. In 1996 Gelernter was the target of one of the Unabomber's attacks and was seriously injured when a package exploded. The Unabomber addressed a letter to Gelernter which explained the reason for this personal attack: "...there are a lot of people out there who resent bitterly the way techno-nerds like you are changing the world..." How was Gelernter changing the world? He had just published a futurist book, *Mirror Worlds* (1991), which envisioned the internet as a collective stream of human consciousness, evoking the idea of a global, human community. He is considered to be "a leader figure

in the third generation of artificial intelligence (AI) scientists.”
(<http://www.edge.org/documents/digerati/Gelernter/html>)

Gelernter’s pioneering work has been in the area of storing and retrieving information, both independently and collectively, i.e. databanking. He has called for a new paradigm in computer usage which will permit one to index *all* (meaning every shred) of a person’s life data on what he calls “lifestreams,” entities which float in cyberspace and can be retrievable at any computer in the world when beckoned by a person with a proper ID. Gelernter describes his vision in an internet interview:

The Net is going to matter when I can rely on it to store the information I now keep in disk, and the computer is a completely transparent object. ...I have my entire information life online, in chronological order, searchable from my electronic birth certificate onward. All the documents and pieces of information important to me are maintained by the Net.... (ibid)

Gelernter’s ideas are being implemented by Michael Milken’s Knowledge Universe and William Bennett’s K12. Press accounts bill Gelernter as one who hates computers for use in education. But within the high tech world his critics note a marked discrepancy between his public persona as a “reluctant computer nerd” and his cutting-edge software innovations which he is marketing on the internet. His critics also raise disturbing issues about the potential loss of freedom should Gelernter’s utopian ideas become widely implemented. If all the databases in the world were “indexed” using Gelernter’s technology, there would be a gargantuan storehouse of data, including every computer keystroke, archived in internet hyperspace for future access.

“Gelernter is a guy I listen to on these things. I read his stuff – even understand some of it,” Mr. Bennett said. “Gelernter told me that what has been done in online education is a scandal, and what could be done might just be the salvation of many kids.” (“A New Enterprise Joins Growing Community of Online Schools” by Margaret W. Goldsborough, *New York Times*, 1/24/01)

Endnotes Part 1:

1. This multi-part report was written shortly after publication of the first edition of the book *the deliberate dumbing down of America* by Charlotte T. Iserbyt (Conscience Press, 1999, 2006). This book can be accessed on the web at: www.deliberatedumbingdown.com.
2. Bennett, William J. *The De-Valuing of America*, p. 69.

“Choice” Reform: Dollars, Disasters and Databanking

Part 2 of The “Choice” Charade

Reform Drives Profits

Former U.S. Education Secretary William Bennett might have set up his entire K12 operation as a private curriculum publisher in the homeschool venue. But K12 isn't a simple curriculum vender. Students' parents must enroll them in K12, because K12 is an online academy. At up to \$1200 per pupil, per enrollment, per year Bennett could have easily realized profits. Based upon his well-cultivated image as Mr. Virtues, he could have made a decent income by enrolling a portion of the estimated 1.5 million homeschoolers nationwide. He could have fashioned an untarnished image as a benevolent godfather to homeschooling.

But Bennett has grander plans. Personally, he has decided to go for the more lucrative cybercharter income – straight from the public treasuries, a surefire way to anger public education proponents (a group he repeatedly insults with the moniker of “the blob” in his discourses on public education). Professionally, he has seized upon a theme he embraced during his earliest days in the “bully pulpit” as Secretary of Education – “standards” and “accountability,” an education reform agenda antithetical to homeschooling rights. Strategically, Bennett's K12 is standing to benefit significantly from the well-heeled political connections of its founder:

Bennett says there is nothing specifically in President Bush's education plans that will benefit K12 – although, if vouchers, increased funding for charter schools, and educational savings accounts become law, as Bush proposes, the company could be on the receiving end of federal cash. But Bennett, who would not reveal how much is being paid by K12, believes the Bush Administration's focus on annual testing and accountability can only benefit his online enterprise. “That's because, at the end of the day, people will say, ‘O.K., we're for standards, we're for outcomes,’” Bennett predicts. “And then they will ask: ‘Now how do we get there?’” Bennett, of course, hopes K12 will be part of the answer. (“Bill Bennett: The Education of an E-School Skeptic,” by Alexandra Starr, *Business Week*, 2/14/01.)

...K12's creators remain hopeful that an assortment of tax credits, educational savings accounts and charter school mechanisms will eventually allow parents of any income level to afford their programs. (“A New Enterprise Joins Growing Community of Online Schools,” by Margaret W. Goldsborough, *NYT*, 1/24//01)

Last summer U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige embarked on a cross-country tour promoting the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*. On a stopover in Colorado at a forum on

e-learning, which featured Bennett's Colorado Virtual Academy, Paige touted the fact that "\$700 million is available to states and schools in 2002 through the Enhancing Education through Technology program, along with \$2.25 billion through the E-rate initiative" (<http://www.nclb.gov/media/news/071202.html>). This is in addition to hundreds of millions of federal dollars for charter school expansion and development.

Indeed, Bill Bennett's K12 Virtual Academy cybercharters have all appearances of becoming a financial windfall. His start-up costs include a loaned computer, curriculum, a teacher overseeing up to 40 pupils, and a few other items of nominal expense. Estimated expenses run between \$1500 and \$2500, depending on a number of factors. His profit is considerable. An alert issued by the OHIOEANDA (Ohio Equity and Adequacy of School Funding) entitled "Bill Bennett Strikes Gold in Ohio" (9/11/02) spells out the details:

According to the Department of Education website, Bill Bennett's Ohio Virtual School received \$398,347.04 in September based on an annual amount of \$3,983,470.39. The annual amount along with the monthly payments will change as Bennett enrolls more students.

Some information and implications regarding this enterprise are:

1. Bennett told a nationwide TV audience (Fox News Network) last year that the cost of Virtual schooling is \$895 per student.
2. Bennett's Ohio Virtual School will possibly provide up to \$1500 worth of instructional materials and services to students. Ohio taxpayers will pay Bennett on average more than \$5000 per student. These payments are deducted from Ohio school districts.
3. Most of the money collected by Bennett will not contribute to Ohio's economy. His operation is based in Virginia.
4. Bennett appears to have strong political ties to those who control Ohio's purse strings. No doubt any changes in Ohio law regarding charter schools will provide additional benefits to the Bennett-type operations.
5. The home schooling community is seriously divided over Bennett's tactic of targeting home schoolers.

The state of Ohio, which is far ahead of the rest of the country in "choice" implementation (charters, cybercharters and vouchers), provides a good window into the profits that can be made. As of January 2003, the Ohio Department of Education reported that Bennett's Ohio Virtual Academy received \$5,334,896.27 for the 2002-03 school year with a claimed enrollment of 1004. This enrollment is a 23.8% increase from October, 2002. Therefore, the average pupil funding is \$5,314. And this figure doesn't include the \$500,000 start-up funding available to all charter schools in Ohio in the first few years,

\$50,000 from the state and \$450,000 from federal funds. Nor does it include federal grants for budget line items such as “classroom size reduction,” an irony available to an “e-classroom” of one person in the family room.

Bennett is not apologetic about the profits, even if they do come out of government coffers.

Bennett answers critics who worry about profit motive in the K-12 educational system emphatically, “I am in favor of anything that works. I don’t think that profit motive is something to be afraid of. I recently gave a speech to a group of executives from a top auto company, and as I talked with them, the thing they kept focusing on was customer satisfaction. At the heart of customer satisfaction was giving their customers what they wanted – the very best performance and service available. Being customer-oriented means tremendous flexibility. We should have that in the classroom and throughout the nation’s education system. (“William Bennett: Education Philosopher,” by Stefanie Sanford, 9/01, <http://www.convergemag.com>)

Profits and politics aren’t the only issues of relevance. Bennett backed “choice” while he was the U.S. Secretary of Education, a key cabinet position during the Reagan administration. During the next decade he trumpeted “choice” from his various positions on think tanks and public policy institutes. He wrote books and made speeches which promoted “choice.” All of this could be viewed as “insider trading” -- meaning that Bennett stands to profit directly from his prior pro-“choice” advocacy, and will continue to profit as an outcome of his political connections. However, less known, but certainly well-documented, is the fact that Bennett has consistently been one of the nation’s foremost cheerleaders for education reform. “Choice” is a key element of systemic education reform plans. Part 3 of this report will demonstrate that Bennett’s personal venture into “choice” has much to do with his ambitions to further the education reform agenda. In fact, Bennett’s cybercharters are the perfect vehicle to leverage key elements of education reform.

Cybercharters are pushing the limits on many fronts. They are riding the crest of the rapidly burgeoning e-school initiatives, propelling high-tech ventures into the potentially profitable education markets. They are deliberately altering the meaning of “homeschooling,” a term with legal status, by broadening its association to include public e-schooling. And, cybercharters are redefining “public” education to include partnerships, hybrids, blended, dual and other homogenizations of public and private.

A recent “blended” school project from Oskaloosa County Florida, which claims to be a model for the nation, is creating “a seamless educational plan for two groups of students: those that are schooled at home and students that are schooled at ‘government schools’ (public schools).” The project pivots on a purposefully expanded definition of homeschooling: “an alternative form of education in which school-aged children primarily learn at home, under the supervision of their parents, rather than in a traditional school.” (Ishizuka,2000, p.4).” Broadening the definition of a term to include the opposition can be a highly effective political ploy to engineer change. Indeed, this new

“third choice” pilot program intends to lobby for substantive legislative changes which will irrevocably alter the legal parameters of homeschooling and push the boundaries on public “options.”

Charter schools unabashedly take money away from public schools and transfer it to private for-profit or non-profit corporations. This fact alone wreaks havoc on district budgets. Cybercharters do not have the overhead expenses and start-up costs that accompany the “bricks and mortar” charters, of which Edison is the most notable, yet in most instances they receive the same amount of money per pupil. Therefore, cybercharters stand to make quite a bit more profit than a traditional charter school. A statement by Tom Mooney, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers on behalf of the Coalition of Public Education (8/29/02) voices concerns:

...Advocates have been all too successful in spreading the myth that charter schools are autonomous, community based schools offering unique instructional programs. In fact, the field is increasingly dominated by corporate chains offering cookie cutter curriculum with profit rather than proficiency as the primary motive. The profit margins in the corporate run virtual schools are particularly obscene.

Cybercharters are cash cows. The battle is already furiously raging over who will get the moneys. More money can be made by setting up cybercharters than “bricks and mortars,” and school districts that formerly opposed high-tech computerized education are now rushing to stand in line for the lush moneys. A recent news account illustrates the magnitude of this revolution in education:

Three western Ohio school districts are considering whether to convert all of their schools into charters schools in hopes of being entirely funded by the state. The state pays all \$4,949 per-pupil spending for charter school students, but traditional public schools use local property taxes to pay a portion of that basic aid for students. (<http://www.onnews.com/story/php?record=22586>)

Charter schools of all types – public, private, profit, non-profit, blended, hybrids, etc. – are currently on the receiving end of a literal flood of state, federal and private dollars.

Breaking the Mold

By design, charter schools “break the mold” of traditional education. In 1991 the U.S. Department of Education released its *America 2000* education reform plan, which was the vanguard thrust towards achieving national education reform goals. The Bush Sr. administration, led by Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander, proposed that ***“the definition of public schools be broadened to include any school that serves the public and is held accountable by a public authority.”*** State and federal legislation since that time has opened the door to new experimental “choice” models such as magnet schools, pilot schools, charters, and other experiments with a multitude of descriptive names.

It is important to note that this definition of “choice” is *public* education, and does not include private or homeschool choice. Public “choice” is best exemplified by the contrived choice of chocolate cake served on a blue plate vs. chocolate cake served on a red plate.* With the implementation of each new facet of education reform, there is a significant erosion of true choice. For example, private schools take a blow toward maintaining autonomy when they are legislatively required to administer high-stakes, state-mandated testing. Adherence to state standards and curriculum alignment to state assessments is characteristic of government school “choice.”

By design, “choice” schools are set up in such a way that they are several times removed from citizen voter accountability or oversight. There are “sponsors,” “authorizers,” “Educational Management Organizations” (EMOs) and other private and/or governmental entities that constitute a new governance structure. Some pro-charter arguments have held that parents would have direct input into their child’s education (so-called “choice”). In fact, citizens have to go through a labyrinth of bureaucratic hoops to make simple requests for public information.

The time-honored structure of education in American guaranteed that parents and local citizens elected a school board which was directly accountable to them for the education of their children. Since the early 1980s, with the advent of education reform measures, this representative form of government has been systemically dismantled. The role of school boards has changed with the passage of state and federal legislation. Traditional pathways for parental and citizen accountability have been restructured, so that what happens in the classroom is decreed from on high, not by local elections or teacher conferences. Site-based management structures have gradually replaced the role of school boards in matters such as curriculum decisions.

School districts on academic “watch” discover that the state now runs their daily operations. And the term “accountability” no longer means “accountable to the taxpayer.” In education jargon it has been redefined to mean student performance on assessment tests, which is the basis for evaluating student, teacher and school performance. “Transparency,” a new buzz word, means that “report cards” are publicly issued for each district, indicating performance on the assessments.

The Intentional Design Flaw

From the earliest days of education reform plans, charter schools and other “choice” experiments were designed to be unencumbered by the restraints placed on public schools so that they could be free to “innovate.” In order to create an environment where this creativity would not be stifled, reformers insisted on “waivers.” The *America 2000* plan states:

We expect that the Design Teams will begin by erasing all conventional assumptions and constraints about schooling: the schedule (and calendar), curriculum, class size, the pace of learning, teacher/student ratios, adult roles, teacher recruitment, health and nutrition, discipline, staff development, organizational and management

structures, resource allocation, students-as-tutors, the nature of instructional materials and much more (p. 30)

Waivers exclude charter schools from a significant chunk of state and local regulations, including many of those guaranteeing the safety of students. For example: waivers can grant charter operators the right to retain control over their own operations; eliminate enrollment caps, ease restrictions on employee qualifications; and exempt charters from state collective bargaining laws. The theory behind waivers for charters holds that “free market” competition would drive charters to the straight and narrow course and keep operators above board. This, of course, ignores that fact that education reform-style “choice” is not based on true “free market” economics.

Waivers mean that charter schools do not have to jump through as many bureaucratic hurdles. But waivers also mean that there are few safety nets in place when things go wrong. When charters are mismanaged, parents have discovered that they haven’t many options for complaint, and little power to rectify the situation. Should troubles develop, there are few, if any, avenues for parental appeal. Charter school operators, even though they are on the government dole, have been granted the unbridled authority to make decisions directly impacting students -- what grades to offer, the number of children to enroll, what textbooks to purchase, whom to hire, where to locate, the condition of the facilities, etc. All they have to guarantee is acceptable performance on the designated assessment test.

Charter schools often experience growing pains that create dangers for children. According to an article in the *Akron Beacon-Journal* a Columbus, Ohio, bootcamp style charter opened without a working telephone in the facility and with portapotties in the parking lot. The police were called 12 times in several months for disruptions, including one charge of sexual assault. In mid-October 2002, “350 employees of charter schools did not have criminal background checks completed, and 36 had not even applied to the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification & Investigation. A month later, only two schools were in full compliance.” (“Parents have freedom of choice, but not freedom of information” by Doug Oplinger and Dennis J. Willard, *Akron Beacon-Journal*, 12/12/99.)

In another issue examined by the *Akron Beacon-Journal*, a chain of Ohio charter schools targeting children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) for enrollment was audited by the state for re-labeling students who enrolled with designations which included “severely emotionally disturbed.” According to a former teacher, the re-labeling was performed by school staff members who “were untrained to evaluate mental capabilities... [with] no parents present.”

The school gets about \$13,000 in state and local funds for each student classified with a special education problem – nearly double the money it would get for educating a regular student or one with ADD.

And nearly every student at Summit Academy Akron is reported to have a special education problem, even though most of them didn't carry that designation when they were enrolled in public schools.

Now, allegations that Summit Academy has intentionally misidentified students with special education disabilities have drawn unscheduled audits from the Ohio Department of Education at two schools. And Akron Public Schools officials have asked state Auditor Jim Petro to review Summit Academy's special education records.

In question is whether millions in tax dollars that flow into the eight Summit Academy charter schools in Ohio owned by Peter DiMezza of Akron have been properly obtained and used. ("School fund sham?" by Reginald Fields, *Akron Beacon-Journal*, 5/12/02)

Bruno Manno, a well-known "choice" proponent, admits to one charter's "accounting irregularities, governance tiffs, and overreporting of enrollments":

The new D.C. school board moved during the 2001-'02 school year to close three other schools chartered by the previous board. They had an array of problems: overcrowded classrooms with little ventilation, high absentee rates, few textbooks and other instructional materials, abysmal academic results, and failure to file financial reports and to offer the advertised courses. ("Yellow Flag," *Education Next*, Winter 2003)

Bruno Manno's solution to the crisis cited above? The National Association of Charter School Authorizers, who will press for "results" and "accountability" in "choice." "Results" and "accountability" are sacred to education reform ideology. It doesn't matter *how* the results are obtained. It just matters that they *are* obtained.

Waivers are a crisis waiting to happen. This is by design. Troubles will erupt as a natural result of this intentional design flaw. It only takes one big headline disaster for a national push to institutionalize education reform mandates on *all* "choice" options, including the last bastions of truly free choice: homeschools and private schools. This is why it is so imperative for "choice" reformers to broaden the definition of homeschooling. Once there is a well-publicized calamity – say, for example, with a cybercharter that superficially resembles homeschooling -- the reformers fully intend to start the drumbeat for more onerous governmental regulations, oversight, and intrusions on *all* choice, not just public "choice." No child shall be left behind.

Waivers for Favors

There is another convenient loophole in charter waiver design. Disasters, such as the ones cited above, surprisingly do not result in bad charter operators put out of business or their schools shut down. This is because waivers for "choice" always come with *favors* for "choice." Politics is the name of the game. In return for being granted certain "waivers"

which benefit business interests, the innovators turn their profits into political action -- especially highly financed, well-oiled political action committees. This political action translates directly into advocacy for education reform measures including, of course, more “choice.”

Stories have appeared in the press about enormous campaign contributions, political pay-offs, potential conflicts of interest and other sleazy political maneuvers. Private foundations, public policy groups, “choice” advocacy organizations, education officials and “choice” operators move back and forth across the “choice spectrum, serving in various roles and capacities which promote an agenda that profits them directly. (See http://www.susanohanian.org/atrocities_fetch.php?id+323 for one pertinent story.) In exchange for political favors (\$\$\$) charter operators have been granted business waivers (\$\$\$).

The most notorious “choice” tycoon is David Brennan of White Hat Management. His saga, which traverses the “choice” spectrum from the Cleveland vouchers to charters, was recorded in a 1999 *Akron Beacon-Journal* article series by reporters Dennis J. Willard and Doug Oplinger (“In education, money talks,” 12/13/99). An examination of the campaign finance database at the Ohio Secretary of State’s website reveals that since the initial gubernatorial campaign of former-governor George Voinovich, an active “choice” proponent, the Brennan family has contributed over \$1.8 million dollars to “conservative” Republican candidates, who in turn greased the political, legislative, legal, judicial and bureaucratic machinery that furthered a “choice” empire. Certain “irregularities” were winked at or ignored, which allowed Brennan to move with ease from a troubled voucher initiative directly into charters. In a PBS interview, Brennan reveals how the squeaky wheel got greased:

Combining all those reasons together we decided to close our voucher schools as of June [1999], and coincidentally, charter legislation permitted us to open schools in those same locations and that’s what we did. But I probably feel more forcefully than I ever have that vouchers are the answer for the problem. **Charters are a way station on the way to getting full choice through vouchers.** [emphasis added] (“The Battle Over School Choice, Frontline, 2000, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/vouchers/interviews>)

It is not a coincidence that Brennan’s White Hat Management has now created its own version of a cybercharter, the Alternative Education Academy (also known as OHDELA). OHDELA chose a target marketing strategy identical to William Bennett’s, i.e., capitalizing on the reputation of homeschoolers.

The “waivers for favors” system creates financial windfalls for charter operators, and there are immediate political repercussions. Mom and pop homeschoolers who live on one income can’t begin to compete with this Goliath. Perhaps this situation wouldn’t be very serious if, indeed, the cyberschool merchants were truly “friends” of homeschoolers. But, as the record will show (see Part 3), the very men who are proponents of “choice” are also sounding the loudest drumbeats for “results,” “standards,” “accountability,” and

“assessments.” Their “choice” is not true choice – the choice that homeschoolers currently enjoy now. Their “choice” is government “choice,” which is no choice at all. And cybercharters are the perfect look-alike instrument with which to foist this reform agenda upon an unsuspecting and naïve homeschooling community.

The real threat to public education does not come from the tiny remnant of mom and pop homeschool families. The real threat to traditional public education comes from the new “choice” of the education reformers. Canned “choice” is activating key elements of education reform that will change local community-based public schools forever. It is the best tool ever devised for such a purpose because 1) it perfectly deceives the public, 2) it creates crises (through the use of waivers), and 3) pre-determined solutions are waiting in the wings.

“Choice” proponents knew all along that there would be fiscal and educational disasters with experimental schooling options. They even knew about personal safety and sanitation dangers to children. Nevertheless for over a decade now, “choice” proponents have been continuing their push for waivers, for innovations and “break the mold” schooling. To the public, the “choice” proponents cite guarantees of excellence in education, point to high “standards,” parental freedom to choose what is best for their children, and “free market” checks and balances. But, when they write amongst themselves in the higher echelons of public policy institutes, think tanks and education periodicals, they speak a different language – that of education reform. In the rarified air of education bureaucratic lingo, another agenda is at work

Tests Drive the Reform Engine

“Choice” is an acceptable form of education reform because it is part of the “system.” The reason it is part of the system is simple: the test. Before proceeding, it is necessary to review the basics about education reform. In a nutshell, education reform is a SYSTEM (womb to tomb) founded upon a METHOD (operant conditioning). The system runs via a FEEDBACK MECHANISM (assessment test) that is DATABANKED (computer-stored). STANDARDS set the criteria for measuring the degree to which rewards and penalties are bestowed to the child, teacher, school, district and state. The most essential component of a smooth-running education reform system is a well-devised assessment test. The test drives the entire reform engine. Little Johnny or Susie sit at their desk and answer questions on this assessment. These answers are then fed into a databank, processed, and regurgitated in the form of rewards or penalties to student, teacher, school officials, school building, and school district.

Since the 1980s, when the national testing agenda rose to prominence, testing has been one of the least understood aspects of the education reform plan. The public thinks they are getting old-fashioned achievement tests that measure academic progress. But the education reform tests “assess” a child’s progress not only on academics, but also their political correctness, worldview, beliefs, opinions, values and attitudes. These tests have state-prescribed “correct” answers to questions that formerly were considered private and

personal matters. And these tests are now “high stakes,” which means that rewards and penalties are attached to them.

For perhaps thousands of years teachers and tutors have employed tests as a way to measure what a child has actually learned. Does Joey know that $2+2=4$? A simple mathematical quiz will quickly reveal Joey’s strengths and deficiencies in knowledge of subject matter. A competent teacher will then review the material with Joey and make sure he learns the answers that he has missed. This type of academic test is non-standardized and purely academic. Curriculum-based tests used to operate the same way, simply identifying the degree to which the student had learned the subject matter covered in the book. The advent of standardized tests began to change all of this. Standardized academic achievement tests were an instrument that told parents and teachers how well their children were performing on certain subjects *as compared to their peers*.

Since the days of John Dewey, a certain segment in the upper echelons of education have sought to reform education so that it would become a vehicle to transform society, particularly towards a form of socialism. Today, the reformers will argue that education must socialize children, prepare them for the global workforce, teach them interpersonal skills and equip them for lifelong learning. All of these goals have attitudinal, values-laden components which are then embedded into the standards and assessments. Embedding these worldviews in psycho-social assessments ensures that they will become integrated into American life and culture within a decade or two. The obvious trouble with such a grand scheme is obvious – not all Americans share the same values, attitudes, opinions, beliefs and feelings. The assessment testing mandate ensures that the next generation of children will conform like clones to this government-prescribed mindset.

If little Johnny or Susie answers too many questions incorrectly, including the value-laden questions, he/she won’t pass the test. The repercussions for this will be felt all the way up the line. Make no mistake about it: the onus rests on the child. And children know it. Stories of children being frightened to the point of physical illness have been repeated around the country. News accounts have reported on teaching to the test, excessive preoccupation with test preparation, and even cheating on tests. Everything hinges on “the test.” This is what “accountability” is all about.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, or “The Nation’s Report Card”) is the gold standard for all U.S. assessments. Under the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) federal education reform act, state standards and assessments must become aligned with federal requirements. To make sure that this will be accomplished properly, the feds now carry a big stick. All states must have submitted accountability plans to the U.S. Department of Education by the end of January 2003. The law forces states to show improvement or face tough consequences, including loss of federal dollars. Everybody from Johnny and Susie on up will receive “report cards.” These report cards are peddled to an unsuspecting public as a reliable method of ascertaining a school’s *academic* progress. The report cards are used by everyone from mayors promoting communities to corporations, to real estate salespersons selling neighborhoods. In reality, however, the

report cards are all based on the *psycho-social* assessment scores of little Johnny and little Susie.

High stakes testing is currently designed to hold a child's school accountable for meeting state and federal standards. Under the NCLB Act, in the first year of poor performance, the school will have to improve itself. In the second year, children will be given the option to transfer to another school. Third and fourth year penalties become increasingly excessive and coercive. The second year of the penalties phase could be a windfall for charter operators. This is when parents, who are deceived by the "report card" scores (thinking them to be indicative of academic failure), or dismayed by the reduction in school funding, may throw up their hands in exasperation and decide to try charters or other vehicles of "choice."

The "choice" promoters are waiting in the wings to receive little Johnny and Susie into their cybercoffers. These "choice" options, however, are not true "choice." Charter schools give assessment tests because that has now become an essential part of the definition of "public" school. Therefore, children will not escape assessments, or the curriculum that produces "success," simply by transferring over to a new school. But they might escape the penalties – for now. Children cannot escape the test. No matter where they go, the test will be there.

Databanking Devices

The scores from little Johnny and Susie's NAEP tests travel to a databank – and beyond.³ How far beyond has never been divulged to the public. The key point is that the government, along with various contractors and subcontractors, all have access to the test question data of its citizenry from tests that are not simply academic, but also psycho-social in nature. Big Brother knows what your children are thinking, feeling, believing, and valuing.

Databanking the assessment results is the key to education reform. Everything hinges on the databank. Each year, or series of years, the databank is updated to reflect a child's new scores. These scores are compared to prior scores, rewards and penalties are meted out, and the "progress" of children toward a national standard is recorded. Curriculum and educational processes that produce "success" are given the government's stamp of approval as "programs that work" and federal dollars follow.

Groups of citizens have valiantly tried for several decades, legislatively and through the courts, without much success, to stop this flow of intimate information. Significantly, national "conservative" leaders and organizations have by and large not only failed to support these citizens, but have actually stood in their way or sabotaged their efforts. National "liberal" organizations have proven to be equally untrustworthy. While "left" and "right" mucky-mucks were locked in spurious battles over turf, semantics and outcomes, the real issue is the significant loss individual freedom and privacy, and the encroaching power of the state.

One might have assumed that the supposedly politically conservative “choice” proponents would oppose such a gargantuan governmental intrusion into the deepest recesses of the human mind, especially when it involves mass coercion on a scale not seen since Stalin. Such is not the case. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Chester Finn, a close colleague of William Bennett’s, and staunch “choice” advocate, has written:

For too long, U.S. education has lacked meaningful standards and avoided real accountability. Thankfully, this is starting to change.

The quest for educational accountability relies on a three-legged stool: standards, assessments, and consequences.

...How do we know if a student, teacher, or school is meeting the standards? Tests, directly linked to the standards, are critical.

...Finally, standards and tests must be coupled with consequences. (“Standards, Testing & Accountability,” www.edexcellence.net/topics/standards.html)

Dr. Chester E. Finn, Jr., is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation which is an education reform group specializing in “choice,” “accountability,” and “standards.” Finn was Assistant Secretary for Research and Improvement (OERI) at the U.S. Department of Education from 1985-88, during Bennett’s tenure as Secretary of Education. Finn has written exhaustively over the past decade about the use of assessment tests in education reform, focusing a great deal of attention on “accountability.” It was Chester Finn who is largely credited with authoring the original education reform plan, *America 2000*. Ironically, even though he has ironclad credentials as one of the chief architects and promoters of education reform, Finn is cast as a political conservative by the education establishment and the media. This is in part due to the fact that he is pro- “choice.” But he is also a master at writing “you have to do it *this way*” pieces that tweak liberal democrat positions.

In 1992 Finn wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, “Clear standards can be the centerpiece of radical change.” (3/23/92). A few years later Finn joined the chorus for “local control” and downsizing the U.S. Department of Education, a politically conservative rallying cry. He explains how this could work:

It's time -- past time -- to “send education home,” in Mr. [Lamar] Alexander's phrase. The schools cannot be fixed in Washington. They are the proper work of states, localities, teachers and parents.... What should remain in Washington? Not a lot: **statistics; perhaps a bit of research; the assessment of student performance at the international, national and state levels....** [Emphasis added] (“A Primer for Education Reform,” *Wall Street Journal*, 1/13/95)

Colleagues William Bennett and Lamar Alexander, both former U.S. Secretaries of Education from Republican administrations, agreed on the same agenda in a speech before Congress:

The gathering, analysis and reporting of education statistics would be placed under the jurisdiction of the National Education Goals Panel, consisting of governors, legislators, members of Congress and senior officials of the executive branch. Assessment of student achievement at the international, national and state levels would become the unambiguous responsibility of a rehabilitated National Assessment Governing Board, overseen in turn by the Goals Panel. (Empower America, "Abolishing the Department of Education in Order to Liberate Parents and Schools," A joint statement by former Secretaries of Education Lamar Alexander and William J. Bennett, delivered to a House committee, Jan. 26, 1995.

In short, everything would fall under a federal entity overseeing assessment testing. Three of the country's foremost "choice" proponents – Alexander, Bennett and Finn -- were lauded across the country by Republican conservatives for their call to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education. In response, vitriolic pieces were written by education journals and public policy institutes from the Left, decrying this agenda. This artificial debate in the media masked the real plan that these men were advocating – the databank. This is what Finn, Bennett and Alexander wanted leftover after disbanding the U.S. Department of Education in Washington: the centralization of statistics, research and assessment performance results.

The federal databank is a hungry creature. There are children "left behind" whose assessment scores are not yet recorded. Bennett, Alexander and Finn promote "choice" because they know that charter schools function perfectly to fill in the gaps, catching more children in the web. When parents are enticed away from private schools and homeschools to place their children into charters, their children are then tested and entered into the government databank. Charter schools, because they are public schools, administer assessments to children. Charter schools promise to deliver better test scores, which means that they must teach in a way that meets or exceeds the new standards. Many, including Bennett, brag that their curriculum is aligned to state (meaning federal) standards.

Assessment test results feed the databank. As long as children become effectively indoctrinated with the proper academic and psycho-social attitudes, values, beliefs, opinions and ideas, the reform engine chugs along merrily, eagerly gobbling up new scores. Part 3 of this report will reveal the staggering extent to which these three men and their cohorts have engineered and advanced this facet of the education reform agenda.

The conclusion is inescapable. The purpose is control of an entire population of children, including their teachers, through the use of coercive and punitive government-sanctioned methods – based on the databanking of test scores. Leading education reformers have never hidden this agenda. But neither have they trumpeted it openly. One has to dig through the massive reams of reform documents, public policy papers, think tank reports and government papers to see the full picture. Excerpts from these key documents can be found in *the deliberate dumbing down of America: A Chronological Paper Trail* by Charlotte Iserby (www.deliberatedumbingdown.com).

The *No Child Left Behind* Act has openly instituted the utopian (but totalitarian) systemic changes envisioned by the leading reformers of the past several decades. Fully implemented “choice” has the capability to change traditional public schools beyond recognition. Educators might agree now with the politically and ideologically “correct” assumptions underlying the psycho-social testing instruments. But will they agree with these ideas as they evolve in the future? What if they dislike the government-prescribed psycho-social-political curriculum of cookie-cutter schools in the future? Where will they be able to send their children when there are no more true choices?

Full “choice” intends to wipe out the remaining bastions of true choice. If homeschool and private school parents lose the right to truly choose an education for their children, then this right has been lost forever in America.

*See Appendix: The Pizza Choice Game

Endnotes Part 2:

1. <http://www.deliberatedumbingdown.com>
2. See chapter 9, “‘Cognitive’ versus ‘Academic’: A Critical Distinction,” Eakman, B.K. *Educating for the New World Order* (Portland, OR: Halcyon House, 1991), p. 65-69.
3. “When Johnny Takes the Test,” a widely distributed article originally published in the September 1995 issue of *The Christian Conscience* (Vol. 2, No. 9). Authored by Melanie K. Fields, Sarah H. Leslie, and Anita B. Hoge.
4. Ibid.

Bill Bennett and the De-Valuing of America: Accountability and Homeschooling

Part 3 of The “Choice” Charade

Those who set the standards and define the terms will rule the systems. Those who manage the resources and determine the consequences of failure will control their “partners” and enforce compliance. The promise of “local control” is meaningless when federal funding is tied to federal standards and policies.¹

The Two Sides to William Bennett

William Bennett, like the Greek god, Janus, has two sides to his face. Bennett has carefully cultivated a persona in the media as Mr. Virtues -- a highly respected leader who is seen speaking out on behalf of fine character and strong academics. Bennett is the epitome, if not caricature, of the consummate moral conservative – always on some new quest to save America from moral decay. These moral crusades endear Bennett not only to the religious and political right, but enhance his reputation across a broad swath of mainstream America. Friends and foes alike assume that this side to Bennett’s face is the only side. But it isn’t.

The other face of Bennett/Janus is less public and not well known. The fact is that Bennett has always been a proponent of radical education reform – the same kind of reform first promoted by William Spady, Willard Daggett, David Hornbeck, Robert Marzano and others. Consistently, throughout his public life, Bennett has trumpeted stringent governmental controls. Bennett’s full record in these matters is only known by education reform insiders and “sold out” radical reform promoters. Teachers and parents do not know this. To learn the facts one must scrutinize the education periodicals and journals, government documents, and reports issued by public policy institutes and think tanks.

Bennett mixes his own brand of character, values and virtue with the heavy-handed measures of reform. Bennett and his reform colleagues probably hold sincere beliefs that the world will become a better place if they institute high standards, put in place accountability structures, and mandate measurable results. However, their plan also includes strong-armed penalties for non-compliance, something already previewed in the *No Child Left Behind* federal education reform legislation. This plan firmly places the locus of control into the hands of an omnipresent and intrusive state.

The less well-known side to Bennett encompasses far more than education reform. It extends into political, economic, philosophical and cultural issues as well. It involves a group of people who share Bennett’s ideologies and who work alongside Bennett to

achieve their societal reform aims. This segment of the report will only focus on education matters. In particular, this section examines what Bennett has actually said and done pertaining to homeschooling, accountability, and values. Surprisingly, this has much to do with government schools, too.

“Choice” – A Catalyst for Reform

“Choice,” despite its pretensions, is a mechanism to empower the state, not the individual. An early state plan for education restructuring described “choice” as a “catalyst” for reform:

Choice is one way to initiate changes in the system.... Public school choice should not be considered an end in itself but rather a means to a variety of outcomes... catalyst for school improvement... research shows that for choice to be effective, it must first be linked to... other restructuring strategies and policy changes. (“School Choice Task Force Report,” HB3565 *Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century*, 1/93, p. 2)

“Choice” intends to: 1) extinguish traditionally structured public education, and 2) eradicate homeschooling as it is currently legally sanctioned. An artfully contrived false dichotomy emerges when this kind of statement is made. There is cheerleading from the Left, from those who are more than happy to kill homeschooling rights. And there is applause from the Right, from some who believe that public education should falter and fail.

Let the homeschoolers beware! Let the public educators beware! Neither is the true enemy of the other! Yet, each is being manipulated by “choice” proponents to assist in the destruction of the other. In truth, “choice” is the real enemy. It is the sledgehammer to be used to drive a fatal stake into homeschooling. It will also irrevocably restructure the intrinsic governance of public education – amputating it completely from its life support system of parental and local control, severing teachers from the last vestiges of independence and self-determination.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* ensures that “choice” will be on the receiving end of public dollars and students when public schools begin to collapse under the weight of the severe penalties imposed in a few short years. Waiting in the wings to salvage the damage will be innovative “choice” structures such as charters, cybercharters, tuition tax credits, vouchers, and many deceptive and innovative hybrids. Eventually, these “options” will tether every child individually to the state, imposing “accountability” and “responsibility” mandates upon teachers, schools, districts, and families.

Within the homeschool community there are already a few families lining up for a “piece of the pie” – federal or state dollars in the form of tuition tax credits, reimbursements, scholarships, vouchers, charters, tutoring, and the many hybrids of these “choice” options. There is also an influx of non-homeschoolers arriving on the scene, borrowing

the term but sporting brand new, publicly-funded trappings. The next few years are going to be treacherous and dangerous for homeschoolers. Traditional homeschoolers, who do not want state money, nor the accompanying “accountability,” are already finding themselves threatened by this new wave of “choice” coming in like a flood. It may come as a shock when homeschoolers see certain leaders exchange hard-fought homeschool rights and freedoms in favor of these new “choice” perks. Perhaps one of the biggest surprises will be William Bennett.

“More Teeth”

In an article entitled “Virtual Charter Schools Face Opposition From Unlikely Source,” published at a CNSNews.com website on August 13, 2002, reporter Jessica Cantelon records that opposition to William Bennett’s K12 virtual academies (cybercharters) has come from both sides of the education spectrum – the National Education Association (NEA, teacher’s union) and homeschoolers. The NEA referred to Bennett’s K12 as “taxpayer ‘facilitated home schooling.’” Tom Washburne of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a homeschool legal advocacy group, warned that “the political presence that you need to fight back the regulations on home education” would be undermined by virtual charters. Carefully treading a fine line between fact and distortion, a K12 official responded to Washburn’s statement:

Jeff Kwitowski, Bennett’s press secretary, dismissed that argument, insisting that government is only intruding on the K12 concept by requiring state funding and tests to measure student performance. Bennett is “not going to let any state politics or any education gurus come in and try to alter things and change things,” Kwitowski said.

In a radio interview with Mark Standriff of WSPD radio in Toledo, Ohio (August 16, 2002), Bennett described his view on publicly-funded “choice” after some objections were raised by homeschoolers. Note carefully how Bennett links public money to the concept of “accountability”:

... [T]he principle I’m defending, Mark, is school choice... parental choice. The objection that they have is that it shouldn’t be involved in public funding at all. It shouldn’t be involved with government schools, as they say. But, I’m not prepared to relinquish \$400 billion and just say, well never mind, that’s not the money that I’m entitled to. Parents are paying that money in taxes, they should have an option within the public school system that gives them a chance to educate their children at home, but be publicly accountable as all public schools should be....

Bennett expounded on his view of accountability in the same radio interview:

B: ... We’ve had some very good meetings in Ohio with your commissioner of education, Zelman, and others, who are saying, “Look, we need results. We have got to get results.” People are tired of defending a system which is, you know, not getting results. And, we can do that. We can provide results, because of the quality of the program....

S: One of the issues that comes up is, obviously, accountability.... And here in Ohio we have proficiency tests. Do the K12 students, the Ohio Virtual Academy students, get a chance to take those proficiency tests along with the public school students?

B: Yes they do.

S: Why are those administered?

B: That's part of the accountability.... We want our kids to take those tests for two reasons. We think, since its public money, they should be accountable. This is public education. Second, we think the kids in the Ohio Virtual Academy are going to do very well on these tests and their parents are going to be very pleased that they put them through it.

These statements, made during the past year while promoting his K12 cybercharter concept, reveal Bennett's philosophy about standards, accountability, and testing. At first glance these remarks could be chalked up to the assumption that Bennett, in trying to appease aroused public officials, was simply towing the reform party line. However, the record will show that Bennett has a lifelong public record of calling for "more teeth" – stricter standards, measurable results, accountability, high stakes assessment testing, and state-imposed rewards and penalties based on compliance.

In an article about the growing opposition to cybercharters around the country detailing "lax academic standards and financial accountability," Bennett disclosed,

There are some crappy cyber schools setting up, and we are as interested as the states are in seeing that they don't survive.... The more scrutiny, the better.... Nothing will put us out of business faster than bad cyber charter schools. ("Cyber schools fill a niche for parents, kids," V. Dion Haynes, *Chicago Tribune*, 12/01/02)

Bernie Hanlon, head of the California Virtual Academy, one of Bennett's cybercharters, echoed these sentiments.

"There have been a lot of abuses in California," Mr. Hanlon said during an interview.... "Any law that strengthens accountability in California is good. We're just going to dance with it." ("Calif. Charter-Funding Fight Hits Home," Caroline Hendrie, *Ed Week*, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.dfm?slug=18charter.h22>)

In an Ohio newspaper article pertaining to the K12 cybercharters, Bennett again linked public dollars to accountability.

Bennett said he would like to see "more teeth" in all school regulations. "I'd be happy to see more accountability and standards," he said. "We're using public money." ("School program has big booster," Kymberli Hagelberg, *Akron Beacon-Journal*, 8/24/02)

“Accountability,” as defined under education reform measures involves testing and meeting state-imposed curriculum standards. This is anathema to homeschoolers for a variety of reasons – most notably, but not limited to, deeply held religious, ideological and/or political beliefs. Bennett’s remarks demonstrate a total lack of consideration and respect for homeschoolers’ choices and convictions.

Homeschoolers see increased “accountability” – the reporting, approval, assessment, evaluation, and state supervision of their home education process -- as a means to strip away the freedoms which have made homeschooling so effective. Homeschoolers have been successful because they rely on time-honored, private accountability structures – “home-grown” collaborations which include local community, church, extended family, support groups, health care practitioners, private tutors, and the list could go on and on. Homeschoolers do not live under rocks, as many critics have supposed; rather they have built up complex and extended cultural networks. The fact that homeschoolers have been so openly engaged in society has actually served them well over the years, endearing them to many who formerly opposed the concept.

Homeschoolers have traditionally been a fiercely independent group: not on welfare, not on the public dole, not on the public roll, receiving charity from private sources when needed. All of this is set to change. The bait is set, the lure is cast. Will they bite?

Opening the Floodgates

New “choice” alternatives, such as William Bennett’s cybercharter concept, pose a direct challenge to traditional homeschooling in America. One homeschool leader expressed concern about the erosion within the homeschooling ranks:

Some public school opponents of private home education have openly stated that their desire is to get a majority of home educators to sign up under public school-controlled programs like the Charter Schools and the Independent Study Programs. They have further stated that when a large enough percentage have done this, that they will hopefully (in their eyes) have little problem in “cracking down” legally on those of us who home school privately.... The further popularity of charter schools... with home educators could help undermine the freedoms we all enjoy. (“Charter Schools and ISPs: Promise or Hidden Threat?”, Roy M. Hanson, Jr., CHEA)

Echoing this concern, the Ohio Home Education Coalition issued an alert in August 2002:

One school district official told a reporter at that Columbus meeting that there are 800 homeschoolers in his district. “If we can convince just 20% to participate in our version of e-schools, we will be successful.” Successful in what way? Is enrolling homeschoolers just about stopping the financial bleed? Or, successful in getting “homeschoolers” to cave in to state pressure where they heretofore have not? Successful in claiming a newly developing definition of “homeschooling” – a

definition to be determined by the mere building and with officials imposing many of the same demands required when one is physically present in the classroom?
Successful in dividing and ultimately conquering homeschooling?

Because homeschooling has traditionally been a movement of the religious faithful and/or extraordinarily dedicated parents, it may become earmarked for extinction as “choice” becomes more widespread and popular. Many fear that the mass entrance of families *without* strong convictions into home-based “choice” models, dilutes the strength of the movement. They have concerns about preserving the integrity of homeschooling and separating it distinctly apart from the new, publicly-funded, “choice” counterfeits. They also worry that those with lesser conviction are easier to sway, particularly when offered the “carrot” of money, such as tuition reimbursements, “freebies,” and other enticements. One educator, noting the shift in ideology, has remarked that “home schooling” is “now about parents spending quality time with their children and giving them the best opportunity for a quality education.” (Kelly Painter of Calvert, quoted in “Blacks turn to home-schooling,” Ellen Sorokin, *Washington Times*, 2/9/03)

It is now clear that not only are homeschoolers part of the targeted market for Bennett’s cybercharters, but public school students are as well. This expanded marketing could potentially have disastrous effects upon government classrooms. It could also bring in a huge influx of new, home-based, publicly-funded, cybercharter students into the ranks of those who call themselves “homeschoolers.” *Education Week* reported last fall (10/24/01) on K12’s cash-flow and investors, and the new need to focus on the public market.

Home-schooled students number about 2 million, said Jim McVetty, an analyst who tracks K12 for Boston-based EduVentures, an education industry firm. But that’s not a big enough pool, he argued. “Even if they’re looking at a quarter of that market share, that’s not a huge market,” he said....

The big prize, of course, would be to sign up sizable chunks of the 53 million [public students]. (“Bennett’s Online Education Venture,” Andrew Trotter)

A related but more recent article chronicles K12’s \$20 million round of new financing, led by Constellation Ventures of New York:

Dennis Miller, managing partner at Constellation Ventures, said the K12 investment is consistent with all of his firm’s criteria. “K12 is a rapidly growing company focused on untapped markets with unique distribution systems,” Miller said. “William Bennett has an exemplary record in the education sector and he and the other premier individuals involved with the company have spent a lot of time developing a world class curriculum that can be delivered in a cost-effective way. The company has been on a significant growth curve during the last two years.

In the same article Peter Stokes, executive vice-president of EduVentures, confirms the new marketing strategy directed towards public students,

“There are indications from both the supply and demand side that suggest this is an emerging opportunity.”

...Stokes said that K12 had originally focused on the home-schooling market, but might find additional revenues from selling its content as a supplement for students in traditional schools.

About 1.5 million students are being home-schooled now, Stokes said. “That’s not insignificant, but it’s not huge,” he added. “The larger opportunity for K12 might be in providing supplemental Web-based content to families whose children attend traditional bricks-and-mortar charter schools.” (“Bennett-run startup gets \$20M,” Tyson Freeman, <http://www.ipo.com/venture/news.asp?p=IPO&newsID=37809>)

In launching the K12 virtual academies, Bennett has set his cybercharter oceanliner on a course towards the deep, dangerous and uncharted waters of education reform. He and his “choice” compatriots have intentionally roped on the tiny flotilla of homeschooling families, towing them on this voyage out to sea. The waves will come up and the waters will get rough. At some point the rope may be severed. Homeschoolers will have to make a decision. They can abandon their crafts and board the “choice” vessel. Or face life-threatening waves of “penalties.”

The definition of the term “homeschooling” is becoming so leaky, given the intrusion of cybercharters and their many publicly-funded hybrids that also claim to be “homeschooling,” that the tug on the tether to Bennett’s “choice” ship is beginning to be felt. Beware of friendly architects who attempt to board the homeschool ship and fix the “leaky” legal definition of homeschooling! The slightest error in the mending could sink the boat when it takes to water!

At the same time, the great *Titanic* of public education is now hurtling at break-neck speed through uncharted waters towards an iceberg of heavy-handed federalism. Even now, with implementation of *No Child Left Behind*, schools are beginning to feel the impact of the insurmountable standards, the crunch of impassable assessments, and the collision of federal mandates with human frailties and lack of funding. The lifeboats from this sinking ship all head in one direction – to “choice.”

Public school officials are understandably hot under the collar about the lack of state oversight of charter schools. They reason: If we have to bend over backwards to meet the onerous requirements of state and federal regulations, then why not everybody else? The drumbeat for more accountability for charter schools has already begun. Homeschoolers could be included in this call. One example lashes “home schooling” onto charters.

An unfolding “elitist” movement in U.S. education is a message that needs to be heard regarding charter schools and home schooling, says an Auglaize County Educational Service Center official.

Charter schools that have public accountability are not the issue, [the official] said; rather, the issue is when schools access the public's money but don't have to provide public accountability, he said **pointing to home schooling**.

"There's no accountability," the superintendent said. "Where we miss it – we don't ask every kid in the state to pass proficiency tests."

The institution of charter schools **like home schooling** tends to "divorce" the community from the pride of its schools, [the official] said. ("Elitism' worries official," by Melissa Warren, *Wapokoneta Daily News*, 11/22/02.) [emphasis added]

The West Virginia Education Association issued a blunt alert on January 31, 2003, decrying the lack of accountability for homeschoolers. "Home school students should be tested just like students in public schools," it read. This group urged their membership to "support a requirement that would mandate that students who fail to achieve standards for two consecutive years return to public schools." (<http://www.wvea.org/lobbyline.htm>) Unfortunately, this state teachers' union is shooting at the wrong enemy. The real threat to public education is posed by the new "choice" entities.

Homeschoolers should not look to Bennett for support when push comes to shove. It is true that Bennett has carefully cultivated an image as the virtuous friend and ally of homeschoolers. He has hobnobbed with the leadership of the homeschooling community for well over a decade now, schmoozing with the state and national leaders. An article in *Ed Week* even cited a favorable review of Bennett's K12 by a notable homeschool leader:

"I think there is a new breed of home schooler coming into the movement who will find this kind of service attractive, especially as it expands to the older grades," said Michael P. Farris, the chairman of the Home School Legal Defense Association and the president of Patrick Henry College, a small institution aimed at children who were home-schooled. ("Former Education Secretary Starts Online-Learning Venture," Mark Walsh, January 10, 2001)

However, HSLDA has since published a strong admonition against charter schools (Jan./Feb. 2002), which unfortunately does not mention Bennett or his company by name (<http://www.hslda.org/courtreport>). The cover story, "Charter schools: the price is too high," warned,

...virtual charter schools are supporting home schooling in name only. Parents who enroll their children in these virtual charter schools are actually creating small public schools in their home.

The accompanying article, "Charter schools: look before you leap!" worried,

...as the number of private home schoolers becomes smaller than those enrolled in public programs, we will see a new attack upon the precious freedoms so many pioneering private home schoolers and organizations worked so hard to establish and

defend. There is a growing attempt to marginalize private home schoolers as a radical and unreasonable element of a larger “reasonable” group that understands the need for government help and supervision by certified experts.

Bennett’s eagerness to conform to state standards and requirements (not to mention state monies), in combination with his aggressive marketing strategies, could easily propel his cybercharters into a leading role as the champion of this more “reasonable” group. In late August of 2002, an Ohio homeschooler interviewed William Bennett after one of his public presentations promoting the Ohio Virtual Academy. In private correspondence to other homeschool parents, she wrote,

I asked him if he is at war for charter schools, is he willing to allow homeschooling to be a casualty of that war?

He didn’t answer directly, but again mentioned how much he loves homeschoolers. Hmmm. Funny way of showing it.

Bennett’s Record on Homeschooling

Most homeschool parents do not scour William Bennett’s writings in the education journals, his public policy documents, or analyze his life’s work. To do so reveals the startling revelation that Bennett has never truly been a friend of homeschooling -- at least not the kind of homeschooling currently allowed by law across America. Rather, his concept of homeschooling has always come with tight government strings attached – aligning to state curriculum standards, requiring assessments, and being held accountable for state-determined results. The following historical record gives indication of Bennett’s enmity towards homeschoolers.

On January 2, 1986, then-Secretary of Education William Bennett was the subject of a lengthy interview by columnist John Lofton of the *Washington Times*. This interview was subsequently entered into the *Congressional Record* on March 7th of the same year. In this shocking interview, when asked specifically about his views on homeschools and Christian schools, Bennett responded,

A: I think in either of those cases the state does have a minimal interest in assuring that (a) the institution is an educational institution, that something that calls itself educational really is – and that cuts a lot of ways, putting a great burden on all sorts of schools – and (b) that the so-called school is not being used as something else – that is, that you draw a distinction between the homeschooler and the parent who wants to keep a kid out of school to do something that doesn’t have anything to do with the child’s education.

Q: But we know that what the state calls a “minimal interest” has a way of growing into a larger interest. Are you saying the state has a right to test those who go to

Christian and home schools, and if the kids don't meet the state's testing qualifications, then the state can shut these schools down?

A: The reading and math test, yes. If enough of the kids are doing fine – reading at a level that is at least as good as the average in the rest of the state, however it is set up – that's fine. Then you leave them alone.

Q: But you support the right of the state to set these testing standards?

A: Yeah.

Q: And if the Christian or home school falls beneath the state's testing standards, then the state has the right to close these schools down?

A: I would say if you have a private school, in the home or under the auspices of a church, and your failure rate for students falls below the average in the state, I think the state could close them down, yeah. It's not educating. Close it down.

These remarks provide an early example of Bennett's advocacy of state-prescribed penalties for lack of "accountability." When pressed on the legal concept of "minimal interest," Bennett responded that "Some parents abuse their children. The state has a right to protect those children from those parents" – an astonishing statement which equates home and Christian education to child abuse. Bennett then proceeded to underscore these views:

Q: But why would you defend the right of the state to set testing standards when one reason a lot of parents want to send their kids to private school is because they reject the state's standards?

A: For the same reason I send in the cops when I find out a kid has been locked in the closet for three months.

Q: But that is a criminal act. Why do you liken home schools or Christian schools that are not state-tested to a criminal act?

A: No, educational abuse of children – if you're not teaching your children what they need to know to survive in this world....

This is horrifying revelation. Bennett, a Harvard-educated lawyer, responded to Lofton's inquiry about "minimal interest" and state standards by likening homeschool parents to child abusers! The second answer reveals Bennett's belief that it is "educational abuse" to reject state standards. He then likens educational abuse to child abuse and neglect – locking a child up in a closet! In a legal sense, he is saying that parents who reject state standards should be viewed in the same way as parents who torture or starve their children.

These words are chilling. Although an extensive search has been conducted, so far no record has been found to indicate that Bennett has ever distanced himself from these words, or repented of them. In the current education reform climate, where failure to meet standards and demonstrate accountability is laced with penalties, these words appear even more ominous. Should those parents who reject state standards be penalized under child abuse laws? Homeschoolers have every reason to be concerned.

Just to be sure that he heard Bennett correctly, Lofton followed up on his interview a few weeks later.

...I asked Mr. Bennett, again, the same question:

Where does the state get the right to shut down a private Christian school or a home school? And I got the same fuzzy answer.

When I pressed him three times on this alleged right of the state, Mr. Bennett said he would have some of his department's lawyers give me the answer to this question. ("A threat to private schools?", *Washington Times*, April 30, 1986)

The context of this interview, conducted in 1986, is of particular interest. A bit of historical background from the homeschool movement is necessary. Back in the mid-1980s, when homeschoolers comprised a fledgling group of separatists and homeschooling was by and large still "illegal," jailing for violation of state truancy laws was considered to be an effective deterrent. In fact, many homeschoolers went to jail during the early days. Truancy laws fall within the realm of criminal court action and are protected by the constitutional provision that one is innocent until proven guilty.

When simple truancy laws proved to be an ineffective deterrent to homeschooling and the movement continued to grow, a more drastic experiment to snuff out homeschooling was then tried in the state of Iowa. A court case ("Barry Bear") and subsequent pilot legislation attempted to re-categorize homeschooling parents as "child abusers" and their children as "in need of assistance" due to "lack of supervision." Child abuse laws fell under juvenile court jurisdictions where the deterrent was an ever-present threat that the child would be removed from the home by social workers to become a ward of the state. (Sam Blumenfeld, a noted author and researcher on homeschool issues, published a series of newsletters in the late 1980s and early '90s documenting the details of the Iowa situation.²) During the years that the Iowa experiment was being launched, using the Archie Bear family residing on a remote Indian reservation as guinea pigs, William Bennett was secretary of education in the Reagan cabinet. How much did he know about the Iowa plan? Was he instrumental in its formulation?

Perhaps coincidentally, an article was published a year after Bennett's interview with Lofton, written by the legal counsel for the Iowa Department of Education during that turbulent homeschool era. She expressed views similar to those espoused by Bennett:

Any law that would allow Christians to teach their children without oversight or interference from the state would also allow parents with less worthy motives to lock their children in a closet, use them to babysit for younger siblings, or have them work twelve hours a day in the family hardware store. Opening the door for the lamb allows the lion to enter as well....

Certified teachers are state-mandated child-abuse reporters. When children are allowed to be kept at home, there may be no outside contact, no help for the abused child....

The precarious balance of parents' rights versus children's rights should never be struck in favor of the parents. ("Children Are Not Chattel," Kathy L. Collins, *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1987)

Bennett on Truancy

Iowa homeschoolers report that during those years the state went to extreme lengths to create further court case precedent to re-define truancy as child abuse, especially targeting families that were presumed to be marginalized (bi-racial, e.g.). Each attempt was thwarted, sometimes in ways that were nothing short of miraculous. Finally, in desperation, state officials created a "phony" homeschooling family. A Vietnam veteran with residual problems was encouraged to begin schooling his children at home by enrolling in "The Des Moines Plan," an early public school program where children were taught by parents in the home. This somewhat dysfunctional family was obviously not well-suited to educating their children at home. Officials prepared to take the family to court for alleged "truancy" violations, but intended to switch gear in court and charge them under state child abuse laws based on "lack of supervision." Being forewarned of this intent, the family fled the state in the middle of the night and escaped this action.

This strategy remains a viable option to this day. Cybercharter operators and supporters have freely borrowed the term "homeschooling" even though they are publicly-funded schools that may occur in the home. The stage is being set for homeschoolers to be linked to any crisis that may arise from the highly unregulated charter industry – guilty by association simply because of the expanded use of this term to describe every possible variant of publicly-funded, home-based education. When the regulations, and demands for "accountability" come down, as they inevitably will, homeschoolers could eventually be forced into the public system.

For example, a number of charters specialize in dropouts, truants and otherwise troubled teens, many of whom have been in the juvenile court system. Three charter schools starting up in Toledo, Ohio, target "actual and potential dropout student," "chronically expelled, suspended, or truant," and "pregnant students or those with children." ("Sponsorship of 3 charter schools OKd," *Toledo Blade*, 3/24/03). Because these types of cybercharters frequently employ the use of the term "homeschooling" to describe their publicly-funded education, there is growing confusion. A recent article from an Ohio

newspaper underscores the mix-up that occurs when homeschoolers are linked to charter schools, dysfunctional families, and child abusers.

[State Senator John Carey] worries that parents who might be guilty of child abuse could be escaping identification and prosecution by pulling their children from public schools under the guise of “home schooling.”

He said it’s possible that parents who believe they are being scrutinized by public school teachers – and could be reported to police or children services authorities for abuse investigations – could pull their children from school to avoid intervention....

Ohio knows almost nothing about its home-schooled children. There may be 60,000 in the state.... And if children in online charter schools are included, the number is much larger....

Akron has received national attention twice in the last two years because of abuse of children who happened to be home-schooled. (“Legislator sees risk in home schooling,” Dennis J. Willard and Doug Oplinger, *Akron Beacon-Journal*, 05/02/03.)

On whose side will Bennett fall when push comes to shove, and the homeschoolers begin to feel the threats of more state control? Consistent with Bennett’s earlier expressed views on truancy, and perhaps shedding light on his underlying philosophical rationale, is an excerpt from his *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (Simon & Schuster, 1993). “Plato on Responsibility: From the *Crito*,” is a dialogue between Socrates and the law, representing the supreme state. Socrates begins by suggesting,

Imagine that I am about to play truant, and the laws and the government come and interrogate me.

The law/state responds,

In the first place did we not bring you into existence. Your father married your mother by our aid and begat you. Say whether you have any objection to urge against those of us who regulate marriage?.... Or against those of us who after birth regulate the nurture and education of children, in which you also were trained?

When Socrates answers in the affirmative, the law/state contends,

Well, then since you were brought into the world and nurtured and educated by us, can you deny in the first place that you are our child and slave, as your fathers were before you? And if this is true you are not on equal terms with us; nor can you think that you have a right to do to us what we are doing to you.

After a bit more dialogue, the law/state then asserts,

And he who disobeys us is... wrong; first, because in disobeying us he is disobeying his parents; secondly, because we are the authors of his education... (pp. 246-247)

Bennett introduced this passage by commenting that Socrates' "decision to die remains one of history's great examples of an individual who believes his first responsibility to his community, his family, and himself is to follow the dictates of a reason-directed conscience."

Over the years, legislative and court threats have continued to attempt to link homeschooling to truancy, and truancy to child abuse and neglect. Just this year the California legislature is considering SB 950, which

...would add "habitual truancy" to the categories of child abuse and neglect." SB 950 would result in Child Protective Services (CPS) social workers investigating private homeschooling parents any time their children were alleged to be habitual truants (5 absences) by a public school official. (*Legal-Legislative Update*, Roy M. Hanson, Jr., Private and Home Educators of California, Mar/Apr 2003)

Could "penalties" for noncompliance with education reform mandates be broadened to include the cruel act of removing children from home under child abuse laws? This possibility has already been raised by social reformers, who introduced family "outcomes" in the early 1990s, proposing that these standards be linked to rewards and penalties for parents. There is now a renewed call for parental rights and responsibilities legislation³ – legislation often naively sponsored by homeschool groups – which could set up government-prescribed standards mandating parental "responsibilities," while at the same time empowering the state with "compelling interest" in parental "rights." This legislation, in combination with other reform measures, could potentially open a "Pandora's Box" of new "penalties" for homeschoolers who refuse to meet state standards.

The Drumbeat for Accountability

Over the years, Bennett has consistently expounded upon the theme of "responsibility," and applied it liberally to parents, children, teachers, administrators and schools. The 1986 Lofton interview reveals that Bennett was an early advocate of the major tenets of education reform – higher standards, increased accountability, widespread assessments, and rewards and punishments. In the context of an extended discussion about a pilot voucher program, Lofton asked,

Q: A recent article in the *Texas Law Review* suggested holding public schools legally accountable for failure to educate kids in reading, writing and arithmetic. How does that sound to you?

A: I need to think about that. They certainly should be held responsible. But legally responsible? I'd like to pause on that because I don't know that we need more

litigation. Schools that fail to do the job should be closed and boarded up. Those that do the job should be rewarded.

This is another early indication of Bennett's resolve to issue penalties. In 1987, Bennett called for "more federal spending,... accountability measures,... merit pay, magnet schools and dropout prevention...." He said that the

lack of accountability is the biggest obstacle to improving U.S. schools. The country has stiffer and more immediate penalties for serving rotten hamburger in a restaurant "than for furnishing a thousand school-children with a rotten education." ("Bennett: Look at how candidates stand on U.S. educational issues," by Christopher Connell, AP, 9/8/87)

Bennett was an early champion for the outcome-based education model.

But the focus should also be on outcomes, or student achievement – what students actually learn. ("Bennett: fewer books, more brains," AP, 9/6/87)

It is interesting to note that prior to his appointment as Secretary of Education in 1985 Bennett insisted, "There are few things in which I have less interest than dismantling the Department of Education," to the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources ("Bennett says he won't kill Education Department," Carol Innerst, *Washington Times*, 1/29/85). In this same article, Bennett called for tuition tax credits and magnet schools, typical "choice" options. Many supposed that the pro-"choice" Bennett would be working to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education, based upon widespread grassroots Republican lobbying of President Reagan. However by 1989, Bennett

told a congressional critic that "largely because of me" it was likely the education slot would stay in the Cabinet. "I made a hell of a commitment," he said at a Senate hearing, storming back at a liberal Republican who complained about budget cuts. "You just didn't like the direction. I was damn successful." ("Bennett's job could position him well for 1990s," Walter R. Mears, AP, 9/11/89)

A few years later, Bennett continued on the same themes. Note carefully in the excerpts below how Bennett intertwines "choice" with more accountability.

I believe that to be effective, reform should attack three fundamental flaws in public education: a soft curriculum, a general lack of accountability for results, and a lack of parental choice. (*The Devaluing of America: The Fight for Our Culture and Our Children*, Summit Books, 1992, p. 61)

A radical reform of education through national standards, merit pay, alternative certification, a core curriculum and, most important, allowing parents to choose the public, private or religious schools to which they send their children. ("America needs cultural renewal," 4/18/93)

With the publishing of *The De-Valuing of America*, Bennett continued his call for more accountability through the imposition of education reform measures:

A second key education reform is providing for much greater accountability. Today, *there are greater, more certain, and more immediate penalties in this country for serving up a single rotten hamburger than for furnishing a thousand schoolchildren with a rotten education....* [emphasis in original, note the similarity to earlier remarks, ed.]

...[W]e must have ways of identifying and rewarding schools that work, methods that work, and principles and teachers who work. We should... hold them all accountable for the results they achieve. We must have ways of identifying and, if necessary, moving out those who fail to do their jobs and of identifying and rewarding those who do their jobs well.... To determine results we must have true reliable national standards. Students must be tested to those standards and the results (by state, district, and school) should be made public. (pp. 62-63)

At the Department of Education I tried to broaden the public discussion on education reform and get the reform movement out of the hands of the educrats and into the hands of the public. I tried to bring attention to the right issues: high standards and basics, competency for teachers, educational choice, strong curriculum content, homework, sound moral education, and accountability. (p. 68)

These quotes on accountability unveil another side to the face of William Bennett. This is a side that is rarely seen in the media, and seldom examined by the public. This brief synopsis reflects his overall views on education reform. These remarks were not pulled out of context. Rather, they reveal his lifelong commitment to education restructuring – a commitment that bears remarkable resemblance to the most radical of reformers.

How can this be? one might ask. Hasn't Mr. Bennett been the epitome of the "conservative" voice in education and family matters, including civic virtue? This is the side that Bennett presents to the public. In fact, one could pull from the previous quote, the phrase "strong curriculum content, homework, sound moral education" and think they were on the same page as Bennett. One can glean what they want to hear from Bennett's words. This is because he consistently delivers a mixed message, including "virtues" with the loaded language of education reform, and this mishmash turns out to mean something else entirely. One educator, a critic of Bennett, has remarked on his effective use of this strategy:

Because Bennett knows [the] public so very well, he makes frequent use of such juicy phrases as "content, character, and choice." It is ironic that a public so unsupporting of intellectual and artistic endeavors responds so favorably to Bennett's calls for more culture and more classics in the schools. Perhaps I ought to point out, though, that the volume of this call depends somewhat on the audience that Bennett is addressing.

Significantly, this teacher rejected Bennett's promotion of the Pizza Hut reading-incentive program, so popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This program, based on rewarding children with pizzas for reading, was a foretaste of modern reform mechanisms that penalize children, teachers and schools for failure to attain good "report cards" based on assessment results. Cutting to the heart of the issue, she remarked,

I see the use of extrinsic rewards to motivate children as cutting to the very core of the American value system. Teachers must help children find intrinsic rewards: reading for reading's sake. When you offer bribes, you debase both books and children....

Experienced and savvy teachers know that when you keep a scorecard on reading, whether it's gold stars or pizzas, children start paying more attention to the scorecard than to the books. Even worse, they start lying about the number of books they've read, and they read easy books so that they can read more in less time. Instead of encouraging reading, participation in such schemes ends up encouraging the development of moral monsters. People who promote such schemes have faith neither in children nor in books. They also lack faith in the ability of teachers to bring good books and children together without gimmicks. ("A Not-So-Tearful Farewell To William Bennett," Susan Ohanian, *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept. 1988, see <http://www.susanohanian.com>.)

This teacher's remarks, full of clarity and common sense, stand in stark contrast to Bennett's views, expressed in *The De-Valuing of America*:

Are we willing to reward excellence...? Are we willing to penalize failure...? Are we going to insist on high standards (making the receipt of federal student aid or receipt of a high school diploma contingent on passing a qualifying test with real national standards?) (p. 70)

When one connects this strong call to "reward excellence" and "penalize failure" with Bennett's assertions about "education abuse," some serious questions must be raised. If parents choose the "wrong" type of education for their child, would this constitute "educational abuse"? What if the child does not score well on an assessment? Could that constitute "educational neglect"? Just how severe could the penalties component of education reform become? And, just how far and wide could penalties be applied?

Accountability and Virtue

Bennett fails to recognize, for whatever reason, that religious, private and homeschool families may have strong philosophical reasons for not wishing to meet state-prescribed standards, and that demonstrating accountability on assessments may, in fact, violate their religious faith. This is a key omission characteristic of the education reform model as a whole. Under this ideology one can *believe* whatever they want, but they do not have a right to *practice* their beliefs – especially when it comes to the education of their

children. Bennett holds the view that “every American child has an equal claim to a common future, under common laws, enjoying common rights and charged with common responsibilities. And there follows the need for a common basic education.” (cover letter, *James Madison High School*, 1/98).

It is clear that what he means by “common basic education” is state-prescribed, state-directed education. But his version also includes “virtue.” For over a decade Bennett has publicly championed a return to Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman virtues, morality and ethics, based on the premise that these are values held in “common” in American culture. Bennett has said,

Religion is a well-spring of civic virtues that democracy requires in order to flourish. It promotes hard work and responsibility. It lifts each citizen outside himself and inspires concern for community and country. It is a call to kindness, decency and forgiveness. Neutrality to religion guarantees neutrality to those very values that issue from religion. (“Divine guidance for young scholars,” *Washington Times*, 10/27/92)

This is the “Mr. Virtues” image that most Americans recognize whenever Bennett is mentioned. It is this appeal to Judeo-Christian values that endears Bennett to the religious homeschoolers. In fact, during Bennett’s many “culture wars” he often took the education elite to task for not supporting the values of western civilization and the Judeo-Christian tradition. Some education reform leaders held to an entirely different set of “common” values, some of which are blatantly derived from eastern mysticism. These culture wars were often magnified by Bennett himself. One astute observer noted that

Bennett’s hypotheses are not presented for dissection or discussion; they are designed instead to push preset emotional buttons, to stir up deep-seated frustration with what isn’t working in our nation, to touch the basic mood of the people.... Such polemics play well on the nightly news, and that’s all that matters. Typical of the dichotomist, Bennett takes a complex situation and divides it into two poles. If you aren’t for him, then you must be against him. And, as Bennett has cleverly constructed his position, if you are against him, then you are against decency and morality, against married motherhood and deregulated apple pie. (Ohanian, *ibid.*)

Lost in these culture wars, unfortunately, is the overarching moral dilemma: Should the state have the right to *prescribe* “common” values? Bennett himself answered that question affirmatively on many occasions, especially in the chapter entitled “The Great Cultural Divide” in his book, *The De-Valuing of America*.

Bennett takes the state one step further into legislating values, however. And this shift represents a significant shift beyond simple law and order; i.e., punishing evildoers. Should the state be empowered to reward citizens who hold “common” values and punish citizens who do *not* hold to these “common” values? Bennett has consistently intertwined moral and cultural issues with accountability:

“If we want our children to possess the traits of character we most admire,” he said in an address sponsored by the Manhattan Institute, “we need to teach them what those traits are. They must achieve at least a minimal level of moral literacy....” (An emphasis on *moral literacy*,” William Raspberry, *Star*, 11/11/86) [emphasis added]

And who defines “moral literacy”? From Mr. Bennett’s perspective, the state, of course. Should “moral literacy” be included on state assessments? Should rewards and punishments be doled out based on a child’s answers to the “moral literacy” questions? Should homeschoolers be required to take these tests?

Reaching one step further, a final, vital question must be raised: Should state-prescribed punishment for psychological/attitudinal questions such as these be based on the results of a single assessment instrument? Complex testing issues alone belie this misuse. Especially concerning children, whose natural vulnerabilities expose them to every potential pitfall of an imperfect testing process! Yet, the “accountability” and “assessment” drumbeat has been pounding incessantly for over a decade now, including within the walls of academia, and all march in step to the new politically-correct tune. Bennett has often been seen leading the pack.

Bennett has been a lifelong champion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which was examined in some detail in part 2 of this report. While Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education he was directly responsible for launching the NAEP in its present form, a test which monitors a child’s threshold of conscience, integrating hypothetical moral dilemmas into its content. This test has become known as the “Nation’s Report Card” and is the foundation for all state assessments. According to Anita Hoge, a parent who filed a federal complaint during the 1980s against the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Educational Quality Assessment (EQA), which was a forerunner to the modern NAEP,

These [NAEP] outcomes include measuring such basic life skills as personal finance and consumer protection skills, health maintenance skills (how to wear a condom?), interpersonal skills, family responsibility skills, and career development skills (ED 139819, NAEP, May 1977 [Contract Agency, NCES, Contract No. OEC-0-74-0506])

Hoge eventually won her case, filed under the federal *Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment*, after years of obfuscation and obstruction at the highest levels. It exposed the extent of federal involvement in curricula, testing and evaluation which was primarily designed to change children’s attitudes, values and beliefs. One former Department of Education official has observed that

Anyone following or involved with the Anita Hoge/Pennsylvania case will tell you that the U.S. Department of Education – under Secretaries of Education William Bennett and Lamar Alexander – pulled out all the stops, at every level, to thwart Hoge’s efforts and those of other parents who tried to use this law. Such an assault on those who paid the bills – and provided the children (“resources”) upon whom they experiment even today – was, and is, criminal. (*the deliberate dumbing down of*

america: A Chronological Paper Trail, Charlotte Iserbyt, Conscience Press, 1999, p. 221.)

In fact, Hoge received no help from Bennett. Writing about her experience with Bennett and Lamar Alexander, she said,

...Mr. Bennett (Mr. Virtues) was Secretary of Education when I filed my federal complaint. Mr. Bennett made no attempt to respond to my letters or appeals from others close to him in the Reagan administration about resolving the most documented complaint of psychological abuse ever lodged in the U.S. Department of Education using the *Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment*.... My files prove that Mr. Bennett could have stopped this abuse long ago... and he did not....

When both former Secretaries of Education, Lamar Alexander and William Bennett, testified before the House Economic and Education Opportunities Committee (1/26/95), they were very bold about expressing their expectations of “responsibility, authority, and accountability flowing toward families, schools, communities and states.” However, in the same breath... they embraced the very reforms that have created such turmoil in our communities.

Lamar Alexander... was named Chairman of the committee to expand the NAEP... in 1986 to state by state comparisons, therefore standardizing the state assessments to mirror the NAEP. He and Mr. Bennett were also instrumental in providing the impetus and the grants to upgrade and expand the national data bank for the collection of microrecords, individual records on individual students and teachers. (“Lamar Alexander and William Bennett,” *The Christian Conscience*, March 1996, p. 42)

Concluding Remarks:

During the Reagan administration all of the reform groundwork was laid for what later became *America 2000/Goals 2000* and ultimately the *No Child Left Behind Act*. In September 1986, Bennett’s Department of Education issued *First Lessons: A Report on Elementary Education in America*, an early project in school reform. In chapter IV, “School Policy,” a boxed quotation states that

The first requirement for a good school is that it rest on values that are good. The second requirement is that it be efficient in promoting the good values.

On the same page, the report calls for “fair and rigorous standards” and states that children should know that “advancement will not take place until those goals have been reached, those standards met.” In addition,

Tests are important means of determining whether children have acquired enough knowledge to move on, and it is essential that fair, complete, and periodic assessments take place.

Susan Ohanian, the teacher who has dared to be a critic of Bennett, wrote about her disappointment with Bennett's appointment of only one teacher to the group of 21 "Distinguished Americans" serving on the Elementary Study Group which prepared the document, *First Lessons*. Discussing the frustration with teaching values, she observed,

One is left wondering how Bennett would go about instilling good character and values in the youth of a nation where shampoo gets its own aisle in the supermarket but the number of thoughtful periodicals keeps decreasing....

When Bennett suggests that all school-children should memorize "Ozymandias" because this poem will "build character," his audience nods in agreement, though not one person in 1,000 has the vaguest acquaintance with the poem. And no reporter ever points to the irony that the same public that pays enthusiastic lip service to the need for children to read the classics – in school – is keeping Sidney Sheldon and Stephen King and Lee Iacocca and Elizabeth Taylor's diet book at the top of the best-seller list. People who fill their homes with "Wheel of Fortune," and who rely on teachers to provide character lessons for their children while pulling them through Tennyson and George Eliot, are indeed putting a lot of faith and hope in the schools. (ibid.)

Bennett has consistently added values to education reform, mixing them with standards, accountability and assessments. Homeschoolers and others may presume to agree with Bennett regarding which values are important. But that presumption could be based more on the media image of the "Virtues Czar," and not founded upon fact. One can glean a sense of Bennett's values and virtues by reading *The Book of Virtues*. Read the story "Baucis and Philemon" (p. 303) and especially take note of Bennett's preface:

The ancient Greeks understood that the health of the community depended on how well its individual citizens treated one another. To them, Zeus, the king of the gods, was both the guardian of the state and the protector of human relations among civilized men. All social institutions, including the family, lay in his care.

Read "Insincere Honesty" (p. 647) which ends, "If that be honesty, 'twere better to be dishonest." Or, turn to page 810, where "The Path of Virtue" is said to be Buddha, and page 812, "Man's Nature Is Good" by Mencius, a "Chinese Confucian sage." Or, read page 815, "The Way to Tao." When Bennett calls for assessing a child's "moral literacy," just whose morals and values will rise to the surface to become the "common" values of our culture?

At the conclusion of *The De-Valuing of America*, Bennett states: "At the end of the day, somebody's values will prevail." (p. 258)

Shall the state prescribe which of these values should be taught to children; and not only taught, but tested; and not only tested, but rewarded and punished?

Endnotes:

1. Berit Kjos, <http://www.crossroad.to/articles2/2003/homeland.htm>
2. Newsletters distributed by the Iowa Research Group.
3. South Carolina House Bill 3102, for example.
3. "Not So Vital Statistics on William Bennett," *New York Times*, 9/27/85.

Chester Finn and the Devaluing of American Education

Part 4 of The “Choice” Charade

Greater transparency will also increase the likelihood that national policy decisions comply with agreed international standards.

Standards may be set by instruments (such as resolutions of some international organization) that are technically non-binding but in fact have considerable influence on behavior. If applied in practice, these standards may begin to assume some legal status. This is the hardening of so-called soft law. (Our Global Neighborhood, The Report of the UN Commission on Global Governance, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 328-9.)

Chief Architect of *America 2000*

Chester Finn is the ubiquitous partner to William Bennett. Wherever one finds Bennett in education matters, one can readily locate Finn. The two men have complementary views, agendas and methods of operating. They sit together on many boards, jointly write articles and books, and aggressively propel “choice” to the forefront of the reform movement’s agenda. The two have been together since the early 1980s, when Finn was appointed to assistant secretary, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) in the U.S. Department of Education, by Secretary Bennett.

Chester E. Finn, Jr. can be said to the nation’s foremost cheerleader for “choice.” To Finn, “choice” is the essential missing ingredient for effective reform to take place. Because of this hard-nosed insistence on “choice,” Finn has often alienated the education establishment. Certainly he has been at odds with them most of his professional life. Yet, it is readily apparent from a brief survey of Finn’s exhaustive written and public record, that not only is he “on board” the reform agenda, but he is probably the conductor!

Most people are totally unaware that Chester E. Finn, Jr., renowned conservative, was the architect of *America 2000*, President George Bush’s aggressive education reform plan that was launched in 1991, and published in a booklet by the U.S. Department of Education under Director Lamar Alexander entitled *America 2000: An Education Strategy*. In a groundbreaking article by grassroots reform opponent, Wayne Wolf in November of 1992, Finn was exposed as the brains behind reform. Wolf wrote,

...[W]e were told *America 2000* was the consensus of the National Governor’s Association. The governors being elected officials from all 50 states, we can then assume that *America 2000* represents educational goals mandated by a broad cross-section of Americans, right? Unfortunately, as we study the roots of *America 2000*, a different picture emerges.

...One [abstract]... stated, “The Bush administration’s true education philosopher is Chester Finn Jr., a professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University. Finn is the chief architect of Bush’s plan to fix the nation’s schools.”

“...Finn, 46, was Alexander’s principle advisor on the key elements of the new *America 2000* plan: a national examination system, a network of experimental schools and public funding for private education. He wrote the early drafts of the blueprint, and he accompanied Alexander to the White House in March it to the president.” (“The Wizard of Education,” Thomas Toch, *U.S. News & World Report*, July 15, 1991, p. 46.)

Wolf cited an article Finn authored entitled “Reinventing Local Control,” (*Education Week*, Jan. 23, 1991) in which

Finn then salts the wound by saying, “Local school boards are not just superfluous. They are also dysfunctional. They insulate education decisions from the voters, taxpayers, and parents.” The whole thrust of the article is his advocacy of abandoning the concept of schools being controlled by locally elected boards.

...Finn’s closing statements yield a wealth of information, not only about his own views, but also about the way power is going to be distributed in our educational system:

We need change agents in charge of those schools, not preservers of entrenched interests and encrusted practices. If the states discharge their part of the job satisfactorily specifying the ‘ends’ of education, furnishing resources, and managing the information feedback and accountability systems; if responsibility and authority over the ‘means’ are devolved to the school-building level; and if parents are encouraged to pick any school in the state that, in their judgment, will work well for Matt or Jessica, we could readily dispense with the extra layer [of bureaucracy].

Local control is dead. Long live local control.

Wolf then analyzed the “ten precepts” of education from Finn’s 1991 book, *We Must Take Charge: Our Schools and Our Future*, (MacMillan: New York). Wolf concludes that these “indispensable ten” can be boiled down to the “Fatal Five”:

1. National Curriculum
2. National Testing
3. National Database
4. Outcome-Based Education
5. Site-Based Decision Making¹

Driving the Reform Engine

In Part 1 of “The Choice Charade” Finn’s record of national testing and databanking of student results was analyzed in some detail. To review, test results are fed into a federal databank. Test results determine student rewards or penalties (passing or failing a grade, for example). Test results determine teacher rewards or penalties (salary increases or demotions, for example). Test results determine district rewards or penalties (spelled out in elaborate detail in the *No Child Left Behind legislation*). To Finn, all that matters for effective reform to take place is the test and the databanking of test results. Standards must be based on a core of common learning (national curriculum). Accountability must be based on measurable results, meaning information culled from assessment scores. Accountability means rewards and penalties, meted out in Skinnerian fashion to individuals and entities, to ensure that everybody stays the course. And the newest term, “transparency,” means that it is necessary to create the appearance of being accountable for high academic standards to the public, even though it is really “smoke and mirrors.”

Because Finn’s reform engine can run on testing and databanking alone, he can then champion the deconstruction of public education. “Choice” is one method of deconstruction, designed to take education out of the realm of bureaucracies and building. “Choice” has the appearance of “local control” because parents have a say-so in where their children receive an education. But “choice” to Finn is **never, ever** to be separated from the test and the databank. “Choice” must only consist of options within the “Big Brother Is Watching” System.

Finn’s version of education reform always includes accountability. According to Dr. Dennis Cuddy, in July of 1987, the U.S. Department of Education issued a

White Paper on Accountability: Tying Assessments to Action (probably prepared by Chester Finn’s office) with a cover letter saying, “Assessment can be used as both a carrot and stick – to recognize and reward school systems that are doing exemplary jobs in raising student performances, and in extreme cases, to intervene in districts and institutions that are not making the grade.” (*Chronology of Education: With Quotable Quotes*, 1998, p. 79)

Dr. Cuddy, who was a Senior Associate in the Department of Education during the era of Chester Finn at OERI, commenting on Chester Finn’s *We Must Take Charge: Our Schools and Our Future* (1991), noted the excessive weight of Finn’s penalties upon children,

Every student must meet a core learning standard or be penalized, according to Finn, who says, “Perhaps the best way to enforce this standard is to confer valuable benefits and privileges on people who meet it, and to withhold them from those who do not. Work permits, good jobs, and college admission are the most obvious, but there is ample scope here for imagination in devising carrots and sticks. Drivers’ licenses could be deferred. So could eligibility for professional athletic teams. The minimum wage paid to those who earn their certificates might be a dollar an hour higher.” (pp. 89-90)

Furthermore, teachers are not necessary to Finn's reform plan. Teachers are as are "superfluous" as the school boards. Teachers are inextricably linked to the test and the databank, through the individual assessment scores of children under their tutelage. Therefore, teachers do not need elaborate credentials, extensive education, or more bureaucratic hoops for licensure or credentialing. They need only demonstrate "accountability." Teachers can be anyone pulled off the street who demonstrates "measurable results" as evidence by children's assessment scores. The only "effective" method to teach to such a narrow parameter of state-mandated standards, is Skinnerian – rote, drill, reward, punish, teach-to-the-test. Finn and Bennett have written,

What's a "teacher"? Today, one can teach (in the public schools) only if one has graduated from an "approved program of teacher preparation" and proved that one took the requisite education courses. It's a paper-credentials concept that preserves the hegemony of the ed schools, keeps a lot of able would-be teachers out of the classroom – and sends in many who know little about the subjects they are supposed to impart. Tomorrow's teacher should be a person of sound character who knows a subject well and is eager to share it with children. Period. ("Reforming Education in Four Easy Steps," *The Washington Times*, Dec. 16, 1997)

Into this system of education, William Bennett and his cybercharters neatly fit. Plugging a child into a computer program, with built-in drills that reward like pigeon-peckings, for hours upon end each day, ensures that no school buildings and no teachers are necessary. The "system" will function just fine. The only thing that matters is the "results."

Funding will emerge as a key issue in education in the next few years. The end goal is to assign each child a voucher, or hybridized tuition tax credit, which will follow that child to whatever "choice" is deemed best. The deconstruction of America's education system is already beginning as "choice" is now eating up increasing tax dollars and funneling those moneys into the personal and corporate coffers of William Bennett and other "choice" gurus. (Of course, we now know that some of this money ended up in Las Vegas!)

This style of education in no way is to be confused with traditional homeschooling, which by and large has existed outside of the System. Yet the "choice" advocates freely wield the term "homeschooling," hoping to mix apples and oranges in the public mind just long enough to rope all independent and private education into the System.

Private education, be it homeschooling or schools who do not take state or federal dollars, is seriously endangered by this "choice" plan. While in the U.S. Department of Education, Finn wrote about accountability in private education.

Short of scattering money in the streets or handing it out to everyone who wants some, the funding agency must define eligible recipients.... This means, in a word, "regulation," the inevitable concomitant of public financial support.

Finn went on to assert that it is an obligation of private schools

to recognize certain limits to their differentness and certain ways they must conform to the norms and expectations of a society that values and supports them....

Some to be sure, like to think they can have it both ways; i.e., can obtain aid without saddling themselves with unacceptable forms of regulation. But most acknowledge the general applicability of the old adage that he who pays the piper calls the tune, and are more or less resigned to amalgamating or choosing between assistance and autonomy.²

Well over a decade later, Finn still trumpets this cause.

Some experts say private schools should provide more information, whether they accept public funds or not. "I think their results should be as transparent as those of the public and charter schools, and they should be ashamed of themselves for trying to trade on status and reputation and rumor and exclusiveness, rather than hard evidence of educational effectiveness," said Chester E. Finn, Jr.... ("Private Schools Pressured for Data," Jay Mathews, *Washington Post*, Sept. 24, 2002)

Finn and his cohorts are hoping that rewards (incentives, dollars) will motivate private education to shift over to the System. Once money enters the picture, be it private or homeschooling, the child is no longer independently educated. The child then enters the System with its testing and databanking -- the all-seeing, all-powerful System.

Implementing "Full Choice"

Chester E. Finn, Jr. recently wrote a widely disseminated op-ed piece evaluating the progress of education reform since the initial *A Nation at Risk* report, issued back in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Finn concludes that the schools are still "at risk." Why? Because schools haven't yet implemented full "choice."

To achieve transparency, schools need clear standards and accurate measurement tools....

...Transparently, however, must be connected to accountability.

For accountability to work, parents must be able to choose their schools....

...Choice will be even more effective... when schools become transparent and accountable institutions.

In combination, the three stratagems -- accountability, choice and transparency -- will transform our education system into one that will, at long last, live up to the principles put forth 20 years ago.... ("20 years later, U.S. Education still at risk," 3/7/03)

Chester Finn's remarks pertained to the recent issuance of a Hoover Institution Koret Task Force on K-12 Education report entitled *Our Schools and Our Future... Are We Still at Risk?* This is the latest in a series of reports, issued by the political Right since the early 1980s, linking the ultimate success of education reform efforts to implementation of "choice."

Within the newly emerging system of education reform there will be horizontal mobility, called "choice," but no way out. "Choice" is ultimately about the dismantling (deconstruction) of the entire government school system so that a new structure can be erected (reconstruction) in its place. John Chubb and Terry Moe, leading "choice" reformers, have written:

Our guiding principle in the design of a choice system is this: public authority must be put to use in creating a system that is almost entirely beyond the reach of public authority. (*Politics, Markets and American Schools*, p. 218.)

This comment is relevant because Chubb and Moe collaborated with Chester Finn on the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education. These men are also close colleagues and associates of William Bennett. Together they have all been issuing the same drumbeat for more accountability, standards and assessments – and "choice."

Prior to his tenure at the office of OERI, Chester Finn was a professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University. Bennett issued a grant from the Secretary's Discretionary Fund to Vanderbilt to implement a proposal entitled "National Network for Educational Excellence" which examined school "effectiveness." "Effectiveness" is one of those words loaded with meaning to education reformers, and it pertains directly to the "Effective Schools Research" of Ron Edmonds. Throughout Finn's writings, one frequently sees the use of the term "effective." In 1985, Bennett provided over \$4 million to implement Effective School Research nationwide.³ On page 72 of *The De-Valuing of America*, Bennett refers to Edmonds' "Effective Schools Program" in glowing terms. Because of the efforts of these two men, one can now find the term "effective" in federal and state education reform legislation.

"Effective" refers to the method of delivery, the type of instruction that children receive. Edmonds' work was a derivative of Skinnerian mastery learning, which is psychological operant conditioning applied to education (sometimes referred to as "training"). Cyber education was Skinner's lifelong dream, as he pioneered "programmed instruction" methods which hooked children to computer programs that immediately delivered feedback on progress. This method is also known as direct instruction. The advent of virtual curricula is cluttered with advanced computer-assisted instruction, which is now jointly based upon brain research and operant conditioning. Obviously there are profound ethical issues surrounding this type of education/training of children. Yet Bennett's K12 cybercharters have jumped into this venue enthusiastically. It may be that Bennett can brag that his students will out-perform others on the tests because he has the inside track on this most "effective" method of programming children's minds.

Underscoring the importance of the method is a startling excerpt from a 1995 report issued by the Hudson Institute, *Looking Back, Thinking Ahead: American School Reform 1993-1995*, co-authored by Finn, Bennett, Lamar Alexander, and Diane Ravitch:

The report decries the backlash against outcomes-based education... Many state outcomes are inappropriate... but... unfortunately, an awfully important baby [mastery learning, ed.] could go down the drain with the OBE bath water, and the country could find itself returning to an era when inputs, services, and intentions are the main gauge of educational quality and performance.⁴

Chester Finn and William Bennett have co-authored a number of articles over the years pertaining to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), “choice,” local control, and education reform. The articles are noteworthy for their semantic deception and promotion of “choice” as a key ingredient for reform. Many of these articles are posted at <http://www.edexcellence.net/library>, which is the internet address for the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, the organization that Finn operates from to advance “choice.” According to one news account, the growth in the charter school movement is directly attributable to the Fordham Foundation, which has put Dayton, Ohio, “on the map nationally in the decade-old charter school movement.” A Dayton Chamber of Commerce official claims, “Dayton is ground zero for charter schools the way Milwaukee is ground zero for vouchers.” Chester Finn is a Dayton native and president of Fordham.

Finn’s group, named for Dayton industrialist Thomas B. Fordham, was redirected toward education reform in 1995 and relocated from Washington, D.C., two years later. It advocates for school choice nationally and has made Dayton its “real world” laboratory. In five years, Fordham has given \$650,260 in grants to Dayton charter schools and facilitated their growth through an “incubator,” now handled by the Chamber’s Education Resource Center. (“Charter schools’ first checkup pivotal point,” Scott Elliott, 7/29/02)

A recent bio on Chester Finn, published by the Koret Foundation lists his accomplishments:

...[D]istinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education. He is the John M. Olin Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, and president and trustee of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. He is on leave from Vanderbilt University, where he has been Professor of Education and Public Policy since 1981.

Finn serves on the board of the Center for Education Reform, the Foundation for Teaching Economics and the Colorado League of Charter Schools, and on boards of the National Association of Scholars and the Center of the American Experiment.

Finn is part of a huge, interlocking group of conservative political activists, who extensively cooperate on his “choice” agenda. The fearless reader can check out the anti-right website <http://www.mediatransparency.org> for a sample of the vast interconnections, funding mechanisms and activities of a group of power-brokers known as “neo-conservatives.” It is significant to point out that true grassroots opponents of education reform long ago parted ideological, political and economic company with these public policy institutes, think tanks, and “choice” cheerleaders.

Shifting the Paradigm by Force

In 1993 the Iowa State Board of Education handed out an article by Chester Finn (“The Biggest Reform of All,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 1990) to discuss at its June retreat. A positive reference to this same Finn article was made by the “father of OBE,” William Spady, in the Spring 1991 issue of *Outcomes*, a chief organ for the Mastery Learning/Outcome-Based Education (OBE) crowd. Spady, in his article “Shifting the Grading Paradigm that Pervades Education,” wrote,

And if you and your colleagues haven’t read Chester Finn’s article... then do so forthwith as well. Not only does it summarize the theoretical groundwork about paradigms first developed by Thomas Kuhn, it also provides a compelling analysis for OBE as being THE paradigm of reform that is now shaping the educational policy dialogue throughout the U.S. (and Canada I might add!). Talk about an unsolicited endorsement!

Why was Finn being lauded by these pro-reform advocates? The answer lies in his comments:

I came late to Thomas Kuhn’s famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962]... Reading it turned out to be one of those rare, clarifying experiences that have lent order and definition to a jumble of ideas and development in which education – and I – have been tangled for a quarter of a century or so.

Who was Thomas Kuhn and why is he so important to these two men? Thomas Kuhn coined the term “paradigm shift.” Kuhn is referenced in Marilyn Ferguson’s *Aquarian Conspiracy* (the first “bible” of the occult New Age movement) as the originator of this term, which was confiscated by the New Age Movement in the 1970s to describe the revolutionary cultural transformation from western rationalism to eastern mysticism. Ferguson explains the term,

A paradigm is a framework of thought (from the Greek *paradigma*, “pattern”). A paradigm is a scheme for understanding and explaining certain aspects of reality. Although Kuhn was writing about science, the term has been widely adopted... A paradigm shift is a distinctly new way of thinking about old problems. (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 1980, p. 26)

The effect of Kuhn's book was earth-shattering. Kuhn is renowned as the first scientist to break ground by applying Hegelian dialectics and existential thought to the field of science. He proposed that science is evolving and has no absolutes. He moved from the rational and tangible nature of science to the nebulous, irrational, intangible and mystical.

Kuhn described science as a series of rocky shifts throughout history created by a crisis when the old scientific model encounters new information that didn't fit. When enough new information is accumulated, a "revolution" would occur and a new scientific paradigm would emerge; e.g., Newtonian science gave way to Einstein's theories. Kuhn parallels scientific revolution to political revolution, and notes that the use of force may be necessary to shift to the new paradigm.

...[T]he parties to a revolutionary conflict must finally resort to the techniques of mass persuasion often including force. (p. 92)

In like manner, both Finn and Spady explain that the "paradigm shift" in education means that the old paradigm of education (teaching academics) has to go and be replaced by the new definition (outcomes-based, results-based). Finn says,

Intense resistance to fundamental shifts in worldview is part and parcel of the tale Kuhn tells. Old paradigms do not retire gracefully, and the avatars ["spiritual master," Ed. Note] of new ones are often scored and savaged.... Even today, one can find pockets of resistance to Darwin's theories and – as Galileo discovered – opposition emanates as much from religious as from scientific thinking. ...[Kuhn says] "the transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced." ... But shift we will.

Even if by "force"? Apparently so.

Endnotes:

1. Wayne Wolf, "Who Really Wrote America 2000?" *Iowa Report*, November 1992, pp. 2-5).
2. *the deliberate dumbing down of America: A Chronological Paper Trail*, Charlotte Iserbyt, p. 184.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 352.

The Pizza Choice Game

A Short Story

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It is 7 o'clock in the evening and your stomach is rumbling. You walk into the neighborhood pizzeria with your wife and a group of friends, hungrily anticipating a hot cheesy crust slathered in tomato sauce and your favorite toppings. As you sit down to order, wonderful smells drift out of the kitchen to your nose. Out of the corner of your eye, you notice a few irregular things about the restaurant, but you ignore them for the moment.

As you are seated the waiter comes by to offer you drinks. "I'll have a cola," says one friend. "I'll have a lemon-lime," says another. The waiter gives everyone at the table a funny little smile and says very precisely, "We only have water."

"Oh," says your friend at the head of the table, with a perplexed look. The waiter leaves abruptly and there is no chance to ask him why. Now you look around the restaurant and notice that on every table there is only water. Then you glance down at the menu with its enticing descriptions, and your stomach starts growling again.

When the waiter comes back with the water, he very carefully sets each glass on the table specifically aligned with each customer's right shoulder. One of your friends attempts to move the water glass over to his left side, since he is left-handed. The waiter quickly reaches across the table, and moves the glass back, with a condescending expression on his face as if he were tolerating a small child's antics.

The waiter then asks for each person's order. He doesn't pull out a notebook, so you hope that he has a good memory. Fred, on the right, asks for a dish of cavatelli smothered in sausage and onions. Shari, next to him, orders a small deep dish cheese pizza for one. Barbara and her husband Tim order a medium vegetarian pizza on a chewy crust. Smith orders a pepperoni calzone and his wife Susan orders a salad with cheese, ham and olives. You and your wife agree to share a deluxe medium pizza with everything but anchovies. You are hungry!

While you are waiting for your order, you overhear some animated conversation and commotion from other tables in the room. It appears that several waiters are conducting some sort of group activity at other tables, and at first you think somebody has a birthday. But then you notice that one woman is actually crying. The others at her table are pressuring her to be quiet and stop crying. But she abruptly stands up and begins to march out of the restaurant. The hostess rushes over to insert herself in front of the door and begins to plead with the lady. "You cannot leave here. It would hurt our rating. Every customer must be satisfied. Every customer must be happy. Please go back and eat your meal."

Just then your attention shifts to another table where a man stands up and begins to shake a finger at one of his children sitting at the table. "You will eat what I say!" he commands loudly. The waiter grabs his arm and gently forces him to sit down. "We can work this out peacefully," he says in a quiet, pleasant voice, smiling playfully at the three children. The preteen girl fakes a retching noise by sticking her finger down her throat and the preschooler is scowling. The waiter then walks around the table, coaching each child over and over again until they eek out a half-grimace, half-smile.

Your dinner companions seem oblivious to this activity as they are engaged in a vigorous discussion about the recent federal restaurant law. Fred is convinced that food quality will improve with added accountability measures. "Look how many people have died of listeria!" he exclaims. His wife Shari nods in agreement, "And look how many cockroaches they have found in the back rooms! I for one am glad they now have stricter sanitation standards."

Tim proudly announces that Barb's uncle sits on the new national accreditation board. "Her uncle says they have oversight over every single facet of restaurant operation, including waiter and waitress training, food service criteria, customer satisfaction, quality control, and supply and demand," he brags. "Now we can be assured of a consistent, high quality product throughout our food service industry."

Smith's wife Susan jumps into the conversation to relate a recent editorial in the newspaper which decried the lack of responsibility people have shown nowadays towards eating wholesome foods. The impact on the insurance industry will be severe unless steps towards implementing a healthy diet are put into effect immediately. Smith pats his belly and chortles, "I'm just glad I can contribute to healthy outcomes tonight."

Just then the waiter arrives, balancing a large tray on one hand. You note that a waitress comes with him, acting as if she is making minute observations of his behavior and recording them in a little hand-held computer. She stands by to observe your waiter's performance as he flawlessly executes a rapid placement of orders. With a sheepish grin, your waiter mumbles, "Don't mind her, I am undergoing retraining."

Smith blurts out, "Well, then you'd better start by taking this tray back to the kitchen, because you got everyone's order wrong!"

The waiter looks perplexed for a moment, glancing nervously at the waitress evaluating his performance. "This *is* your order," he says with a saccharine smile. "Everybody ordered what they wanted." He pauses briefly for effect, and then continues, "Everybody receives what is best for the community. Tonight it was determined that the best value is a small anchovy and sausage pizza."

Fred begins to protest. "But I ordered cavatelli," he sputters. "Of course you did," says our waiter with great positive inflection, glancing furtively to his right where the waitress is punching buttons on the palm pilot. He holds his hands together and begins to recite in a lilting voice, "We all want good choices. Why, I even want better choices. Tonight

everyone will get the *best* choice, the optimal choice for their group. That is why this was *your* choice tonight. Everyone must exhibit happiness with this choice....” His voice trails off. His eyes twitch over to his right again and he resumes his charge. “My choice for you is for your best. My best depends upon your best. You really must agree to accept this very best choice for your meal tonight. Then I will be happy, the restaurant will be happy and we will meet our outcomes.”

At this point, the waiter throws out his arms as if to embrace the whole group, taking a deep breath. It is obvious that this little speech has been very taxing. The waitress continues to punch buttons. But you notice that she is also looking around the table, carefully analyzing each person. Barb tentatively begins to speak, “I don’t think you fully understand. My husband and I are vegetarians. We cannot eat meat because it would violate our beliefs.”

The waiter gets excited. “Yes!” he exclaims. “That is exactly what many people believe. And, of course, we all know that they have a right to believe anything they want to believe. But, it is not in the best interests of the common good for each person to practice their individual beliefs. It might cause disharmony and disunity.” The waiter pauses to inhale deeply again, obviously invigorated by the challenge. “Therefore, your table will have to agree that it is in the best interests of your team to eat anchovy pizzas tonight. Another night -- why, the choice might be vegetarian pizza. Then you can come back and all enjoy vegetarian pizzas together.” He glances off to his right with a big, genuine smile on his face. He knows he is performing well.

In the meantime, however, you notice that the waitress is furiously punching buttons while Fred and Barb are talking. Reluctantly, you speak up, “Just what are you recording?” you ask the waitress in your most forced, pleasant voice.

“I am evaluating each customer’s performance according to the set criteria,” she says matter-of-factly. Then, as if reciting something by rote, she drones, “Each customer shall exhibit happiness with their order. Each customer will exhibit positive food satisfaction. Each customer shall express full and complete dietary compliance with the established mandate.” She pauses and glances knowingly at the waiter, then back to you. “As you may know, your individual and group rating will affect your waiter’s rating, which will affect this restaurant’s rating. As group trainer, I am here to ensure positive performance reviews for all. So far, none from this group has correctly responded to the menu assessment.”

“What?!” you ask, incredulously.

“There is only one acceptable response to the menu,” she answers, in a patronizing tone of voice. “You are evaluated according to the established menu selection standards.”

By this time Barb is cowering in her chair, and her husband Tim’s arm is around her. “We simply can’t eat anchovies and sausage,” she begs. Tim nods in agreement.

The waiter uses this opportunity to begin coaching the rest of the group. “You can see the importance of this,” he said to Fred and Shari. “And you two,” he looked at Smith and Susan, “don’t want any negative markings on your records, now do you?”

Susan gets a look of dismay on her face. “I am allergic to wheat,” she says blandly. “I can’t eat this,” pointing to the anchovy and sausage pizza in front of her.

“Yes, we know,” interjects the waitress.

Susan’s eyes suddenly get wide. “How do you know?”

“Oh, it is all on your record.” states the waitress in that matter-of-fact tone again.

“Of course,” agrees the waiter in a velvet voice. “This all goes on your records. It is best if you can exhibit the most positive outcomes for this assessment, but in the event that there is trouble, of course we’ll have to make a notation” He darts a knowing glance towards the waitress with the computer.

Susan then explodes, “Well, I can’t eat this or I’ll get violently ill.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” says the waiter patiently. “But for the common good, for your team....”

Fred interrupts. “Well, I for one, am not going to have a reduction in food quality because of YOU, Barb! Or YOU, Tim! Or YOU, Susan! You three had just better join with the flow here and eat what is set in front of you.” He grabs a fork and jabs furiously at his anchovies.

The waiter is obviously very pleased. “Of course, of course,” he smiles. He is standing behind Susan and pats her patronizingly on the shoulders. “You wouldn’t want to cause any divisions, now, would you? We just can’t tolerate extremists. This just isn’t acceptable.”

Across the table Barb stands up, and then Tim. “I guess we just won’t eat tonight then,” she says sadly. Susan remains seated, with her eyes downcast and her hands folded in her lap.

“Wait!” exclaims the waiter, rather alarmed. He rushes over to force them back into their chairs. “You can’t choose *that* option! That isn’t one of the choices! You have to eat what is set in front of you.” He then leans down close to the table and begins to whisper, “I don’t like anchovy pizza either!” With that admission, he begins looking anxiously from face to face. “Now I can make a few allowances, and go back to the kitchen to get a blue plate for your pizza and substitute it for the white plate. Or, I could put a parsley garnish on the side.” There is another pause for dramatic effect. “I could even let you order extra cheese if you would like. But, of course, everyone would have to have that, too, and it does cost extra.”

“You don’t get it,” Tim sighs deeply. “Barb and I cannot violate our consciences by eating meat.”

“Well, then, pick it off!” said Shari in a disgusted tone of voice, for the first time entering the conversation. She has already eaten half of her pizza.

“We have philosophical objections to eating anything even contaminated with meat,” explains Tim with a very pained expression.

The waiter acts as if he is internally debating something. He turns and whispers something to the waitress doing the evaluations. The only part of the conversation you overhear is his whispered exclamation, “I have no idea what this philosophical ‘conscience’ stuff is all about! Phooey! I wasn’t taught that!” The waitress shrugs her shoulders, trying to act somewhat aloof, indicating she doesn’t know either.

“Listen,” the waiter turns back to our table, beginning to sound weepy, “You don’t understand. This is my job! I need my job!”

At this point, the waitress rushes over to the table, acting very alarmed. She sets down the palm pilot, with her hand resting on the screen so no one can get a peek. “It’s you guys who just don’t get it! There shall be no leftovers,” she hisses emphatically, again as if reciting something from memory. “Everyone must eat every morsel. No sharing, No exchanges. No leftovers.” Her eyes get a glazed-over appearance, “We must ameliorate extremes. Fanatics must not be tolerated This is for the common good. This promotes civic values....” She stops in midstream, changing her expression to a business-like manner. “But seriously, folks, this is going on your record. I really don’t think you will want to face the consequences of any adverse decisions tonight. This kind of situation doesn’t get erased, you know!” Her eyes glance knowingly at the little computer and then back to us.

The waiter has a terrible, panicked look on his face. “Now let’s be reasonable, folks,” he pleads, as if talking to little children. “Tonight we’ve had a considerable discussion about rights and responsibilities. Tonight we have learned that everyone has a right to eat what they choose, and they also have a responsibility to eat what is chosen for them. It is all very simple: I give you pizzas, and you *eat* them. We all go away with a positive rating, even despite this little ‘incident.’” He is nodding his head, as if the act of agreeing with himself will help the others agree. Then he glances from face to face, triumphantly beaming, as if everything is now fine and good.

But everything is not fine and good. At this very moment a tall man with a restaurant manager nameplate on his right pocket is approaching the table. He has a very severe expression on his face and holds yellow papers in his hand. He begins reading from them, “There shall be no food left behind,” he states slowly in a commanding voice. “Everyone shall eat their pizza. We expect full compliance. There are no exceptions. I am not going

to have a poor rating on my food! Nor my personnel! And I surely am not going to put up with penalties that would shut my restaurant down!”

Your wife jabs you in the ribs with her elbow. “Let go to the fast-food place across the street! They’ll have a decent menu selection, and besides it’s cheaper” she whispers loudly so that everyone can hear. She looks around the table to see who agrees.

Before anyone has a chance to answer, the manager steps in, places his free hand on her shoulder and points out the window, “Yes, you have a right to eat over there if I’ve failed over here. But you’ll take your chances with that competition. I’ll warn you: they don’t have to comply with health and sanitary regulations, they have waivers for food safety, storage temperatures, preparation, and shelf life. Why, food inspectors don’t even have to set foot in that place!”

The manager leans over and shakes his papers menacingly in front of your nose, “Go ahead! Just try going to any other restaurant in town! But you’ll find out. You’ll learn. Everyone has anchovy and sausage pizza on the menu tonight. Everyone pays the same price eventually -- before they eat, or afterwards. And everyone shall be happy about it!”

“Then I think we’ll just eat at home!” your wife exclaims, backing her chair away from the table.

At this, the manager suddenly becomes very subdued and quiet. “Oh, lady,” he sighs, “you’ve got a lot to learn. You won’t be cooking meals at home anymore. Nope. Everything is going to be carry-out in a few years. Even my restaurant kitchen won’t be cooking.” His voice cracks as he unexpectedly adds, “I like to cook.” Then he glances down at his papers and reads slowly and sullenly, “Every customer shall eat the daily, nutritionally complete menu item selection. What every customer should chew and be able to swallow....”

“What, the crazy!... Here, let me see those papers,” you say, grabbing them out of the manager’s hands.

Suddenly it dawns on you. “Oh my!” you exclaim. “Oh my!”

In your hands you are holding a summary of the regulations from the *No Food Left Behind Act** recently passed by Congress.

*This satirical bill title was modeled after the 2001 *No Child Left Behind Act*, a massive federal education reform bill that placed onerous and intrusive requirements on children.

Permission was given to Berit Kjos to post this short story on her website:

<http://www.crossroad.to/articles2/05/sarah-leslie/pizza.htm>.