

Policy Pennings by Dr. Daryll E. Ray

Changes over time

It is interesting to observe changes in attitudes and public policies over time. Back in the 1970s there was considerable discussion about the idea of the federal government providing a significant share of the cost of public education. In part the argument looked at the fact that rural communities in states like Iowa spent a significant amount of money on educating their youth, only to have them leave, often moving to an urban area in another state. The cost of education was borne locally while the benefits were enjoyed at the national level.

Likewise there were other states where the per pupil spending on education was clearly inadequate. Those pupils were less prepared to enter the national economy and that loss was felt by all.

Federal funding would reduce the burden that falls primarily on the local property tax roll and replace it with revenue derived primarily from federal income taxes. In that way all children across the nation would have access to more equal educational opportunities and the cost of education would not fall disproportionately on rural property tax payers, most of whose children moved elsewhere.

This discussion resulted in vehement objections from those who argued that education was a local issue and that the federal government had no role in determining education policy. The fear was that with the money would come a set of federal regulations and the local school districts would lose their autonomy and freedom to set

their educational goals. People objected to the federal government meddling in local educational endeavors.

Since then a number of specific federal educational programs have been adopted. Some have been oriented to ensuring that appropriate educational opportunities are available to persons with developmental disabilities. Others have involved increased support for nutrition programs in the local schools. In many cases these new regulations have come with some degree of funding for specific local school activities, like providing teacher aides for various groups of at-risk children.

Most recently the congress at the behest of the President adopted the No Child Left Behind legislation. When put in the context of the discussion of the 1970s, I find this an interesting piece of legislation. In the 1970s, people were concerned that with the handout of federal financial money would come federal regulations. Today it seems that we have ended up with all the regulations with little of the money.

Daryll E. Ray holds the Blasingame Chair of Excellence in Agricultural Policy, Institute of Agriculture, University of Tennessee, and is the Director of the UT's Agricultural Policy Analysis Center. (865) 974-7407; Fax: (865) 974-7298; dray@utk.edu; <http://agpolicy.org>. Daryll Ray's column is written with the research and assistance of Harwood D. Schaffer, Research Associate with APAC.

Reproduction Permission Granted with 1) full attribution to Daryll E. Ray and the Agricultural Policy Analysis Center, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN;
2) Copy of reproduction sent to Information Specialist, Agricultural Policy Analysis Center, 310 Morgan Hall, Knoxville, TN 37996-001

Originally published in *MidAmerica Farmer Grower*. Vol. 21, No. 16, April 16, 2004