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Wrong answer for schools

By Mike Pence

Nobody doubts this president's heart for our kids. As a governor, George W. Bush championed education reform and, upon being elected president, brought his vision for standards and school choice to Capitol Hill.

Unfortunately, the defenders of the status quo in education succeeded in turning the president's original vision for education reform into a huge increase in the federal government's role in our local schools. Regrettably, they are at it again as No Child Left Behind II, with national testing for high school students, comes to Congress. The last thing our local schools need is more national testing from Washington.

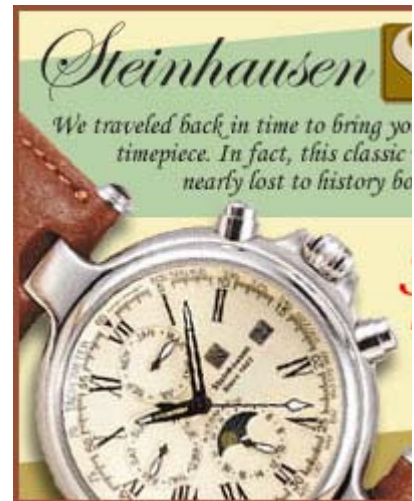
National testing in elementary schools was always presented as a means of identifying persistently failing schools. The president intended schools to be tested so that we could give the parents of students in these failing institutions a way out through educational-choice scholarships, enabling them to attend another public or private school.

In the end, the school-choice scholarships in the president's original vision were eviscerated from No Child Left Behind, and what was left was national testing in grade school and a 52% increase in the federal Department of Education.

So now comes No Child Left Behind II, a complex regimen of curriculum subsidies and national testing for high school students. Sadly, this plan doesn't even make a pretense of increasing competition through school choice but reverts entirely to the educational micromanagement strategy of the Clinton administration, with federal resources targeted to specific classroom activities.

The American people have always known that government that governs least governs best, especially

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in those functions of government closest to the family.
 However well intentioned, one more unfunded mandate
 from Washington will not cure what ails our local schools.
 Resources that promote reform through competition and choice will.

There's nothing that ails our local schools that the parents and teachers of America
 can't solve with the resources and freedom to choose. Say no to more national testing.
 Say no to No Child Left Behind II.

*Rep. Mike Pence, R-Ind., is chairman of the House Republican Study Committee, the
 conservative caucus in the House.*

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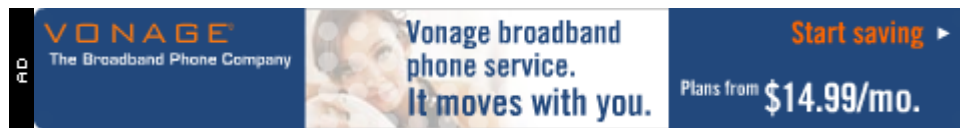
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