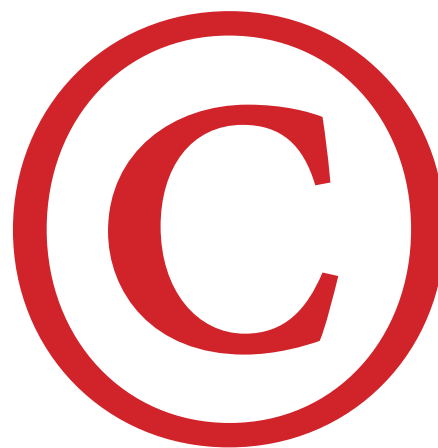


THIS MATERIAL
PROTECTED UNDER
U.S. COPYRIGHT
ACT TITLE 17



The Salt Lake Tribune

Voters rejected fallacious arguments of voucher advocates

David R. Keller

Article Launched: 11/18/2007 12:00:00 AM MST

The stunning defeat of the voucher referendum, by the electorate most likely to pass it, starkly illustrates the necessity to balance individual freedom with the common good.

What lessons can be learned? Both Patrick Byrne and Paul Mero have been vocal supporters of vouchers. The arguments they made at a forum at Utah Valley State College in October reveal the negligence of voucher proponents to address the question of whether vouchers are consistent with the principles of pluralism and democracy.

Byrne, a wealthy capitalist, couched his argument in economic terms. He claimed that public education is a monopoly, monopolies retard competition, and therefore portions of public education should be privatized.

This argument fails because free markets are not palliative to every ill that afflicts the human condition. Some social services are

too important to be handed over to profiteers. A few examples are police, fire, military, commercial regulations and environmental protections, and transportation.

Mero, president of The Sutherland Institute, couched his argument in libertarian terms. He claimed that education is a parental right and not a governmental responsibility. This argument fails because parental choice in shaping children's destinies is not some unqualified moral good. Parents cannot do anything they wish.

The essence of civil society is the restriction of some freedoms for the sake of social integrity. We call such checks etiquette, ethics, and law.

The disingenuousness of voucher advocates eventually became evident. They seemed less concerned about poor families than their desire to push ideologically biased curricula using public money. Since they pay taxes, they seemed to reason that they should be able to determine exactly how their education dollars are spent.

This view of the proper use of public money is absurd. The imperfect reality of living with other people is that broad consensus does not always accord with individual preference. Our tax money often pays for measures we don't agree with, like expensive and unnecessary wars.

Advertisement

A bright idea in online advertising.
PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.

FormatDynamics®

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

The Salt Lake Tribune

It would be foolish not to be suspicious about the quality of voucher-based education. What guarantee is there, for example, that such an education would not omit the study of the scientific laws of evolution in favor of the mysterious intervention of some supernatural being as the explanation for biodiversity? None. Such an academic program would be indoctrination, not education.

The voucher issue has not really been about economics or parental rights. It has been about the desire by some special interest groups for separation and segregation from the polity, which, we have painfully learned as a nation, bodes ill for cultivating a shared sense of humanity.

Contributing citizens must be able to translate the private language of personal life into terminology appropriate for public discourse. The purpose of public education is to provide each person, regardless of class, race, religion, nationality, and so on, with the knowledge and skills to stand in the public square and engage in dialogue with others. Globalism raises the bar.

The edifice of democracy is built upon the foundation of a well-educated citizenry. Shoring up this foundation must be a community effort and not be left to the caprice of free markets or personal whim.

Students are not stacks of Oreos to be moved around like poker chips.

The United States is founded on an ingenious principle that is perhaps the greatest political innovation in the history of human civilization. That principle upholds liberty to the point at which the exercise of that liberty imperils others and the social fabric that stitches us together.

Voters were prescient to see that vouchers crossed that sacred line. Vouchers are a bad idea that died a deserved death and ought not be resuscitated, ever.

* DAVID R. KELLER is director of the Center for the Study of Ethics at Utah Valley State College.

Advertisement



A bright idea in online advertising.

PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.



FormatDynamics®

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™