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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Las Vegas, Nevada)

For Immediate Release

July 28, 1997

**PRESIDENT CLINTON NAMES MARSHALL S. SMITH AS
DEPUTY SECRETARY AT THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

The President today announced his intent to nominate Marshall S. Smith as Deputy Secretary at the Department of Education.

Marshall S. (Mike) Smith, of California, has served as Acting Deputy Secretary at the Department of Education since August, 1996. Prior to that, Dr. Smith served as Under Secretary at the Department of Education, where he was instrumental in the implementation of the President's education improvement agenda. Dr. Smith came to the Department from Stanford University, where he was a professor of education and a Dean of the Graduate School of Education. From 1980 to 1986, Dr. Smith was the Director of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research and served as a professor of Educational Policy Studies and Educational Psychology at the University of Wisconsin. In 1980, he served as Chief of Staff to the first Secretary of Education, and from 1977 to 1980 he was Assistant Commissioner for Policy Studies at the U.S. Office of Education. Dr. Smith was Chair of the Board of International Comparative Studies in Education at the National Academy of Sciences from 1992 to 1993, was on the National Council on Education Standards and Testing, and is a member of the National Academy of

Education. Dr. Smith received an A.B. degree from Harvard University, and a Master's of Education and Doctorate in Measurement and Statistics from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The Deputy Secretary at the Department of Education serves as the chief operating officer of the Department and principal advisor to the Secretary on policies and budget.

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Robert D. Novak

Triumph of The Blob

At 4 p.m. today, some 45 education lobbyists—"back to school" after the August congressional break—will resume weekly sessions with Department of Education officials in the secretary of education's conference room. There is doubt whether these meetings are legal but no question that they have been effective and, until now, a rare Washington secret.

They began in 1995, when what former education secretary William J. Bennett calls The Blob—the special-interest groups that want to maintain the educational status quo—feared the worst from a newly Republican Congress. With more than a hundred bills for abolition of the Department of Education introduced, the Thursday meetings began without the formal notification required by law for "advisory committees." After 2½ years of this collaboration, the tide has turned on education, with the Republicans in full retreat.

"It's pretty much an open meeting," Acting Deputy Education Secretary Marshall (Mike) Smith, who usually presides, told me. He added that I would be welcome, which he conceded would make me the first journalist there. In fact, the

sessions have been attended almost exclusively by The Blob, providing intelligence for the government bureaucrats who in turn disclose Clinton administration strategy. "We rely on you, partly, as our eyes and ears," Smith told participants July 24.

But an interloper appeared at this year's meetings. Paul Steidler, senior fellow of the conservative Education Reform Project, heard about them and asked to attend. He got permission after interrogation by reluctant education officials. Steidler's subsequent weekly minutes offer a wondrous insight into how Bill Clinton's Washington works.

"There was boisterous conversation, and one could sense the camaraderie in the air," Steidler said of the atmosphere preceding his first meeting. The regulars represent such pro-Clinton groups as the National School Boards Association, the American Association of School Administrators and the American Federation of Teachers. First among equals is the National Education Association (NEA), the powerful teachers' union. Joel Packer, the NEA's expert lobbyist, sits next to and is deferred to by the Education Department's senior official present.

When an Education Department official de-

scribed Republican Sen. Paul Coverdell's proposal for \$50 million in grants to fund school-choice pilot programs, somebody exclaimed, "Yeah, the fear voucher." Another voice joined in: "You get it if you are scared." Steidler noted: "There was loud and sustained laughter. I found this to be quite chilling."

Through seven months of these minutes, the administration and The Blob marched in lock step to maximize federal funding and suppress school choice, with scarcely a critical word for the Clinton administration and no kind word for Republicans.

When it was mentioned that former education secretary Lamar Alexander would testify to Congress, "moans and snickers" were followed by the NEA's Packer saying, "It's called Mr. Voucher time." Commenting on a C-SPAN broadcast of Republican congressmen discussing education, then-Education Department lobbyist Kay Casstevens said: "If you didn't see it, you're probably better off."

As budget negotiations neared their climax, Smith asked everybody to make sure they could be reached if they left town. The joint Education Department-NEA clout soon was demonstrated.

At the June 16 meeting, the NEA's Adele Robin-

son alerted the department to House committee approval of Democratic Rep. Benjamin Cardin's proposed \$150 tax credit for after-school private tutoring. Smith declared: "It drives a stake through [the president's] America Reads [program]. It's close to a voucher, folks." Cardin's proposal was eliminated, thanks to administration pressure.

So was a Coverdell amendment to the tax bill permitting parents to use their own tax-free savings for kindergarten through 12th-grade private schools. "On behalf of the NEA," Packer said at the July 31 meeting, "I want to profusely thank the administration for its stand on Coverdell."

Is the administration's failure to list these meetings in the Federal Register a violation of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA)? "The meetings are not covered by FACA," acting Education Department General Counsel Jamienne Studley told me, because they have no fixed membership or specific purpose. "Anyone who wants can join in," she said. But her assertions are refuted by Paul Steidler's minutes, as Mike Smith may hear when he comes up for Senate confirmation.

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