

**Common Core Debate 2013 Steamboat Institute Freedom Conference
August 23, 2013 – debate between Laura Boggs and Jim Stergios
Moderator Bob Schaffer**

Thirty-seven audio tracks corresponding to the 37 tracks in this transcription, can be found at the bottom of this transcribed debate.

TRANSCRIPT of YouTube debate:

Jennifer Schubert-Akin [Jennifer and her husband, Rick Akin, co-founded The Steamboat Institute in 2008.]

Bob, as many of you from Colorado know, and many of you outside Colorado, Bob is a three-term congressman. The only reason he didn't do a 4th, 5th or 6th term, or probably as many as he wanted, was because he had made a three-term pledge to his constituents and his family, and when he was ending that 3rd term, President Bush 43 had a visit with Bob and was explaining it to him, and why that even though he had made that pledge, it would be a good idea to go ahead and seek that 4th term anyway. And Bob Schaffer, being the man of principle that he is (if you go through the Leadership Program you *will* learn what a man of principle he is), looked the president in the eye and said, "Mr. President, if I break that pledge, how am I going to look my children in the eye, because I made that pledge?" [clapping]

[0:00:57.309]

So without further ado, I want to introduce one of my personal inspirations, one of Rick's inspirations -- is Bob Schaffer. [clapping]

Track 002

Bob Schaffer –

Wow. Thank you for that nice introduction, Jennifer.

I heard yesterday's presentations were outstanding. I'm sorry I missed them. In addition to being a has-been congressman, I ran for the U.S. Senate and I like explaining it this way to the kids at my school because they always ask, "would you ever run again for the U.S. Senate again?"

I ran in 2008 and they asked, if I'd give that another try, and I said, "Well, no, I wish I was there, obviously, I wish I were running for re-election right now, but I ran in '08 and the voters decided I should be principal of Liberty Common High School instead, so that's why am there. So, we had a back-to-school event night last night, and in fact Sheriff Smith from Larimer County was our Keynote speaker. I think he's got some little thing that allows him to up get here faster than I can – as the sheriff. If I'd have known when he was traveling, I would have gotten here right behind him.

So our event ended last night. One thing I got to announce, and I'm going to brag about it because I've got a microphone and I'm here, and principal of a public charter high school. Last year my seniors, every junior in the state of Colorado takes the ACT. So my juniors last year took it and scored the number one composite score in the state -- last year. And so [clapping]

[0:01:31.171]

Well hold your applause, because my incoming seniors, they took the test last year as juniors, and those results just came in and they are number one in the state again. So it's not a fluke. [clapping]

So those kinds of things make me a believer in things like choice, and being able to apply market principles to things like education. So that's somewhat of a topic that we're going to discuss today.

You know, inevitably, since the founding of civilized governments and governing institutions, the topic of this next debate has been kicked around, and that is: do we achieve higher quality and low cost and great convenience through the efficiency of centralization, centralized authority? Or do we achieve those goals through decentralization? It's true with healthcare. It's true with everything we've discussed at the conference today. And it's also true with education, and it really is the centerpiece of today's debate.

[0:02:37.572]

Obviously we had 13 states when the country started out, and there 13 different approaches to public education as the country expanded. Every state had its own approach to public education and there are successes and there are failures that exist within that kind of a structure. And within the state of Colorado there are 178 school districts, and should they all be managed in a similar way, or should they be decentralized to achieve whatever goals are established locally?

And so in all of these questions, it is a particular dilemma for conservatives. And the track record on this is not particularly clear to give us any guidance. Conservative presidents

that we would probably celebrate in this room, are the architects of a plan to approach education in a more centralized view... To try to establish national goals, to establish a list of things that *all* children in America should know before they graduate from high school.

[0:03:28.301]

I remember when I was in the state legislature, Bill Owens became governor, a conservative governor, had a business background and a conservative track record. His question was, “Well now that I’m governor, and it’s my responsibility to improve education in the state, how am I going to do this?” And as most business-oriented people would do, first we’re going to start taking measurements. We’re going to measure all 178 school districts. And what are we going to measure them against? -- a common set of goals, so that we know whether district A is competing well against district B, and we can figure out which ones are down at the bottom. But in order to do this, we have to have a common set of objectives. Right? This makes good business sense. Why wouldn’t it make good sense for a state, or for a country?

[0:04:10.100]

And so we have 50 states who for years have established different goals academically for their states. We compete against one another. You can tell whether Colorado does well against Massachusetts, let’s say. But the curriculum in Massachusetts for years has been different than the curriculum in Colorado, and we just expect politicians as they come and go, and members of boards of education as they come and go, to reference their goals against one another.

[0:04:39.717]

Well, a bunch of governors got together about 7 or 8 years ago and said, “Well, why don’t we develop a curriculum as governors for the entire country? And it would be at the option of states whether they want to adopt that curriculum as their state curriculum, and that became known as the Common Core Standards, the subject of today’s discussion.

Track 003

We’ve got two experts who are going to talk through a number of things. I’ll moderate the debate and we’re going to talk about: What is Common Core? Is it fundamentally a good idea? And whether it’s a good idea is a function of two things:
the quality of the standards themselves

and the process itself is relevant to the discussion and to the debate as well. And so, we'll dive into both of those.

First is one of the people who stood up in the room, Larua Boggs. She's a graduate of the Leadership Program of the Rockies, and in 2009 she got herself elected to the Jefferson County's Board of Education. It's one of the largest school districts in the country. I think it's 35th if I remember right. And so a perfect example for us to discuss and consider, as we discuss the impact of the Common Core Curriculum – excuse me, Common Core Standards here in Colorado.

[0:00:51.726]

Laura is a University of Michigan grad in business administration, and her experience and background, as she's applied it to education, comes from the business world and the business community. So, Laura, why don't you come on up – and here she is right there.

[0:01:07.022]

[clapping]

There are four chairs. Why don't you two sit in the middle. I'll sit over – is this scripted any way? You have a preference? [someone in background says something] OK. Why don't you sit in the middle - I'll sit over there. That would be good. Next.

Track 004

This is Jim Stergios. I met Jim about a year ago, when the Common Core debate really started escalating and becoming more controversial than it had been when the state of Colorado initially adopted it. Jim is the Executive Director of the Pioneer Institute, and he has been spending the last couple of years traveling around the state the organizing efforts to inform legislators, members of the state board of education, and the public generally about the Common Core Curriculum from his perspective.

So just to tell you how these things line up, Jim is not in favor of the Common Core Standards, and Laura is. And so we will ask these two individuals and experts, as we go through, to justify their positions and obviously, try to persuade the room.

So Jim, in addition to being Executive Director of the Pioneer Institute, carries a PhD from Boston University, and so we are glad that he has made the trip all the way to Colorado, and once again, Jim Stegios. [clapping]

Jim, welcome.

Jim Stergios

Thank you.

Track 005

Bob Schaffer

Well, I've given a little bit of a cursory description of where Common Core came from. It was a collective effort of a number of Chief State School Officers and governors throughout the country. They came together and said, "Let's come up with some standards." But the real question is -- What happens next?

Jim, why don't we start with you. Why don't you add a little background to the Common Core. We'll talk about -- well I'll let you explain to the crowd where they came from, and the obvious next question is: Are they good?

Track 006

Jim Stergios

Absolutely. Well first I just want to say I believe what Jennifer believes, and I believe what Rick believes. And I think we all do. But I think one of the things that Bob was just talking about a second ago, was the fact that Common Core is a debate that we can have in a civil way. We can disagree. You can be a Republican and you can be a conservative, you can believe in limited government, and also believe in it. I think it's a little bit of a stretch, but that's OK.
[laughter]

[0:00:22.160]

Look, there are several things that are probably worth making note of, just to start to set the table.

It is argued that Common Core is a set of state standards. And as Bob said, in part, it's accurate to say that some governors got together and said they wanted to develop common standards across states. The fact is, it was not truly driven by governors. It was driven by ACHIEVE INC., a group in Washington D.C., together with the Council of Chief State School Officers, the representative organization of the Commissioners of education in various states, and the lobbying arm of the National Governor's Association.

[0:01:01.087]

To say that the governors were deeply involved in this is just not accurate – first thing to say.

The second thing to say is in terms of, are they truly state standards?

Let me give you an example of the kind of “public input” that goes into creating state standards. I think many of you will know this from your own participation.

I’ll give you from Massachusetts. In Massachusetts I think is something of a bell weather to take a look at, because we are the only state in the country that is truly internationally competitive. We’re in the top 6 countries in the world in math and science.

We participated most recently, a year and a half ago, as a country. We are the top in the country, and we’ve gone from just above midrange in terms of performance on the national assessments that already exist, to number one. We’ve been there since 2005. We took this stuff seriously. Standards are a big piece of what we do. Not the only thing we do, but we do a lot of charter schools and other things as well.

[0:01:49.206]

But when you think about whether these are truly state standards – when we developed our state standards in English, math, history and science, it took us six years comprehensively to do it. These were public debates. They were debates where parents and teachers and business folks and university scholars got together and said, “Let’s have this big debate.” Can you imagine the debate on U.S. History? Incredibly controversial. How do you teach the Civil War? War of northern aggression? You know, how do you teach these things?

It’s the same thing in math. You’ve heard of the math wars. Do you use a constructivist approach? Do you add using the standard algorithm, or do you add three-digit numbers – 150 and 175 – starting with the hundreds column, or do you start with the single digit column?

These are all wars that happened. They were the front page of the newspaper. Public comment, revisions, public comment, hearings.

That didn’t happen with the Common Core Standards. There was a small group of folks who sat together. Yes, there were some bureaucrats from Massachusetts. I would think probably from Colorado. I most recently heard when I was in Indiana, they said, “Yes, yes, two of our bureaucrats participated in this.”

Ok, what about the parents? What about the teachers? What about the teachers? What about the scholars and the business interests?

Is that a true state-led process? No.

What happened was, the final draft of the Common Core Standards was finalized on June 2, 2010. There were \$4.35 billion in federal funding available *if* you did a few things, and most notably: adopted Common Core and promised to adopt one of the consortia national tests.

That's not a state-led process from my perspective at all. And I do think the state processes, and upholding the public trust, is incredibly important. Having these conversations are incredibly important. If we're not going to argue on the front pages of our newspapers, in public, disagreeing agreeably, or disagreeably, about what our kids are going to learn, what the heck are we doing?

Track 007

Bob Schaffer

So, Jim, let me cut you off there, and we'll get to the other aspects of it.

And, by the way, as a matter of full disclosure, I was Chairman of the [Colorado] State Board of Education for seven years. I just stepped down last January when my term ended. The State Board of Education voted on whether they were going to adopt these Common Core Standards. It passed on a 4 to 3 vote. I was one of the three that voted against, so I don't come here with a neutral opinion. But I will do my best. I will be fair about this. [laughter] I will cut you off, Jim, [laughter] just like the best of them.

But the question is – the point I want to get to is that the state of Colorado, by their elected officials, did, in fact, adopt these standards, at some point, even though they may have been drafted by others, people that we can't name easily. We know who these people are. We know those seven elected officials and our legislators, who as an elected body ended up supporting the adoption of these standards in a variety of ways.

At some point you can see these standards being developed. You can get a sense for their quality, and the state makes a collective decision to stay in or stay out.

Track 008

Bob Schaffer

And so, let me get to that point, Laura, are you satisfied that the state is moving toward and embracing Common Core Standards with eyes wide open?

Laura Boggs

Thanks for the question. And I'll remind you that we're both from Cincinnati, so you have to be nice to me. [laughter]

Bob Schaffer

Go Reds.

Laura Boggs

And I think it's interesting the way you started, appropriately, I think, is to congratulate your students, and your teachers and staff on your ACT performance. But to me that speaks to the issue here. If we didn't have standardized tests, in that ACT, you couldn't compare yourself to other schools across the state, and more importantly, to other schools across the nation. So before I answer your question, with all due respect, I want to know a little bit about who's here. How many of you are from Colorado? OK. Texas? Where else? [people in audience call out the state they are from]

OK. And how many of you went through public schools? Grandchildren in public schools? Awesome.

And what is the belief system about public education in the United States? To me this is an incredibly important conversation, because we live in a republic, as we were reminded a couple of times this weekend, not in a democracy. And if our students don't have the skills to
read their ballots, to think deeply, to what my grandmother would call a bullshit detector for
what's on your ballots (thank you, Grandma), then we don't have the continuation of our
republic.

So for me the Common Core State Standards are that. And as Congressman Schaffer knows well, in Colorado we did go through that very public process. Colorado, before the governors got together, was already saying, “We have an industrialized model of education that is no longer appropriate for our children.

In the Industrial Age, our children graduated, went to work in the industry. They needed to know lots of facts. That's not true anymore. Most of our students will have 6 or 7 careers, not just jobs. We don't know what the careers our children will have are. So we need our children to have a narrower set of standards, but a much deeper understanding.

The old standards in Colorado were very broad and not very deep. So Colorado was already in this process. We had already, as I understand, developed standards, not just in English Language Arts and Math, but in 13 different areas. You can go to the Colorado

Department of Education with **people that Congressman Schaffer hired**, and you can see the standards in dance and in visual arts, in addition to reading, writing and math. And **I am told that many of our citizens engaged in that process of comparing with what the other governors thought was a floor**, not a ceiling, but a floor of what all students should know. Because at the end of the day, especially as republicans or conservatives, don't we want to know how effectively our dollars are spent?

So we've heard a couple times this weekend we need to tell a story. And this is a story I'll tell before I turn it back to Congressman Schaffer.

How many of your children took Spanish, or French, or German? How many of you took Spanish, or French, or German?

If you had walked into a Spanish class, knowing a couple words – I know *agua* -- I can say *gracias*. I know a couple. If you would come out, after a year's worth of studying Spanish I and only knew five words, would you consider that year an effective use of your time in learning a new language?

To me, (thank you, no, no, good, 5 words good for anybody?), to me, if we don't have some common set of standards that we measure the effectiveness against, how do we know when those lovely things of innovation in capitalism are working? How do we know?

Jim Stergios

So here's some *agua*. [laughter]

Track 009

Bob Schaffer

So let's dive right into the standards as well. Are the standards reasonable objectives for the state to pursue? Laura, do you want to take a crack at that first?

Laura Boggs

Sure. I'll take a crack at that. I think that's a discussion we all need to have. For me, as a base, are they reasonable? Absolutely, so let's see.

Fifth grade math, numbers and operations in base ten. Recognize that in a multi-digit number, a digit in one place represents 10 times as much as it represents in the place to its right. And one tenth of what it represents in the place to its left.

Yes, I want children to understand base ten math. But that's a base. I'm not saying that's where the ceiling needs to be. I'm saying that when we invest in public education, that we need an understanding of what all of our students are expected to learn, or least the preponderance – here's where the measure should be. And yes, I believe that in math and English Language Arts, with the caveats of how they've been written, they're very reasonable base standards.

Track 010

Bob Schaffer

Jim, are the standards reasonable and something that satisfies [?]?

Jim Stergios

I come to this with a little bit of a unique perspective. I've experienced, in talking about foreign language, I speak four languages. I am kind of a language nut, one of which is Japanese, and I run a prep school in Japan, so I have a very good idea what international competitiveness means to these folks, OK? and develop curriculum for that school as well, to understand how to get them to where they wanted to get. These are students who want to come to the United States and study at the highest levels.

So the first thing I would say is, the same discussion that we had before about rule of law, about federal encroachment, these are all important discussions to have, and we should have them, but [it is] the quality thing that matters most to us in Massachusetts, because it's been the lifeblood that has led to our very fast increases in performance.

Second thing I note is that standardized tests, I completely agree we've been big proponents of standardized tests. In Massachusetts we're the only state in the country that actually has a state test that correlates well with the existing national assessments. There are existing national assessments. They're sampled. They give us an ability to say Colorado's here, Massachusetts is here. There are also larger city based, so you can also compare Boston to the larger cities like Denver.

I'd say that when we looked at this issue, we looked at it in a very deep way. Jim Milgrim was the only academic mathematician, that is truly a mathematician, not an educationista who does math. OK? He was the only academic mathematician on the validation committee for Common Core. So he went in thinking: if these are really high quality standards, I'll support them.

[0:01:4t.685]

Sandra Stotsky, who's known around the country as the best academic expert, most highly reputed academic expert in English Language Arts – helped develop some of the best standards in the country in the very states. She sat on the validation committee. She, too, believed if the national standards were good enough, she would support them.

So it's not an ideological question in this regard. Both of them stepped off the validation committee saying, "this is a bloody mess." Or, I won't use your term about [laughter by Laura Boggs] – their detectors went up. [laughter]

[0:02:16.449]

And here are the reasons why. When you take a look at some of the standards you can see that it cuts – Colorado's ELA standards for example are rich in literature. Massachusetts' are as well. Common Core cuts the amount of literature in half.

There are ten standards for non-fiction, nine for literary study. Anybody who knows anything about reading research, and writing research, knows that the acquisition of a deep broad vocabulary – those are the keys to the kingdom – to be truly capable of analytic thinking, what some people call critical thinking.

So you're going to cut that, especially in K-8, where it's absolutely necessary in a narrative, and we all know from the research – narratives are incredibly important to keep children engaged, and what we're going to give them is an MPA regulation??

You're going to have them study an extract this big on a frog and keep their interest. That's not how kids' minds work. We know that. OK.

[0:03:13.312]

On the math side Jim Milgrim has written and submitted two Common Core and also before the Colorado Board of Education, testimonies saying that: "Common Core pushes back academic expectations in math to the point where by 5th grade, we're one year behind our international competitors, and by 7th grade, two years behind folks. Algebra 1 moves to 9th and 10th grade from 8th grade for many many many states.

Alright, let me ask you something. What does that all translate into? The guy who wrote the math standards for Common Core, a guy named Jason Zimba, Dr. Jason Zimba from

Bennington College, he's now left. He's a wonderful guy, warm guy, I like him, but he's wrong-headed.

This is a question about ideas. He testified before the Massachusetts Board of Education. He said, when the question was posed to him: "What level of college readiness are you talking about? What do you mean by college readiness, when you say that Common Core will get you to be college ready?" He said, "non-selective community and state colleges is all."

And I ask you, if we're going to give up on the rule of law and can talk you through exactly why there's not just a Constitutional question, if we're going to spend about \$16, \$17 billion as a set of states, unfunded mandate, to do this, it'd better be better than community college readiness for my kids.

[0:04:35.708]

And I would say one final thing, and that is in regard to: is this a floor? Can we do more than that? Look folks, Common Core sets out in the initial agreements with states – 85% verbatim your state standards have to reflect, verbatim reflect Common Core.

The national consortia tests, there are two consortia building tests that will be across the various states. Those tests will only test what's in Common Core. You can add more literature, you can add better math, you can specify very specific Colorado standards, or Massachusetts standards, and guess what – it won't be tested. And if it's not tested, guess what – it will not be taught long term.

Alright? So this is a grand fiction that we all the state level have lots of flexibility. Let me remind you, the government, when it encroaches, it encroaches.

Track 011

Bob Schaffer

So let me challenge Jim. Your tradition in Massachusetts, my goodness, the pillars of American Literature, half of them come from your state, and your

Jim Stergios

The best ones.

Bob Schaffer

The best ones. [laughter] And I can see where the affinity of the Massachusetts Board of Education for strong literature might take a particular direction just based on the history and the culture of your state. Everybody here would, of course, argue the virtues of cowboy poetry would rival those of these great Massachusetts authors, and we may have a different direction for the State of Colorado.

But can you address Laura's point of "should not we be able to look across the country and have our children coast to coast aspiring to similar or identical standards in English Language Arts, in Math? The case being, this is the point of the pro side of the debate, is that some common standard would be better than, as Arn Duncan said, fifty states going their own direction.

Track 012

Jim Stergios

I disagree, it's a very controlling, sort of top down approach to thinking about education.

I think that you shouldn't study old Massachusetts literature. You should study Colorado literature. You should get to know the place – affinity to your place, your parenthood, to your traditions. It's really important. Massachusetts has great literature, but guess what, Alabama has awesome literature. Louisiana has incredible literature. Texas has incredible literature.

I mean, when you think about books like "The Movie Goer" and things like that, what they meant for the culture of the 1960s and 70s – that's not Massachusetts. And they should absolutely study it. That is grafting our kids, gluing our kids to history, and understanding where they came from. And I think that is incredibly important.

Now, can you get to some level of common standard? The question I would ask is, "Why do you have to?" We already have a national assessments based on upon sampling. We understand why Massachusetts compared to various states. There are all kinds of difficulty analyses that assessment gurus can do to understand whether Massachusetts' state's test is actually reflective of a standard similar to NAPE, which is the national sampled test.

Same thing for Colorado. You could do the same thing for a district. If you wanted to.

The fact is, people are damn lazy. They don't want to do their jobs, and do the hard work and talk about this stuff in public, because, guess what, people disagree about it. My [].

Again, I would just say that we really have to go back and say, "This is worth arguing about. Our kids are wroth arguing about. This is not a technical issue.

[0:01:21.045]

I would take exception with the view that somehow we're in a different world today, where careers are so different and everything's so different that – it's kind of processing information – we have information at our fingertips. No, education is about knowledge, folks – about judgment. If you want to process information, it means you have to go out, and you have to understand what a reputable source is, not based on who tells you what the reputable source is.

The *New York Times* is a vendor to Common Core. So I'm sure they're going to support it. Nothing gets [?] the *New York Times* every day – nothing against that.

I want to know – do you know how to do analyses? Can you think analytically? – not just process information? And that means being glued to our heritage and its way of thinking as well.

So I would not say that you have to have that across the board. But here's what I would say, and I don't mean long, I apologize for that. If the federal government, and I may get boos on this, if the federal government, which is very good at spending money, wanted to do something useful, OK. If you think about the federal government's involvement in education over the years,

[0:02:26.603]

It's the 1965 Act that established a role for the federal government, said the federal government cannot have anything to do with curriculum development, testing development, instructional practice guides. Signed by Lyndon B. Johnson.

1979 -- Jimmie Carter signed a law establishing the Department of Education, said this very same thing.

Every major law that is part of the Elementary Secondary Education Act, which is the law that gets reauthorized, most recently as No Child Left Behind, states explicitly the federal government should have no [truck?] whatsoever with supervising, directing, having any involvement with curriculum development, testing for states, and instructional practice guides. They blow past all that.

[0:03:08.445]

But the biggest point about the federal government is that in their involvement over 40 years they have had no real positive effect on education. They ran the D.C. schools for a while. Look at what they did there. OK?

So I guess what I'd say to you is: you can do better. Colorado standards were better in ELA [English Language Arts] prior to Common Core. They could be better. Go back and do the hard work.

Your math standards, to my understanding looking at them, they were about as good as Common Core, maybe a little bit worse than Common Core.

So let's all look at ourselves honestly – not say Common Core's the devil. We should go back and make them better.

Track 013

Bob Schaffer

Laura, I'm sympathetic to the duties and challenges of any elected official, when it comes to education, because you can turn on CSPAN and watch late-night speeches of members of Congress holding up *The Tim's Comparison Third International Math Science Study Comparison of Countries*. Pissa study is the other one – I don't remember what that stands for, but we are constantly looking at and being confronted with, where we rank as a country, compared to others, and where we rank as a state compared to others. And the goal of elected officials – you get elected for a shot term. You've got to come up with a strategy before the time you are finished, or if you want to get re-elected, to show how you have shown progress.

Can you speak to that. You spoke already to the values of having a common set of standards around the country for the purpose of state-to-state comparison. What's your view on Common Core's utility in helping us become more internationally competitive?

Track 014

Laura Boggs

Well, I think that's a great question because the U.S. does rank 14th in reading right now, and 25th in math. And the Common Core State Standards allow us to at least begin the conversation.

So one of the things I didn't say in the introduction is – my mother was a public school teacher, and she taught English, so I'm all over that Shakespeare stuff [laughter] as I sat at her knees as she graded papers. She taught mostly in the inner cities in Cincinnati.

So here's the conversation for me. Today in Colorado, less than 50% of our 10th graders are proficient in math. Many of our 3rd graders – something like 30% of our 3rd graders -- aren't proficient in reading. The problem that we all have, and I think Congressman Shaffer [she accidentally said Beauprez] would agree, is my mother's \$5 word. Cognitive Dissonance. Is there anybody in here that would stand and say . "I sent my children to a lousy public school." Anybody? Anybody?

I've got to tell you ladies and gentlemen, you should. You should – especially if you are in Colorado. And you guys do wonderfully well, however 50% of our children in Denver don't graduate from high school.

I'll talk about Jefferson County. We are an affluent county. We compare ourselves to Douglas County and Cherry Creek all the time; but because we are such a large district, bordering on Sheridan on the east side, all the way through Evergreen and Conifer on the west side – it's like running multiple districts. Because you take those children between the Sheridan and now almost Kipling corridor – we have a high school in Jefferson County where 96% of our 10th graders – what number was that? – 96% of our 10th graders are not proficient in math for 5 years in a row. We graduate 70% of those kids. 71% of them need remediation. They're not on the list of the turn-around schools in the state of Colorado.

If we don't have some base level of measurement, my superintendent and my union boss buddies on our school board, get to run around telling you all how great things are in Jefferson County. And there is no evidence to the contrary. Truly not true – I just gave you some. But I can't tell you how my high schools in Jefferson County compare to the high schools in Massachusetts. Yes we take NAPE tests across the state, but until they get to 10th grade and they take an ACT test, which all other students across the states take, there is no measure for how are our 3rd graders doing, compared to the 3rd graders in Massachusetts. Fourth grade yes for NAPE, but it's a randomized sample. It doesn't go down to the school level.

We have 178 school districts in the state of Colorado, as you mentioned. A hundred of them have under a hundred kids. How many of those school districts don't get in that statistical sampling of NAPE? Yes, Common Core State Standards, all of those words are important. They are core, they are state-based, they're common.

It gives us the ability to break the cognitive dissonance. To Jon Caldera's point earlier, it's not going to get fixed tomorrow. But if you guys don't walk out of here knowing that your children aren't in the best public schools possible, we can't fix it.

Track 015

Bob Schaffer

Jim, Laura has a good point. Let's stipulate, Massachusetts has good schools. Shouldn't a parent in Jefferson County be able to be armed, as an active and engaged citizen, with some comparable data as to how that parent's high school is comparing to one in your state? And a second issue I'd like you to address is this international comparison. The argument that typically propels the pro Common Core side is that America is slipping behind – our kids are slipping behind their international peers, and we need to be more competitive in a changing economy. So those two issues: Comparison at the state level, at a district to district level, even across state lines, and comparison between Colorado kids and kids in Japan, let's say.

Jim Stergios

Yep. So let me start with, federal involvement has really not raised standards across the states over the last twelve, thirteen years. Take a look at the history of the standards movement, which is probably a 20 – 25-year movement. It started after *A Nation at Risk*. One of Ronald Reagan's then Secretary of Education said, "You know, we're essentially waging war on ourselves, because of the quality of our schools. We're undermining our ability to compete economically, and our ability to defend ourselves.

In the 1990s a lot of states really worked very hard – Texas, Massachusetts, any number of states. Early 90s the standards were very weak. By the late 90s they were really very good. There was really not much federal involvement at all in any of this. They were just folks who were sharing information across states.

NCLB [No Child Left Behind] comes, and guess what happens? States don't want any kind of accountability, so they lower their standards, and they lower the quality of their tests.

So what we do now, was because of the federal involvement, which has led to some adverse impacts – we say, "What will solve this is more federal involvement." I find that a remarkable leap of logic. I also think that what Laura's arguing is essentially – Colorado has an issue with proficiency in a number of its schools. We must do something. Feds, please help.

[0:02:12.828]

Let me say this respectfully but firmly: you have the evidence you need to know what schools are not proficient. You just gave it to us. [clapping] The hard work must be done to

address those That should be a turn-around school. And that decision should be made, and that's where the focus should be, and not on some ethereal set of standards that will be incorporated across any number of states.

Look, in Massachusetts frankly we don't look – when we think about policy, we're thinking about my town of Brookline. We look at the next town over, Newton has better scores than us. What the heck are they doing? They'll go over there and they'll share information and that sort of stuff. It happens across our state. It happens regionally to some extent.

We don't look at Colorado, not that Colorado is not a great state – it's a *great* state. But it's not like we have to know exactly what happens in that district to understand what we should do.

[0:03:04.699]

Folks, education has traditionally been local for a pretty good reason. T.S. Elliot used to talk about it in his *Notes on Culture*, how meaningful action-- “reasonable action by a human being, is best when it's closely held, in an environment that you know well.” It is absolutely true.

Taking some reform that's off the shelf in Brookline, Massachusetts, because you think it might work in Colorado, ignores all the important cultural stuff you have here. It ignores differences among kids. Kids are really unique.

So I would say, you have all the information you frankly need right now. You need to need the courage to act upon it.

Track 016

Laura Boggs

Thank you, I hope you empowered every Coloradan to go out and vote for their right school board representatives in the next 65 says.

Jim Stergios

Absolutely. It is so important. And these are races that are getting ignored a lot of the time – people think about the top of the ticket. In Massachusetts we have a terrible republican culture, where everyone thinks about the Governor's office, and we win that often, but no one

2013-08-23_CCDebate_Boggs for _Stergios against_Posted 2016-04-18_Transcript by Donna Jack—and links to all 37 audio tracks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=064lhGrV0Os>

thinks about the grassroots, what type of a school committee, the board of education, any of that sort of stuff.

Laura Boggs

So in Colorado our school board elections are actually odd-year elections, and in November, so raise your hand again if you are in Colorado.

Jim Stergios

Vote! [laughter]

Laura Boggs

In about 60 days you'll get a mail-in ballot in your mailboxes. If you're not on the ballot, which you have this week to go pick up your petitions and get on the ballot, know who is, and vote.

Track 017

Laura Boggs

But with all due respect, I'm not asking the federal government to com help us. That's not what I perceive Common Core State Standards to be. I am asking us to be able to compare how our children do in our schools to how they do in Massachusetts. Not at a ceiling level, but at a base level, because we spend in Colorado somewhere around 10 or 11 thousand dollars per student.

We've asked ourselves all weekend: Why are we in this position? Why are we in Colorado leaning blue, [or] a blue state, wherever you think we are? Because we have ignored our public education systems. My grandmother also taught me that if I don't own the problem, I can't fix it. I'm not asking the feds to ride in on a white horse and help us fix this. I'm asking us, "Is this the base we want?" And we should be able to compare.

In 1785 John Adams said, "The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people, and be willing to bare the expense of it." That's what we've decided in the United States, so that we can graduate a literate constituency. If we don't have the ability to compare that across the states, we'll be back here 10 years from now, 20 years from now,

asking ourselves why we're getting progressively more liberal? Because we've allowed our union bosses to take over.

Any totalitarian take-over, any socialistic take-over, and communistic take-over knows, get the kids and you have the country. It's time for us to stand up and make sure that doesn't happen. [clapping]

Track 018

Bob Schaffer

We're going to move some of the questions into considering going forward. The reality is that the State of Colorado committed to the Common Core Standards while they were still being completed.

It wasn't the case with the famous Nancy Pelosi line where she's standing there -- "We'll read the bill after we pass it." It wasn't exactly like that.

They were in progress while the state was considering voting on them – the state board anyway – and so we had some general guidelines, and some very specific examples that we could look at, but they weren't fully completed and implemented when Colorado joined.

And the same can be said with these international consortia. There are two national groups that states can join for the sake of assessments. So follow me on this. There's the standards we're talking about now. An important part of this is the assessment to those standards, and you can join one of two groups. We joined one called PARCC, as the state legislature passed a law in 2012, causing the state board to choose one or the other. And the state board picked PARCC.

But the question is – and the PARCC standards are not developed even now. And so we've committed ourselves, financially as well as in terms of state planning, to these initiatives, and the comfort that is constantly given to elected officials is, "well, if this turns out bad, we can just back out, and pull ourselves out of these."

I'd like you to speak to that. At what point would it become appropriate for the state to back out, and then there's the other question, after we've invested millions, how do you do it?

Track 019

Laura Boggs

I think that's a great question. And honestly some of my learning being on the school board of the 35th largest school district in the state [country?] is, that is not an easy thing to do. We have 12,000 or 14,000 employees in Jefferson County. We're about a tenth of the state of Colorado, so I'll round and say there are maybe 140,000 public education employees in the state of Colorado. Turning that ship around is not an easy thing to do.

So I'm with you. And turning that around would not be easy. It wouldn't be easy today, to be honest, because Coloradans in most of our public schools have spent, since 2010 when you guys voted to go that way, retraining our teachers, reorganizing what was delivered in what years – but there's a third stool of that triumvirate in my world that you didn't talk about. And I think that's the most important one.

[0:00:52.753]

We've talked a little bit about standards. We've talked a little bit about assessments. To me, the most important piece of that is the curriculum. And Common Core State Standards, while guiding curriculum, doesn't determine curriculum.

In Colorado, and this is different – there are a hand full of states that have constitutionally given their local school boards local control over the curriculum, and Colorado is one of them. So for me it's not so much about backing out of the standards, for me it's more a conversation of making sure our school boards are doing their job. And what's the curriculum that we're going to deliver, to make sure that we're meeting at least, and hopefully exceeding, as in the case of Douglas County who recently passed a resolution that said basically the Common Core State Standards are irrelevant in Douglas County, because they've pegged their standards higher than the Common Core State Standards.

[0:01:48.003]

And so I think your question is really a thoughtful one that we need to be careful about because pulling out of that asks all of our school districts to turn a direction, and without knowing what that new direction would be, I think that's a really difficult place to put school districts, to put school boards, and most importantly for me, to put us, because that throws us in chaos for, I would suspect probably the next decade, where again we can't compare how well our students are doing to other schools.

And quite frankly, part of the reason the teachers' unions in the United States are against the Common Core State Standards, in my opinion, is because they want to do just that. They want to throw us in flux for the next ten years, so that we spend the next ten years talking

about what should the new set of standards be, instead of figuring out how do we make our children more successful. What systems do we need to put in place, and I agree. In Massachusetts and Colorado, they're going to be different. In Jefferson County, they're going to be different on the east side of the county, than they are going to be on the west side of the county.

So I think that's a really important conversation, and I worry for the loudness of the conversation – that states need to pull out of the Common Core State Standards, and pull out of the Assessments – those groups -- because I think it puts us in a state of flux without – as we've heard all weekend – you have to have the new vision.

If you can tell me where you'd prefer to go, and what standards you'd prefer to have, I think that's a logical conversation. But without some new conversation to have, and a way to measure that, and again in Colorado that's taken us a little over a decade to get there, many other states the same timeframe – I think we need to tread very carefully. And I'll come back to my final analogy. Go ahead.

Track 020

Bob Schaffer

Jim, there's here in Colorado, there's some rumbling, probably not enough to put a question in front of the legislature or the state board any time soon, about Colorado pulling out of Common Core, and the PARCC Assessments. This discussion has become very relevant in Indiana, as the leadership has changed. You've got a new governor, a new state-wide superintendent of education. Michigan's having this discussion. Some states never went in. Texas being a good example. But for these states that are considering reversing direction on Common Core, and Consortium assessment strategies, is it a function just of the merits of the debate, or is there more to it?

Track 021

Jim Stergios

Yes, I think it's a great question. If I could, just two very quick points. Again I would just like to just correct that the Common Core is not a floor, though. It is verbatim, 85% -- that's what gets tested, and that will be in the classroom.

Second is the American Federation of Teachers, headed up by Randi Weingarten, is for Common Core – they're only for putting off the test one year.

The National Education Association, the largest teachers' union in the country, is for Common Core – has participated in their 21st Century Skills Task Force, and in other things. So they're not against this.

I don't disagree on the testing, when it comes down to the test, they'll want to blow that up so they can't be tested and held accountable. I agree with that.

Track 022

Bob Schaffer

Jim, on this question. I think it's possibly both of you may be right. I'd like you to speak to this, and that it is instructed to states that they are to adopt these standards as a state, but that from a state perspective, go into the districts, it is a minimum floor, so that the state commits to setting a minimum floor, but what people down in Denver tell my school and my district and others, is that this is the floor, you as a school will shoot higher. You should establish standards that are higher.

Track 023

Joe Stergios

I complete agree, I'm just saying that when the tests are put into place, and the tests only test on what is part of Common Core, your teachers will not teach that, because they will be evaluated in part on that, so [clapping]

Track 024

Joe Stergios

Your question, though, was about the reality about where we are now. So, you're part of PARCC. PARCC has had five states pull out of its assessments consortium over the past four months. I believe that includes Georgia most recently. Michigan has been put on hold any implementation. Indiana has put everything on hold. As a result, the cost for PARCC will

continue to go up, because there will be fewer students participating in that, fewer dollars flowing through, so it's going to become even more costly.

I think that is why legislators now, only now, are catching up with this conversation, because the costs are now coming through. It might surprise you, folks, but Common Core was advanced without a cost estimate. [groans] The first organization to do it was Pioneer Institute. We hired one of the most recognized cost gurus – assessment gurus – in the country. He did an analysis. He said basis about \$16 billion.

You might say that's worth it for the kids – right – you can make that judgment. But again I would make the judgment it's for community college readiness, and I'm not really ready to pay \$16 billion for that.

[0:01:9.097]

The second issue that is really cropping up all over the place, and this is something that speaks to moms, is, if you look at Indiana, Utah, now Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, Georgia – the moms are organizing. And that is something that flows back through constituent services, back to legislators, where they're hearing, "What! You're doing this?"

Speaker Shannon, in Oklahoma, was I think tepidly for Common Core up until I think this past spring. And he said, "I've never received more letters, more Facebook messages from moms on any issue during my entire career. I'm against it now."

I think that's what's happening – that people are catching up with the knowledge, because moms are seeing the stuff that's coming home with their kids.

I'm not blaming Common Core for all that. OK? Because that's a curricular decision made in implementing Common Core, but Common Core has opened up the door to a lot weaker stuff – a lot of the constructivist stuff. You cannot blame Common Core for that. That's local officials. OK? So let's be honest about that. But Common Core certainly has not helped in that regard. It's lowered the bar for many states. So it hasn't helped on that front either.

So I think where we are is, folks are facing over the next couple months a couple things: more costs coming out at the local level – at the state level where state legislators have to vote for a budget to fund this.

California, part of the \$6 billion tax increase is going to Common Core. Tony Bennet, who is the state superintendent in Indiana, moved to Florida after he lost the election on Common Core, by the way. Got there. He was just fired, or resigned, excuse me – in part because he realized he had \$400 million additional cost to Florida because he had to implement Common Core. He said, "no, no no. There won't be more cost." but, yes there are costs, folks.

[0:02:57.106]

That's a big issue. The second thing is that there are organizationally at the grassroots level, whether it's the Eagle Forum, whether it's Moms, whether it's all these organizations called Utahans Against Common Core, Indianans Hoosier Against Common Core – they're flowering. It is a very robust set of folks, and I think legislators are beginning to feel that pinch as well.

That's related to content.

Track 025

Laura Boggs

That's a – I'm going to jump for a second. Being the mom of two children, a sophomore and a senior, and yes I send them out to drive to a really lousy school every day [laughter].

Is there a really tall building I can jump off of?

One of the good things about the Common Core State Standards conversations is, it is engaging our parents again. We've gone about two decades, I think, with working families where mom's working, and dad's working, or the last couple of years, somebody's unemployed and looking for a job. And I think, on us again, is our reticence over the last two decades to watch what's happening in public schools.

So one of the good things about the Common Core State Standards debate is that it has woken up our moms – and dads. And grandmas and grandpas – 'cause they usually are the ones with the time on their hands, so grandmas and grandpas get involved as well.

But I think a lot of that is the fear of the federal government being involved, and I think this room knows better than any other, we have to be ever vigilant if we are going to keep our republic -- to the federal government getting involved.

But my question to those moms is: what about the standards don't you like? And if you don't like something about the standards, elect a school board like we did in Douglas County who will raise the bar. It's not the base of the standards that mummies don't like. In some cases it's that it is not high enough.

OK. That's fine. But I think we need to be very careful about which conversations we're having, because while we're a parent, watching the stars, and the sky is falling on Common Core State Standards, we're opening our castle doors to changes in curriculum, and that's where the battle should be fought. And to a national database called InBloom, which Jeffco is

piloting, as well as the state of Colorado. And that's another place where lots of states have pulled out. But your grandchildren's data, is going to be put in this national InBloom database, funded by the Gates Family Foundation, and that's marching forward while we're having this Common Core State Standards conversation.

And I'm not saying we're not smart enough to have lots of different conversations. But make sure that you're having the right conversations -- and that you know what it is you're for or against, and where to fight that.

Track 026

Bob Schaffer

I want to finish with my questions, and I've gone over our schedule here a little bit on this portion. I think it's gone alright. Everybody agree? Good. Because after this we'll take some question from the floor -- and that is on this question of curriculum, because that is really the sacred ground in education. Our state constitution forbids your state legislators and the state government from establishing a curriculum. That is not the case in every state, by the way. So how this applies is a different question for the Common Core people state to state.

But there are many states, we being one, and it's enforced fairly well by our courts -- that curriculum development belongs specifically and exclusively in the debate of state board members.

Some say that if you are designing the standards and the test, the thing in the middle is the curriculum; and if you can define those well enough that you have pretty well defined the curriculum as well. But not everyone agrees with that assessment, and so I would like Jim, you to start off on this question.

And let me add one more thing. *The Denver Post*, on Thursday morning [Aug. 22, 2013] opined on their editorial page, in support of Common Core, basically saying: Alright people in Colorado, there's no debate here, just move forward. Adopt them, embrace them and stop whining.

And it said in the editorial that districts still control curriculum so that's what's really important, and this debate isn't so urgent on that basis.

So let's talk about the most important piece. How is curriculum affected by Common Core Standards, national consortium assessments. Is it still a free world for curriculum development?

Track 027

Jim Stergios

And I think the answer is a little muddy, but yes it has certainly an impact. I'd start by saying the following.

If you listen to Common Core proponents themselves, they say it is game changing in terms of what it will do for the curricula around the country. Well, OK, let's take them at face value to some extent. But let's look at it at a more granular level. And what you're saying about Colorado is actually true of many states, where districts have local control – Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and all that sort of stuff.

First and foremost the testing consortia that are developing the tests – in their applications to the federal government for funding –about \$350 million – they actually say, “we will develop curricular materials and instructional practice guides” – explicitly say that. Go look at the applications yourselves.

OK, so will it have an impact? Sure. Sure it will. Will it dictate? No.

But let's go a little bit further.

How many people are proponents of school choice? How many of you actually have your children in a school of choice? Thank you for doing what you're doing.

Alright, Indiana. Little story. The whole blow-up over Common Core, how does it get started? It starts with a woman named Heather Crossen, who's a mom of a kid in a Catholic school. He's a 4th grader, and he comes home with some really lousy math, and she starts saying, “How can I change that?” And the principal said, “Well, this is just wonderful stuff. You just don't understand it, Mrs. Crossen.” “Well, I really don't like it. It's kind of crazy stuff. It's very constructivist. I just don't want to see it.” Goes back, he says, “Now I'm sorry, you can't. You have to talk to your state representative.” She talks to the state representative Board of Ed, all the way up. And they say, “Well, we're part of Common Core. It's what we've adopted as part of Common Core.” It's like, what do you call - a 1-800 number in D.C. to change it?

Prior to the voucher law that passed in Indiana, Catholic schools could do whatever they wanted to do. But as part of the voucher law, they had to adopt state tests, which then were the national test. OK?

Now what's the problem there? Catholic schools used norm-referenced tests, generally speaking. Tests that are not attached to a specific curricular choice; because they're used by a vast array of different schools of choice. You can't say that all schools have the same curriculum, so you try to pick up things like aptitude, basic knowledge, analytic skills, that sort of thing.

Common Core's tests are very different, Folks. These are tests that are designed to drive curriculum. They are not norm-referenced tests. So is it clear they dictate what the various curricula will be? No. You cannot say that. They certainly drive it in a certain direction. They make all sorts of choices about how much non-fiction, how much fiction, the kinds of non-fiction. They make very specific choices about where Algebra 1 is. Will you actually get to Calculus? Where's Trigonometry? They make a specific choice about how to teach geometry. All of us learned side/angle/side – Euclidian traditional geometry (get that little thing going in your head – I think they remember it) – that's changed.

There's an experimental approach that's never been successfully been used at the K-12 level they're using. These are curricular choices – yes. Is it across the board? No. So I don't want to over-state what it is, but Yes – it's a big impact.

Track 028

Laura Boggs

I appreciate your being honest about where that line in the sand is drawn, because as we know in Colorado, Douglas County has raised the bar, and truly treats Common Core State Standards as a base.

Bob Schaffer

LPR graduates, by the way, in Douglas County on the Board.

Laura Boggs

Lots of LPR graduates. So when those LPR graduates stood up before, I expect to see every one of your names on the ballot in 65 days, because truly this program does raise good school board members.

But I think one of the interesting conversations in this free market crowd is: What kind of curriculum choices will we have, in a world where I now know as an entrepreneur, I can write books, and sell them across 50 states, where five years ago if I wrote a textbook, I may not be able to sell it in more than one, because I may not be able to convince any single school board to buy that book.

Does it not open some entrepreneurial opportunities, and give us some opportunities to have much broader curriculum choices in our free-market environment now, than we might have had before? [inaudible from audience] No? [inaudible from audience] OK.

So free markets don't drive entrepreneurial opportunities? That's an interesting conversation in this group. [from audience: it's not a free market]

Well when you know what your standards are, I would pretend that it absolutely is a free market. You still get to go to your school board. Bob's telling me I have to behave. [laughter]

Bob Schaffer

Keep going. The floor's yours.

Laura Boggs

I think it's a conversation worth having, because lots of the entrepreneurs in the education space that I met over the last four years are excited about the opportunities to write textbooks; to do blended learning, quite frankly; to be able to, wouldn't it be cool if every child across the United States had the opportunity to go to Liberty Commons, because Bob could broadcast into all 50 states? And there's some level of assurance in your local school boards that he's at least meeting the base of the Common Core State Standards, so your school boards aren't [] out to me the direction that we're going in public education.

And with a senior, I'm particularly interested in this conversation. Are Colleges worth the investment? Shouldn't we be able to take some of the best practices in some of our best schools across the nation and make that generally available to other students across the country?

And I would say thank you for being honest about where that line's actually drawn in curriculum. And I think this is an interesting piece of the conversation.

Track 029

Bob Schaffer

OK. In my opinion the most important issue confronting our country is public education; and whenever I have been at gatherings like this, and throw the microphone open to the floor,

it is possible that people want to tell us about their school, and where they send their kids, give us opinion.

So there's a roving microphone, and my only request is that: frame your question in the form of a question. [laughter]

Track 030

[1st person – Mr. Corins - with a question]

You mean I can't make a speech first, Bob?

You know it's been interesting to me, in listening to this discussion, and I've listened to many over the years, we talk about education in terms of process and statistics. We don't talk in terms of educating students. I was fortunate enough after a forty-year business career, to teach at the Business School at UNC. And I was appalled by the fact that here are college students without the ability, in a lot of cases, to get up on their feet, and discuss and defend an issue, or write about it in a way that is coherently understood by most people.

So we're not educating people. We are passing them through a system. And this is something that hasn't gone on in the last ten years. It's gone on for the last 60 years.

Bob Schaffer

So Mr. Corins, the question is....[laughter]

1st question – Mr. Corins

The question is: We've got to destroy the system that exists today, and change the whole educational system [clapping] beginning with statistical measurements, in my opinion, is not a way to change the educational system.

Bob Schaffer

So if the answer was yes, would that satisfy you?

1st question – Mr. Corins

It's about time that we looked at education, not as a process, but as a fundamental end to create an educated citizenry. We haven't done that.

Is Massachusetts trying to do something completely different?

I graduated from Boston English High School. So I'm familiar with Massachusetts. [?] to change the educational process.

Track 031

Jim Stergios

Look, I first would say, thank you for sponsoring a table and supporting Steamboat's work.

The second thing I would say is I will disagree with you on standardized tests, in terms of they play a very important role, but they are the end of the pipe, and you are precisely right about that. And here's where I think Massachusetts does have an important role.

Every state has to do it in a way that is right for them. And that is, from our state constitution, John Adams in 1780, outlined that we must cherish public education and literature. Alright, that is something unique to our culture, so to your point. We have strongly believed in setting up our standards that we would have people read *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*. They will read *Jane Eyre*. They will read really high-quality literature, if they are African American, Asian American, or sort of Syrian-Greek, mixed mutt that I am and my kids are. So, we've really focused on making sure they are human beings who can participate in our civic culture, as well as ready for international competitiveness, which we always hear about. So I completely agree with you on that.

Let me just take a couple other quick things if I could. In terms of when you – before going into questions, you said, "Public education is the number one issue." Folks, it is the number one issue. And we have ceded it to the democrats. And we've allowed Common Core to separate us. We are for more school choice built around kids – what kids' specific needs are, and they are very different – not having a once-size-fits-all so that school choice of any kind all leads to the same curriculum. That's what we're for.

We are for measurement and accountability. And we're for lots of flexibility. That's what we're for. We're not for having the federal government tell us how to do it. We're not for a national curriculum.

Finland has a national curriculum. It's the size of Massachusetts. OK?

If you have a national curriculum, or you don't have a national curriculum; a national set of standards, or not a national set of standards; internationally there's no indication in the data that says you'll do better or worse.

This is all a bunch of – a huge distraction, I believe. We should be working with stuff that Laura was talking about before, which is, at the granular level making sure the kids are getting access to great, high quality liberal arts content – we're allowing for much more expansion of E-learning. Your program can be expanded. Hard decisions turning around schools. Holding them accountable.

This is separating us, folks.

Track 032

Laura Boggs

And I would say thank you for that, seriously. This is an opportunity for us to win the conversation.

I was in an interesting meeting in Denver. All the people that run for school board in Denver are democrats. But some are reform democrats, and some are not reform democrats. And I was in a meeting of republicans, where one of the reform democrats was asking for our support, and he said this. So this is the democrats telling us this: Republicans have always led the conversations about making public schools better. We lead in voucher conversations. We lead in choice conversations. We lead in getting rid of teacher tenure conversations. We lead in getting rid of union control conversations. Republicans have always led. And we can do it in a way that both sides understand, because we understand the measurements and the goals, and the objectives and the process. But we can say it in a way, what's fair? How do we give the underdogs their chance?

Public education allows us, if we choose to, to come together, and Jim just said, have those underdog conversations, have those fairness conversations, which opens the tents and rings everybody together – democrats, republicans and unaffiliateds – and allows us to control the conversation, and really move it forward, if we'll stay together.

Track 033

Bob Schaffer

So we've got time for one, maybe two more questions. The microphone is right there.

2nd question – Mr. ?

Hi. Thank you for coming. My question's based sort of back to your statement of free market. This is geared towards that.

With me it sounds more like this is crony capitalism, and we're going to set up a government program to initiate a free market system of choice and what-not. When at the end of the day, why is this debate not geared more towards private testing, from private companies? That would seem to have more of an incentive to keep their standards incredibly high -- so that schools can gauge off of that, as opposed to a government program that, in the future like you said, it's at the whim of each elected council. And why would they not tweak their tests down to make their children, or make the entire state's children look better? When a private company could very well do a much better job at that.

Track 034

Laura Boggs

I think that's a great conversation. And to Congressman Schaffer's point before, our legislature in Colorado did require the State Board of Education to make a choice, but only for one year. So I actually have some acquaintances on the State Board of Education, and I think one of the conversations that's better to have in Colorado is, maybe Colorado needs to go to Iowa Basics. Maybe we need to pull out of PARCC, and go to an Iowa Basics. I don't know how well we would do. We would have to norm that. And I believe that your local school board, because we have local control, could say, if you had the right school board, again Douglas County's going in this direction: We're more interested in what our PS and TIMSS tests are, than we are in what our PARCC test scores are.

And if you can have that literate conversation with your community, and get enough of your business people to give enough money, because in general unions buy school board races. So if your business people are on board with this, and running the right candidates you can have those conversation. I think that's an absolutely great point. Different from the entrepreneurialism of the curriculum, but I think that's an absolutely great point.

Track 035

Bob Schaffer

Jim, let me ask you to respond. We've got to engineer a 6-minutes stop here. So let me ask you to respond to that question, and fold in some closing remarks, and then I'll let Laura have the last word, and we'll finish at 10:45.

Track 036

Jim Stergios

Absolutely. Free markets does not mean one standard across all states. Those are very different conversations. If a vendor cannot come in and customize a product for Massachusetts students, I'm not interested in that vendor. You have to have flexibility and creativity to do that sort of thing.

So we can actually pass this sort of difficulty – there are difficulty analysis you can do for all kinds of tests, to make sure that different states are at comparable levels. It's easy to do. But if a vendor comes to me and says I can't do a test for you in Massachusetts, because, guess what, I need all of New England to get – I also need the west coast.

That seems to me to be baking in only the largest assessment companies who buy their way into the process. In fact, the largest assessment company is Pierson and others, are very much supportive of Common Core, because they want to have one national market. They don't want to have to deal with parents, and teachers, and all that sort of stuff.

And while that is sometimes, I think, you know there's a hard discussions to have, I'm very protective of our kids. I do believe that it's public education, that we have to have a place where there's accountability to those people who are actually doing the work; and that means people that are elected and appointed within Massachusetts.

Look, I don't have any closing remarks, Bob, besides saying the following:

Public education *is* the number one issue that we are facing.

Do not buy in a bottle reform, whether it's from the federal government, or from frankly Jeb Bush -- his Florida approach to education reform.

You as a state have to do the hard work, and deliberate and engage. Have the conversations to craft your own way. You are a lab of innovation. You have shown in the past the ability to create good standards. You also need to create good tests. You need more choice. Those are the things to fight for.

And frankly, if you get diverted with all this stuff on Common Core, and implementation, and processes, and processes, and processes around Common Core, you're diverting a lot of attention from expanding the number of schools that are like yours.

But Massachusetts has done pretty well in public education. The reason I say, is a simple reason. Massachusetts public education has done pretty well, *vis-à-vis* the rest of the country. Our charter schools have implemented all of the reforms we put into place, that many of our district schools have not wanted to. And guess what the result is? Stanford University is not a great friend to charter schools, nor an enemy. They are very much an objective arbiter. And they came out with their report in March that said: Massachusetts charter schools, those choice schools, are the very best charter schools in the entire country.

Take this back home with you, in terms of what your schools can do.

Our Boston charter schools, in nine months, the academic year, provide an additional 13 months of learning in math, and additional 12 months of learning in English Language Arts. That is what is possible through choice, and modest, though important work, at the state level on standards.

Going to Common Core and diverting attention, is it a problem? But also setting a weaker set of standards for our charter schools as well – is a big problem.

When all the school choice leads to the same curriculum, I think we are doing a disservice to one of our key platforms, which is school choice. [applause]

Track 037

Bob Schaffer

Laura Boggs, you get the closing remarks.

Laura Boggs

I would agree that our efforts and energies need to be spent somewhere other than Common Core State Standards. That being said, I want to thank the Steamboat Institute for putting this on the agenda. This is not an easy conversation to have.

You each need to finish up, go upstairs, look in your mirror, or look in your rear view mirror, and understand that if you personally don't get involved in this conversation, no one else will.

I would never have imagined that I could be the little puppy on this stage, four years ago. I was just a pissed-off mom. So

Bob Schaffer

I love pissed-off moms. [laughter] That's what it takes.

Laura Boggs

who had the good fortune to be mentored by some great people. So whether it's my good friend Donna, who I expect to get an email from saying she's running for the board of education in Texas, or any one of you in here, especially in Colorado. Those applications for board of education people are due in the next week. By this Friday, you have to have picked up your petition, and gotten at least 50 validated or 25 in smaller school districts.

So I'm going to close by asking you to do this – PLEASE do more than just being part of this conversation. I'm going to ask you to think about doing one of three things, or all three

Number one: Run for your school board, whether that's local or state. If we don't take this back, we lose this country.

Number two: Donate cash or time to somebody who is, because in most cases your unions are spending lots of money to make sure that you are not part of this conversation.

And Number three: Advance this conversation of choice. Get out of the cognitive dissonance that we all have about where we're sending our children, ask God for His forgiveness if that's your mode, that you're sending your children into the cesspool of public education [laughter] – oh my [] my friends are going to love me. But be real about where we are. And advocate for the choices, because only in a free market, will we force the ability to give parents the opportunity to send their child to a school that works, no matter what their zip code is. [applause]

END OF TRANSCRIPT

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