

Opinion/Com

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Republicans' contract could be

mentary

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disastrous for America

The Contract with America is a contract for disaster for both education and the environment. Republicans have taken their perceived mandate for change and have made some proposals that will devastate the progress that has occurred both in education and in our quality of life.

I attended an invitational conference earlier this spring in D.C., which was sponsored by the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education. Aside from calls for meaningful systemic change and debate on how to accomplish such, there was much discussion about what Republicans are looking at to change funding for education in this country.

You have all heard by now about their recommendation for modifying (eliminating?) the school lunch program. Are you aware, however, that some Republicans are also suggesting that the student loan program and the Department of Education be eliminated? I know of college students who have told me that they would have to quit college and get a full-time job in order to support themselves if they lost their student loan. Do the Republicans want to push students out of college and perhaps to a standard of living that would demand even more from society? How about a little positive motivation for those wanting to improve themselves? Do we want to force some people to look at crime and drugs as a possible means of meeting their financial needs?

What about eliminating the Department of Education? What kind of message would we be sending the rest of the industrialized world if we did such? People in this country are always demanding that education be improved, even though they resist paying for it when asked. Countries that we are always being compared to have strong central/national educational programs. Many require the passing of a

national test for advancement on the "educational ladder."

There are more positive things happening in education in this country than many would care to admit. For example, did you know that last fall, for the first time in the history of international competition in mathematics that the U.S. team placed first out of 64 countries? What made the win even more meaningful was that all of the students on the

U.S. team received perfect scores, and secondly, that all of the students on the team were from public schools.

I do believe that the Contract with America has made people stand up and take notice to the fact that there are needs for change in areas of government, and certainly that we can be leaner and more efficient, but I don't support the almost childlike attitude of some Republicans about change.

They are suggesting some changes that are irresponsible, and irrational (stupid?). Furthermore, I find their arrogance, manner, and swollen egos to be repulsive. Some appear to be as poor at winning as

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they are at losing.

I am just as concerned, if not more so, with the intent of some Republicans to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy. Newt Gingrich and his friends need to get a grip (to quote his own phrase) and not turn back years of progress in making this planet a better place to live. It appears that the friendly relationship between Republicans and big business is more important than continuing to improve the quality of our environment, both nationally and globally.

Republicans, such as Bud Shuster and Larry Pressler, are pushing legislation that would eliminate even more wetlands from protection (we have little left, and they are the most productive ecosystem on this planet). The Conservation Reserve Program has been one of the most successful federal programs to benefit soil, water and wildlife, yet the Republican Congress wants to slash it critically.

Spencer Abraham and David McIntosh want to knock antipollution

regulations back a few years, with Abraham pledging to keep down fuel-efficiency standards. Thomas Bliley has authored a bill that would weaken two major laws that protect people from pesticide hazards, and the list goes on. Roll back regulations if they are of no benefit, but don't jeopardize the good just to give big business larger profits.

Overgrazing on public lands has helped push scores of species to the brink of extinction. The amount of old mining and mineral-processing hazardous wastes scattered across the U.S. is near 50 billion tons, which has resulted in the contamination of 12,000 miles of rivers and streams, and 180,000 acres of lakes and reservoirs. The estimated cost of cleaning up hazardous wastes from hard rock mine sites, by mostly taxpayer monies, is \$33 to 71 billion.

Last year, American Barrick Resources paid the federal government \$9,765 for land in a mining claim worth about \$10 billion and they will pay taxpayers \$0 in royalties. Yes, there is a need for change, and one of those should be the Republicans love affair with big business and the multinational corporations that too often influence those in office to vote to their benefit, and perhaps their own.

The priorities, and the players, have changed, but the game in Congress is the same. The love of power, real or in one's own mind, and the abuse of it is alive and well in Congress. I am sure we can be leaner in government, even though President Clinton has cut back the size of the work force to what it was when Mr. Kennedy was president, and that duplication of services needs to be eliminated, but let's show a bit

more discretion and common sense as to where to attack.

I believe that this country's deficit is the biggest problem facing us right now, but I am not impressed by the Republican tax cut. The cut is pure politics, looking for a vote next year, not looking to help this country. If \$189 billion can be squeezed out of the budget, then put it towards the deficit, and stop supporting the wealthy, big business, and Republicans.

Dale E. Peters writes from Frederick.
