

Game-Changer? Tennessee En Route to Reject Federal Education Money



by Roger L. Simon

The Associated Press is reporting what well may be an earthquake in the relations between red states and the federal government—specifically, the Department of Education, whose decrees and even its existence are questioned by many conservatives, including former President Donald Trump:

“NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — One of Tennessee’s most influential Republican lawmakers says the state should stop accepting the nearly \$1.8 billion of federal K-12 [education](#) dollars that help provide support for low-income students, English learners and students with disabilities.

“House Speaker Cameron Sexton told The Associated Press

that he has introduced a bill to explore the idea during this year's legislative session and has begun discussions with Gov. Bill Lee and other key GOP lawmakers.

“‘Basically, we'll be able to educate the kids how Tennessee sees fit,’ Sexton said, pointing that rejecting the money would mean that Tennessee would no longer have ‘federal government interference.’”

What that doesn't immediately say is that Tennessee would fully replace that \$1.8 billion with the state's own money, so that the low-income and other disadvantaged students the AP seems concerned about wouldn't be affected.

I was on a radio interview with Sexton on Feb. 9, with Michael Patrick Leahy on his Tennessee Star Report, and can attest that this proposal—if not yet a done deal—is likely to be one in some form. Sexton said Lee and many other key “stakeholders,” including Education Commissioner Penny Schwinn, were already positively disposed to his idea.

At this point, as always, the devil will be in the details, including how long this would take to effectuate, given annual budget considerations. Sexton estimated 2024, but indicated it could take longer.

The state of Tennessee is fortunately on a solid-enough financial footing to be able to do this. Other states, such as Oklahoma and South Carolina, also are exploring similar legislation.

If the measures pass, Beltway heads are likely to explode. You don't want our money? Mon Dieu!

Tennessee, it's worth noting, has a Senate with 27 Republicans and six Democrats and a General Assembly with 73 Republicans and 26 Democrats. Passage of such legislation in some form shouldn't be overly difficult.

This could constitute the beginning of an epidemic, in which red states reject what many believe is serious unconstitutional overreach by the federal government in education and many other areas.

Such things are being examined actively in Tennessee as the state's attorney general, Jonathan Skrmetti, explained at a luncheon of the Nashville Republican Women on Feb. 8. Skrmetti is forming a task force of lawyers potentially to sue the federal government over this overreach and possible attendant violations of the [10th Amendment](#).

Sexton, for his part, seems to be responding to an increasingly militant grassroots in his party that has been augmented by the great inflow of refugees (political migrants), many of whom are surprisingly activist, to Tennessee from blue states.

They have been demanding reforms in a system that has been infiltrated by critical race theory and also various versions of age-inappropriate sexual education. While these refugees had come to Tennessee to escape such things in blue states, they were deeply disappointed to find that at least in terms of the schools, they were running to stay in place, in great degree due to federal intervention.

This legislation, if it goes forward, will be a significant step in the right direction.

It also could be a baby step, possibly more, toward the rebirth of the federalism intended by the Founders. In the current environment, the only way that could happen would be via the states. The proper word, figuratively and literally, for the federal government is metastasis.

During his talk at the Nashville Republican Women's luncheon, Skrmetti also referred to the active alliance of a large number of red state attorneys general who are working together to block this overreach in many areas.

For the most part, these legal endeavors exist behind the scenes, but may prove to be the most telling of all in bringing this country back on course.

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