

## **Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits:**

### **Will They Promote or Destroy Educational Freedom?**

**by**

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For many years now, conservatives have pinned their hopes on vouchers and tuition tax credits as the means of improving education in America. The theory is that by giving parents through government subsidies the financial means of patronizing private schools, the public schools will be forced through competition to improve their academic programs. It is also argued that government vouchers would give parents the ability to choose a school other than the assigned public school for their children.

The major problem with such a plan is that it would inevitably lead to government regulation and control of private education. Proponents of voucher plans argue that stipulations can be put into the law forbidding government regulation of the private schools. But as we all know, courts have ruled quite decisively that acceptance of government money obliges the recipients to accept government regulation. To assume that one can escape the inevitable when all of previous experience has indicated otherwise is to court disaster.

For example, when the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that tax dollars through vouchers could be used at religious schools, it left wide open the very strong probability that regulations of some sort would accompany those voucher payments. The court has already ruled that "the participating private schools must select on a random basis the students attending their schools." Private schools have always enjoyed the freedom to choose the pupils they want to attend their schools. This is one of the keys to their superiority to the public schools. But with vouchers all of that will change, for the court has decided that in order to get government money the private schools must become more like the public schools. And this is only the beginning.

LLewellyn Rockwell, in an insightful article in *Chronicles* (Sep. '98) about the Wisconsin situation, writes:

"What are the problems with vouchers? First, there is the eligibility criteria for students. The money is not available for the children of middle-class parents who actually pay the taxes that support public schools. It is available only for those the government defines as 'poor,' the very group that already enjoys vast subsidies in the form of free medical care, housing, daycare, food, and cash. Vouchers represent not a shrinkage of this welfare state but an expansion, the equivalent of food stamps for private school. . . . No matter how you slice it, vouchers represent more welfare, another free lunch for the underclass."

The aim of conservatives should be to get the government out of the education business, not more deeply involved in it. The last thing conservatives should want is a plan that will inevitably expand government's role in education. We already have too much of it, and Republicans haven't helped by increasing the budget of the federal Department of Education instead of abolishing it.

The goal of conservatives should be more educational freedom, and that can only be achieved by reducing government's role in education. It is government's intrusion in education that has led to this perpetual education crisis that requires billions of federal dollars to solve it. But the simple truth is that the more money the government puts into education, the worse it gets. Why? Because the educational malpractice that is now so much a part of the system is very expensive and requires additional billions of dollars every year to sustain it at a level the establishment finds necessary.

Here's a statistic that may explain why the education crisis must continue indefinitely. In 1950, colleges of education awarded 61,000 bachelor's degrees and about 20,000 master's degrees. In 1980, colleges awarded 118,000 bachelor's degrees and 103,000 master's degrees. I shudder to think what the 1990 statistics are or what the year 2000 statistics will be. Who knows how many thousands of doctors of education are now functioning in the system to keep it dysfunctional. That is why educational malpractice is absolutely necessary: to keep all of these doctors and masters of

education fully employed.

To give you an idea of what these masters and doctors of education have been doing for the last thirty years, here's a little quote from the NEA's "Forecast for the Seventies" published in January 1969:

"Biochemical and psychological mediation of learning is likely to increase. New drama will play on the educational stage as drugs are introduced experimentally to improve in the learner such qualities as personality, concentration, and memory. . . . Schools are becoming 'clinics' whose purpose is to provide psycho-social 'treatment' for the student. . . . Ten years from now, faculties will include . . . biochemical therapist-pharmacists whose services increase as biochemical therapy and memory-improvement chemicals are introduced more widely."

Well, here we are thirty years later, and four million students are on Ritalin, a powerful mind and mood altering drug. What can we forecast for the year 2010?

Proponents of vouchers claim that such subsidies will permit parents to choose the kind of education they want their children to have. But parents already have a choice. They can indeed send their children to private schools if they want to, or they can even home-school them if they want to. But then the argument is made that it's not financially feasible for most parents to take advantage of the free choices that now exist and that vouchers would address that problem.

To that argument I say, nonsense. Most people in the middle class could easily afford a private school for their children if they really were concerned enough. The trouble is that most parents willingly accept the government schools because they have been "educated" or brainwashed to believe that sending your child to a government school is tantamount to being a good parent. Also, there are those real estate agents who never hesitate to tout the supposed "superb" public schools in their community in order to sell houses.

But the fact that thousands of parents have withdrawn their children from public schools and are now home-schooling them indicates that truly concerned parents do



not need a voucher plan to help them make intelligent decisions about the education of their children.

Another well known argument of the proponents of vouchers is that such financial aid from the government would help the poor seek private schools for their children. Certainly, black children in the inner cities have been the prime victims of public education. But what they need are private vouchers from private sources to help them escape the fate of the underclass. Already, private groups, instead of waiting for government vouchers to be approved against the fierce opposition of the NEA, the AFT, and President Clinton and his wife It Takes a Village, have set up voucher plans that are already helping thousands of youngsters get the best education available in the private sector.

One must wonder why it is so difficult for Republican politicians to understand the concept of educational freedom. Perhaps they believe that the public would find it too hard to understand. So they talk about "choice" in education, rather than freedom of education. They prefer to use the language, semantics, and vocabulary of the left to create policies inimical to the concept of educational freedom. The latter poses a challenge to statism. "Choice" does not. It merely means that parents have a choice of government sanctioned educational programs and facilities.

When we fight for educational freedom, we are struggling to roll back the encroachment of the state in our lives. A government education system is the sine qua non of statism. It is what the government must have if it is to mold our citizens into the compliant servants of the state. Thus it ought to surprise no one that America's most totalitarian statists are using public education as the means of getting socialized medicine implemented in America. Our public schools are being turned into a human resources development system, better known as Outcome Based Education, which is very much like the education systems that existed in communist countries.

But our system will be much more efficient because it will have a computerized data-collection system that will enable the government to maintain the most thorough dossier on every American ever put together by a bureaucracy. The fact that some of our largest private corporations are working with the government to restructure our

education system and put all of this in place is an ominous sign that we are headed toward a combined fascist-socialist system run by a universitarian elite. That is why it is so important for us to maintain what is still free in our society and to do all in our power to prevent any further spread of the government octopus.

It is absurd for the education policy of conservatives to be decided by a section of the population that has become addicted to government aid. Vouchers, as a supplementary form of welfare, might be justified as a means of getting people eventually off welfare. And I doubt that it will do even that. But it isn't the solution for the middle class which can well afford the costs of private education if they will simply rearrange their family priorities. And when we speak of private education, we are not talking about the expensive prep schools patronized by the rich. We are talking about the many modestly priced private schools that exist all over this country.

Catholic and Christian school tuition costs fall far below the cost of public education to the taxpayer. For example, in Boston, while it costs an average of \$5,000 per pupil in the public schools, it only costs \$1,600 in the parochial elementary schools and \$3,500 in the secondary schools. And home-schooling is a lot cheaper!

As Lew Rockwell writes: "Vouchers have much in common with socialism. They both rely on government plans, government-issued coupons, vast expense, and invasions of private space. . . . [V]ouchers reinforce the twin evils of public education: involuntary funding and compulsory attendance. . . . The free market always provides the most choice and parental satisfaction. . . . The free ride at taxpayer expense has not worked in any other area of social and economic policy. We should not expect anything but harm when the same theory is applied to education."

And so, if conservatives are serious about lessening the intrusion of government in our lives, there is no better place to work for freedom than in education, in short to work for the separation of school and state. In the long run it will save taxpayers billions of dollars and result in better education for all. But most important of all, it will permit us to preserve this precious heritage of freedom to pass on to future generations of Americans.