

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview.
Short Film: “Secretary of Education Contradicts Herself” (10–12 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Goal

In this short (5:35) film, interviewer Jan Helfeld tries to pin down former Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings on why she thinks the U.S. government should be involved in education.

***Note:** Spellings served under President George W. Bush, from 2005–2009. She was in some ways “conservative” and was heavily criticized by leftists/statists, but she doesn’t come off as very principled about government’s legitimate role and following the Constitution in this short interview.*

Instructions

1. Play the short film above here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jv4M7Ae5728>, and tell students to take notes.
2. Have students in pairs/groups discuss for 3–5 minutes, and then discuss as a class.

Debrief/Wrap-Up Questions

1. What is the main point that Helfeld (the interviewer) is trying to make? ***That since the Constitution doesn’t give the U.S. government the power to be involved in education...it shouldn’t be involved in education!***
2. How do Article I, Section 8 and the Tenth Amendment apply to this discussion on education? ***Article I, Section 8 doesn’t give the U.S. government power to get into education, so it should stay out of it, to repeat. The Tenth Amendment doubles down and says that if a power isn’t listed in the Constitution specifically, it’s prohibited.***
3. What does the word *pragmatist*, which Spellings keeps using, mean? What does Helfeld point out is off with her claiming this and saying she wants to obey the Constitution? ***A pragmatist is somebody who acts practically. Spellings says she’s a “political pragmatist,” meaning that there are others who want the Department of Education to continue, so she doesn’t want to fight against it, claiming that it’s not practical. But Helfeld very reasonably asks, “Aren’t you supposed to obey the Constitution? Why is that not “pragmatic”?!?!”***
4. What is your reaction to Spellings’s statement “The Constitution doesn’t say that the federal government *can’t* get involved in education? ***This is an incredibly naïve/uninformed/ridiculous thing to say, especially for a high-ranking U.S. government official. It shows that either she has no idea that the Ninth Amendment exists, or that she doesn’t care.***