



Teachers' Pets (Cont'd)

January 27, 2006

Our recent editorial on the political spending of the National Education Association has caused something of a stir, and not always of the illuminating kind. In a letter to the editor on January 13, NEA President Reg Weaver claimed we misread the data his union has released to the Labor Department Web site. We didn't, but we appreciate the opportunity to draw more attention to the NEA's spending priorities.

New transparency rules now require large unions like the NEA to reveal more detailed financial information in forms (known as LM-2s) that they file annually with Labor. What caught our attention in the NEA's most recent filing is the extent to which it behaved more like a liberal philanthropy than a labor union in dispensing the \$295 million in member dues it took in last year.

Under the new regulations, which Big Labor fought, unions itemize expenditures under categories like "general overhead," "political activities and lobbying" and "contributions, gifts and grants." In his letter, Mr. Weaver suggests that only a very small percentage of union dues money is steered toward politics, while the vast majority goes "straight to our local and state affiliates for education programs and member services." Nice try.

What Mr. Weaver didn't reveal is that the NEA also works through these same state affiliates to further its political goals by bankrolling ballot and legislative initiatives. To that end, the Kentucky Education Association received \$250,000 from the NEA last year; the Michigan Education Association received \$660,000; and the California Teachers Association received \$2.5 million. We doubt this cash goes into buying more laptops for poor students.

And then there's the money that the NEA sends directly to sympathetic interest groups working at the state level, such as the \$500,000 that went to Protect Our Public Schools, an anti-charter outfit in Washington State (never mind that charters are "public schools," albeit ones allowed to operate outside the teachers' union education monopoly).

Often, the recipients of these outlays have at best a tangential education mission. The Floridians For All Committee, a political action committee created by pro-labor Acorn to push for a minimum-wage hike, received \$250,000 from the NEA last year. And the Fund to Protect Social Security received \$400,000. In total, the NEA reports spending \$25 million on "political activities and lobbying." But that doesn't tell the whole story.

The NEA spent another \$65.5 million on "contributions, gifts and grants," and many of the recipients listed under this category are also overtly politicized organizations: the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (\$40,000), the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (\$35,000), the Democratic Leadership Council (\$25,000). The next time the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank that received \$45,000 from the NEA last year, issues a report slamming school choice, we'll have to wonder whether it was bought and paid for by the teachers unions.

None of this is to suggest that the NEA or Mr. Weaver is engaging in any illicit behavior. Our point was to alert both the public, and especially the 2.7 million NEA members, that their forced dues payments are being spent on an agenda that could have been compiled by the most liberal members of the Democratic National Committee. And thanks to these new disclosure rules, this agenda is now out in the open, where it belongs.