

**Politicians can be sneaky rascals,
especially when they think no one is looking.
By Dale Glenn**

During the last two election cycles Indiana voters have given one party overwhelming power to make decisions, not on the Senate and House floor, but in backroom caucus rooms free from public view. They ran their campaigns on all sorts of emotional, hot-button issues, many designed to strike fear and loathing in the hearts of citizens, but one important issue was rarely mentioned: public education. It is safe to say neither our governor nor our legislators were elected because of their views on education.

Now, in those back rooms they are attempting to strip voters of one of the most grassroots institutions still available to them. They have passed a law that further distances voters from their ability to direct the course of one of their community's most fundamental institutions: public education. They now deny voters the right to elect the State Superintendent of Public Instruction; instead, the governor will be appointing one.

This is wrong on a number of levels, as we can see from the past two elections for state superintendent. In one, a Democrat won and proceeded to effect the will of the voters by standing up to lawmakers and a governor who were attempting to cut funding, route money to private school corporations and religious schools, ignore relevant educational research, demonize educators (causing a teacher shortage), and misuse testing under the guise of promoting accountability—all to promote an agenda that centralizes power in the hands of politicians and diminishes the role of professional educators.

In the most recent election, voters elected a Republican as state superintendent. Before two years were up she announced her resignation after criticizing her own party members for their inability to listen to the professionals and placing politics over what is good for children.

This lack of respect for the profession is now further challenged by more back room maneuvering. HB1005 and SB275 leaves a loophole for the governor to appoint a superintendent who has no professional experience in K-12 education. This ambiguity centers around the word "preferable" which is used in the law to placate those opposed to non-professionals holding the office. To say, as in HB1005, that it is "preferable" that a K-12 experienced professional be appointed has no meaning under the law and can thus be ignored. This leaves the door open for the governor to choose someone regardless of professional education credentials and/or K-12 experience.

So here we stand. It is important to read the small print. It is important to hold our legislators and governor accountable and expect them to be transparent. It is important to know where your representatives stand on public education. As the late Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, once said, "All politics is local." There is no better representation of that ideal than in education. People care about their local schools, and since the state superintendent has influence over what happens at the local level, it is important the people have a voice in the selection. To deny the public

this voice is to suppress the independent mandate that voters in Indiana have had since 1851.

Education is important enough to stand alone, apart from partisan politics, and it must be placed in the hands of people who have devoted their lives to prepare, train and experience their chosen field: professional educators.

We can all help by contacting our state legislators and asking them to listen. HB1005 is a flawed erosion of our democracy. Let them know we are watching.