

Worse Than Union Busting New Advertising Assails Workers' Rights

by [Mary Beth Maxwell](#)

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A television ad playing in Michigan this September seemed innocent enough: an adorable little girl in braids, a schoolroom filled to the brim with the latest, colorful learning aids and enthusiastic students eager to learn. But wait; the pigtailed girl is giving a report on union malfeasance. The teacher appears shocked to hear that her union dues support worker-friendly political candidates. Seriously?

The nationwide arrival of commercials like this one—often accompanied by full-page newspaper and radio ads—should raise eyebrows. This isn't a promo for a new parody on the next installment of "Saturday Night Live" or "The Daily Show." The TV spots are the handiwork of a powerful, well-financed web of extremist, conservative organizations and well-paid spin doctors on a mission to dismantle labor unions.

The ads beg the question: Who's willing to invest millions to undermine the right of teachers, nurses and other workers in America to earn a decent living and protect their interests in the workplace? The answer is far less innocent than ponytails and reads like a page torn out of Christopher Buckley's bestseller, *Thank You for Smoking*.

The over-the-top mudslinging by the Center for Union Facts, the National Right to Work Committee and other anti-union groups is nothing more than an attempt to pull the wool over our eyes, hiding the real crisis in the American workplace. Too many workers in the U.S. still can't adequately provide basic necessities for their families to protect themselves from workplace hazards or take care of themselves when they get old or sick. The firings, intimidation and harassment that often befall workers attempting to exercise freedoms of speech and association by forming unions are threats to our democracy. When faced with union organizing drives, 30 percent of employers terminate pro-union workers, 40 percent threaten to close a worksite if a union prevails and 51 percent coerce workers into opposing unions with bribery and favoritism.

The motives behind assailing organized workers are both financial and ideological. Union-busting is big business. Just ask Center for Union Facts founder and D.C. mercenary lobbyist Rick Berman. He's the mastermind behind the ads and has earned a living attacking other public interest groups—like Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Centers for Disease Control—for clients including the alcohol and fast food industries. Although he won't reveal who is bankrolling CUF, attacking unions seems to be the source of his latest windfall.

And Berman isn't the only one profiting from conspiring to bring about the demise of worker-built organizations. Search for "union buster" on Google and peruse over 3 million hits. The proliferation of "union avoidance" consulting has resulted in 82 percent of employers hiring help to fight worker organizing drives.

But the assault on unions goes deeper than the dollar. It is bolstered by a long-standing conservative political objective to eradicate unions. Right-wingers know something the rest of us seem to have forgotten: Workers still want unions because they are a powerful deterrent to poverty and unfettered corporate greed. When conservative political strategist Grover Norquist says, "We're going to crush labor as a political entity" and ultimately "break unions," it isn't because unions aren't relevant anymore. The right knows that unions act as the nation's conscience by advancing civil rights, environmental protections and other causes of equality, justice and fair play far beyond the workplace.

If worker-built organizations weren't powerful, the right wouldn't invest so much time and money to dismantle them. And Berman's supporters would be less concerned with obscuring their support from public view.

So the next time you come across a slick television, radio or newspaper ad pedaling anti-union propaganda, ask yourself who benefits when workers are prevented from joining together to represent themselves. Question what's at stake when democratic rights are limited in the workplace.

The anti-union network's vision for the workplace is out of sync with what we value in America.

Ding! Round 2 goes to the children!

Federal appeals court backs NEA challenge to NCLB

The battle to change the so-called "No Child Left Behind Act" took a dramatic turn Jan. 7 when a U.S. Court of Appeals panel sided with NEA's side in a crucial lawsuit against the federal Department of Education.

"The court's message couldn't be more clear: If the president is sincere about continuing No Child Left Behind, he needs to put his money where his mouth is," said NEA President Reg Weaver.

NEA, along with several state associations and school districts, went to court back in 2005, contending that the feds could not make states and districts spend their own money, beyond available federal funds, to carry out the law's draconian mandates. NEA lawyers pointed to a specific passage in the law to that effect.

But the Bush Administration insisted Washington was under no obligation to pay. A federal judge agreed and dismissed the suit. NEA appealed, and on Jan. 7, the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the earlier ruling, stating that the Secretary of Education was violating the spending clause of the Constitution. The court said if Congress really wants to make states and districts pay NCLB costs, Congress must change the law to say so.

The ruling, according to NEA general counsel Bob Chanin, puts states and districts in a strong position to carry out NCLB directives only as far as available federal funds cover. NCLB funds have fallen \$70 billion short of what was originally promised.

The ruling adds fuel to efforts by NEA and many others to overhaul the law. NEA maintains that a massive increase in federal funding is a badly needed investment in the nation's future -- but the money should go for smaller classes and other proven ways to improve children's education, not mandated high-stakes testing, which, according to national scores, is not helping.

P-20 Council prepares first report

Last spring Governor Bill Ritter established the P-20 Council, a coordinating group charged by the governor with recommending changes in K-12 and higher education (from preschool through graduate school, hence the name P-20). The council is expected to meet and study education for several years, but has already issued its first set of broad recommendations. Its overall task is ensuring that a seamless education system is preparing young people for the demands of the 21st Century.

The governor appointed the council members including three CEA members: Amie Baca, District Twelve EA; Adele Bravo, Boulder Valley EA; Beverly Ausfahl, retired Pueblo 60 EA member. CEA President Beverly Ingle (Cherry Creek EA) serves as an advisory panel member. Most of the council members are administrators, school board members, business people, and higher education representatives.

Council members have been working in six subcommittees: P-3 (preschool through grade 3); Data and Accountability; Dropout Prevention and Recovery; Educator Recruitment; Preparation and Transitions (of students); Preparation and Retention (of teachers).

The council issued its first round of recommendations November 19, some of which the Governor may take to the Legislature for further discussion. The council recommended that:

- Full-day kindergarten become an integral part of the state's K-12 school system with the state funding it for all children whose parents choose to enroll them;
- The Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program be expanded until statewide waiting lists for 3- and 4-year old children are completely met;

- The state assign a unique child identifier to every 3- and 4-year old child enrolled in a publicly funded early care and education program (akin to the K-12 student identifier);
- CDE research and report on best practices for curriculum, instruction, and assessment across P-3;
- CDE review current laws that impact the number of students who drop out of the public K-12 system before graduation;
- The Legislature direct the creation of a P-20 data system for analyzing factors that increase the likelihood that students will drop out during their K-12 education;
- The state increase school funding to a level that fully funds state mandates and adequately meets the needs of districts to attract, retain, and support high quality educators;
- The state encourage districts to explore alternative compensation systems as a method of improving educator quality;
- The state create a pool of public and private money for seed funding and technical assistance to schools and districts for the design, development, planning, and evaluation of alternative educator compensation systems;
- The state create a P-20 data system that facilitates data transfer across systems in order to improve teaching and learning, conduct research, inform the public, and evaluate program effectiveness, and manage this new system via an independent governance structure;
- Each segment of the education system have its own accountability system that incorporates some cross-system elements;
- The state establish postsecondary preparation as a primary purpose of preschool-grade 12 education and that all students are prepared for a full range of postsecondary options;
- The state modify enrollment policies to ensure that access to such programs is expanded and that guidance and cost certainty are incorporated;
- The state study a college readiness endorsement and the creation of statewide pathways, such as those leading to distinctions for career readiness;
- The state incorporate the EPAS system (EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT System) as an integral part of assessments, but on a voluntary basis by districts.

More work is needed before any of these recommendations are translated into policy, law, or action. The P-20 Council's work will continue as the Governor examines the first round of recommendations and determines whether to move ahead with them.

