

Biden administration presses ahead with critical race theory that some see as ‘racist’

The Biden administration’s proposal to fund education programs informed by critical race theory (CRT) likely violates civil rights laws and federalism principles, according to an academic group.

The right-leaning National Association of Scholars (NAS) isn’t just critical of the wisdom of the proposed rule, which would prioritize federal funding for history and civics programs that “incorporate culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments.”

It’s calling on state attorneys general to go to court to block the Department of Education proposal, which is accepting public comments through May 19.

The proposal favorably mentions Boston University professor Ibram Kendi, the foremost popularizer of “anti-racism,” and the New York Times’ 1619 Project, which is also a school curriculum offered through the Pulitzer Center.

NAS policy director Teresa Manning, a former law professor who unsuccessfully sued her university for viewpoint discrimination, predicted that AGs from West Virginia, Arkansas, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana and Texas would get involved.

These six Republicans fired a shot across the bow of the Biden administration in its first week, triggered by the president’s unprecedented flood of executive orders. They promised to challenge unconstitutional laws, overbroad agency actions and violations of the Administrative Procedure Act.

Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen “is looking closely at how the Biden administration’s proposed rule could create a race-based ‘hostile environment’ in Montana schools in violation of state and federal law,” a spokesperson told Just the News.

He is “concerned about its basis in Critical Race Theory — a racist ideology that directly contradicts the founding principles of our nation,” the statement continued. “Montana will not stand for anti-American indoctrination that turns

our schools into training grounds for fringe political activism and violence.”

A spokesperson for Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita said their office was “evaluating the proposed priorities and their implications” but hadn’t committed to intervening.

A statement from Arkansas Attorney General Leslie Rutledge’s office said she is “a leader in pushing back against the Biden Administration’s federal overreach and will continue to monitor unconstitutional actions made by the Administration.” Other AGs didn’t respond to queries.

Even though the “proposed priorities” just set conditions for a grant program, “states cannot afford to simply ignore” the creation of a de facto “industry standard” for civics and history education, Manning told Just the News.

“On the contrary, they need to treat this cancer before it metastasizes!” she wrote in an email. Her group launched a Civics Alliance last month with civil rights veteran Bob Woodson, Brown University economist Glenn Loury and others.

Other critics are calling on state legislatures to push back. Stanley Kurtz, senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, wrote model legislation backed by NAS that would ban what he calls “action civics” and CRT training for K-12 teachers.

It is “urgently necessary” for states to approve bans in K-12 curricula as well, he wrote in National Review. Otherwise “it will be almost impossible to resist the carrots and sticks soon to be deployed” by the administration.

Like Race to the Top, ‘few red-state politicians will have the guts’ to reject federal money

The federal proposal justifies the new funding priority based on the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a “disproportionate impact on communities of color,” as well as “the ongoing national reckoning with systemic racism.”

The teaching and learning of history should include “the consequences of slavery, and the significant contributions of Black Americans to our society,” as reflected in the 1619 Project and Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture.

It's good that schools nationwide are "working to incorporate anti-racist practices into teaching and learning," such as those advocated by Kendi. The proposal quotes his claim that "racist policies are the cause of racial inequities."

Applicants for grant money must show how their projects consider "systemic marginalization, biases, inequities, and discriminatory policy and practice in American history" and incorporate "racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse perspectives." Conspicuously, political diversity is left out.

Education Week said the grant program was given only \$5.3 million this fiscal year. But Kurtz argued in National Review that the proposed priorities would influence the bipartisan Civics Secures Democracy Act, introduced last month, which would authorize \$1 billion over six years for civics education grants.

He compared it to the Obama administration's Race to the Top program, which incentivized "nearly every state" to adopt "abysmal" Common Core standards. "Few red-state politicians will have the guts to stand up" to the media for rejecting federal money for civics and history.

Manning's analysis for NAS said the priorities "would cement radically racist instruction into the nation's schools" that is likely to create a "hostile environment" by race under Title VI. "NAS plans to encourage state attorneys general and other high-level legal officials to challenge" the grants for promoting "state sponsored discrimination."

The six AGs who signed the Jan. 27 warning letter to President Biden are "especially vigilant" about his actions of "questionable legality," she told Just the News. The proposed priorities also "may encroach on standards set by the states," providing more opportunities for legal challenges.

Not applying for the grants is not enough, Manning argued, because states that opt out will be hemmed in by a "brick wall" of new education standards.

"No one in an industry can simply ignore something that might become the industry standard because everyone is expected, eventually, to meet the industry standard" — in this case, heavily influenced by federal money, she said.

Voters don't want progressive activism in the classroom

Multiple critics compared the proposed priorities to a new Illinois rule that

mandates “culturally responsive teaching and learning standards for all Illinois educators,” an early draft of which required teachers to promote “progressive viewpoints and perspectives.”

The right-leaning American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) commissioned a survey that found Illinoisans reject “progressive political activism” in the classroom by more than two to one, including nearly 50% of self-identified Democrats.

The federal proposal is marked by a “deafening silence about such matters as the Founding documents, the Emancipation Proclamation, the World Wars, the Civil Rights Movement,” ACTA President Michael Poliakoff wrote in an email.

“Instead, we get a homage” to Kendi and the 1619 Project, “whose tendentious rewriting of American history drew the scathing critique of a broadly nonpartisan group of the nation’s leading historians,” he wrote. Poliakoff criticized the branding of the proposal as “culturally responsive teaching standards,” when it would actually teach students to “view everything through the lens of racial oppression” and worsen societal divisions.

“ACTA is unsure of the legal basis to challenge this rule,” he answered when asked about NAS’s theories. “But we are certain it is an unseemly intrusion of a particular ideology into public education.”

A spokesperson for Woodson, the civil rights veteran and 1776 Unites founder, simply told Just the News that he “opposes government funding for CRT in schools.”

Murray Bessette, vice president of education for the Common Sense Society, called the proposed priorities “a kind of antiwisdom” that will accomplish the inverse of their intentions.

“We need to teach American history in all its complexity as a precondition of learning from the mistakes of the past and of doing better,” said Bessette, until recently the head of academic programs for the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation. America is the “successful overcoming” of past injustices by heroes from Abraham Lincoln to John Lewis, “who built the most successful multiethnic country in the history of the world.”

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