

**"The Wrong Man for the Job -- Bill Ratliff"**

by Donna Garner

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I want to leave no doubt in anyone's mind: Texas definitely does not need Ex-Texas Senator Bill Ratliff as the next Commissioner of Education. In yesterday's *Austin American-Statesman* (AAS), the editorial board recommended Ratliff for the position. Why am I not surprised? During the 1990's it was Ratliff, Mike Moses (Ex-Commissioner of Education), and the AAS who ran the show. Ratliff and Moses came up with their miserable ideas, and the AAS advertised them free of charge!

Now that the public is looking more objectively at education in our state, they are beginning to realize we have major problems with our public schools; and the people who helped to create this chaos are trying to distance themselves from the mess they created.

Ratliff is not just a "private citizen" with a big heart for the schools. Besides his legislative retirement benefits, Ratliff makes large sums of money as a taxpayer-enriched opportunist. Ratliff is a registered lobbyist (<http://www.ethics.state.tx.us/dfs/loblists.htm>) with many clients including the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB). Having retired from the Texas Senate in 2003, he began representing TASB on May 10, 2004. That year he received up to \$99,999.99 from TASB, and again in 2005, and 2006.

We taxpayers paid Ratliff's rich lobbying fees because the membership dues that education entities pay to join TASB come from our taxpayers' dollars.

Because the TASB dues come from public funds, we taxpayers are actually paying TASB to lobby Legislators for more school funding so that our taxes will increase. We are paying to lobby ourselves!

Ratliff is also a paid lobbyist for Raise Your Hand from which he is to make \$49,999.99 in 2007: <http://www.ethics.state.tx.us/tehd/lobcon2007d.htm>.

The Austin paper did not bother to mention Ratliff's many lobbying allegiances and conflicts of interest nor did the paper mention other important facts about Ratliff. Not only did he author the failed and oft-maligned Robin Hood Plan, but he also drafted SB 1 in 1995 which stripped local teachers of control over what they taught.

Due to SB 1, Texas teachers have lost control over their day-to-day instruction and instead must follow the poorly constructed Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards.

The English / Language Arts / Reading TEKS are particularly egregious because they are not explicit, measurable, or specific for each grade level; and the curriculum requirements listed in the ELAR/TEKS are much too numerous for a teacher to cover thoroughly in a year's time. Therefore, teachers flit from one TEKS element to the next, never really having time to make sure students gain mastery.

It is these poorly written standards (the opposite of back-to-the-basics curriculum requirements) upon which the much-despised TAKS tests are based.

**As the author of SB 1, Ratliff is also responsible for taking the authority away from elected local school boards and placing that power into the hands of unelected superintendents.**

**No longer do locally elected school board members have any real control over the all-important issues of personnel hiring and district curriculum decisions.**

**Local school board members' duties have basically been reduced to (1) hiring and firing the superintendent, (2) buying and selling property, and (3) setting board policy ( e.g., those items which involve board members themselves -- elections, vacancies on the board, travel and reimbursement policies, etc.).**

**Ratliff is also responsible for the loss of control by the elected State Board of Education. At the state level, Ratliff tried for years to replace the elected State Board of Education (SBOE) with an appointed one. Appointed boards really do not care what voters want. They will do the will of whoever appoints them and of the lobbyists who orchestrate from a distance.**

**Ratliff's SB 1 reduced the authority of the elected SBOE and enhanced the power of the unelected Texas Commissioner of Education who at the time was Ratliff's joined-at-the-hip ally, Mike Moses.**

**Ratliff always pretended that the SBOE had lost control over textbook content; and until Attorney General Greg Abbott's 2006 opinion, the SBOE was shut out of fulfilling its lawful responsibilities. For eleven years the Board labored under Ratliff's false interpretation; and during that time, numerous inferior textbooks were placed in front of our Texas students.**

**Because of Ratliff's influence on SB 1, elected SBOE members cannot even elect their own chairperson; the Governor appoints one.**

**I certainly trust that Gov. Perry will completely ignore the *Austin American Statesman's* endorsement of Ratliff as Commissioner of Education. The future of true education reform in this state depends upon this appointment.**

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