

Press Release
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RATLIFF SAYS LOCAL CONTROL OF SCHOOLS IS ENDANGERED SPECIES

MT PLEASANT- Thomas Ratliff, Republican nominee for State Board of Education, says local control of public schools is under fire from the Federal and State level.

Democrats in Washington and Republicans on the SBOE seem to have one thing in common. They both want to dictate how our schools educate our schoolchildren. Texas families need to tell the State Board of Education that we want our schools back!

When Texas turned down the Race to the Top dollars, we said we didn't want Washington D.C. offering federal money in exchange for federal control of our curriculum and standards. To quote Governor Perry, *"If Washington were truly concerned about funding education with solutions that match local challenges, they would make the money available to states with no strings attached."*

Now the SBOE is taking a page out of the Washington D.C. playbook. They are trying to micro-manage the 1,000+ school districts in Texas. How? By making the social studies curriculum so long, they will remove the ability of local school districts to "match local challenges" around Texas. In fact, the current version of the social studies standards is 40% longer than the previous version!

Even worse, after the standards are adopted, the SBOE will dangle textbook money in front of school districts, but only if the school districts buy the books that cover the overly specific curriculum adopted by the SBOE. It's bad public policy when Washington does it, and it's bad public policy when Austin does it.

Quite honestly, I am surprised that the various conservative groups and the Republican Party are sitting on the sidelines watching local control of our schools evaporate in front of our eyes. Is the top-down approach appalling only when liberal Democrats do it? Of course it isn't. Texas has over 7,000 locally elected school board members who know the schoolchildren and school districts better than Austin or Washington. The SBOE should provide the schools with a core curriculum and return local control to our schools.

When the SBOE adopted a resolution regarding the Race to the Top funding. It said, in part:

"Whereas the nationalization of curriculum standards would undermine the ability of Texas to have a curriculum that reflects the unique heritage, culture, diversity, and history of the state; and public education is a state and local responsibility, and whereas decisions regarding what Texas children should learn and how Texas children should be tested are best made in Texas by Texans through an open and public process; now, therefore, be it resolved that the State Board of Education opposes any effort to implement national standards and national tests, and believes that the authority to determine what Texas students will be taught in Texas public schools should reside with the State Board of Education, local school boards, and parents."

If the SBOE would re-read their resolution, they would realize that the heritage, culture, diversity and history of Texas are not the same for all areas of Texas. Local flexibility of curriculum is the only way to have curriculum that reflects every area of Texas.

The SBOE should also hold true to their resolution and reduce the number of requirements in the social studies curriculum because the current social studies curriculum draft offers very little in the way of local school board authority.

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Unfortunately, I believe many of the groups calling for postponement of the vote are basing their objections on inaccurate or incomplete information about the current draft of the standards. As I have stated many times, the SBOE does not have the legal authority to take ANYONE out of the textbooks. While different groups have honest disagreements on who should be in the standards, I think there is a growing concern about the sheer magnitude of the proposed standards.

To be clear, I do not believe the SBOE should postpone their vote on the Social Studies curriculum. The outgoing members of the SBOE were elected to serve their districts for a 4-year term. They are certainly entitled to serve out that term and vote the way they think is best for Texas schools. I am hopeful that common sense will prevail and the SBOE will re-visit and reduce the burdensome number of requirements in the social studies curriculum. Please join me in asking the State Board of Education to REDUCE the number of social studies requirements and return local control to our locally elected school board members, superintendents, teachers and parents.

SBOE District 9 includes the counties of Anderson, Brazos, Camp, Cherokee, Collin, Delta, Falls, Fannin, Franklin, Freestone, Grimes, Henderson, Hopkins, Houston, Hunt, Kaufman, Lamar, Leon, Limestone, Madison, Navarro, Rains, Red River, Robertson, Titus, Upshur, Van Zandt, Walker and Wood.

Thomas Ratliff and his wife, Stacy, live in Mount Pleasant, Texas with their two children Sara and Taylor who attend Chapel Hill ISD. Thomas and Stacy have been active volunteers at all levels in their children's schools.

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