

New D-11 board member should support vouchers

Congratulations, Sandra Mann. You got way more votes than anybody else for District 11 school board, and you pulled Tami Hasling and John Gudvangen in along with you. Your side won, and my side lost. As someone who is trying to be gracious in defeat, I have just one request. Defect now. Give us vouchers.

You don't have to be a conservative Christian or a pro-freedom libertarian to support vouchers. There are all sorts of reasons why dyed-in-the-wool liberals and pragmatic Democrats should want them, too.

Vouchers can help reduce school segregation. People love to believe that public schools are an economic and social equalizer. Unfortunately, the evidence says otherwise. A recent Gazette article comparing school quality across districts drew the inescapable conclusion: Schools in richer districts do a lot better than schools in poorer districts. News flash: Moon implicated in tides. Film at 11.

We have gross inequality between schools because, right now, only the rich have choice. Want your kid to go to Cheyenne Mountain schools? Buy a house in the Broadmoor. Out of your league? Well, if you've at least got enough money to afford a home, you can choose once by buying into what you hope is a "good" district and then hope that things work out.

For the poor, who are happy if they can find a decent apartment and a job not too far away, whatever school they've got is what their kids are stuck with. All they can do is hope for the best.

Does anyone seriously think we should fund any other social good this way? Should we have "medical districts" where property taxes go to support a public hospital in your area where you go when you're sick? How about "food districts" where income taxes go to support a public grocery store where you do your shopping for the week? Try to campaign on that kind of platform and see how far you get.

Vouchers won't completely decouple where parents live from where they send their kids to school. Most parents won't want to send their kids too far away from home during the school day. But vouchers will make it more likely that good schools will appear in poorer neighborhoods, be-



OPINION
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cause vouchers will make a market for them. Best of all, vouchers will help education get better and cheaper every year, something no other education reform offers. That's the best way to help the worst off.

If you're opposed to vouchers, I invite you to research the question of school funding inequality on your own. I think you'll find, as I did, that the situation is so unfair that vouchers are worth a try.

But there's another reason to support vouchers even if you're not a conservative. They will keep "intelligent design" out of your kids' science classroom. Permanently.

I am a public critic of ID. I may not like it that we have monopoly schools, but as long as we do they should be teaching the best science we know. That's evolution, pure and simple. But Christians aren't fighting this battle to force their beliefs down anyone else's throat. They're fighting to teach what they believe to their kids in the schools they pay taxes to support. Sure, they'll eventually lose, but what a waste of time and effort. They (and we) deserve vouchers.

Imagine, if you're a parent worried about the influence of the religious right, what a post-voucher world might be like. You could send your child to a school that is committed to teaching evolution, one that will never permit ID or creationism anywhere near a biology class. For that matter, they might have Planned Parenthood give presentations on a different topic every month.

At the same time, your Christian neighbors who find such things repugnant could send their children to schools that reinforce their values. Why not? Monopoly schooling leads to extremes: Extremes of boredom from dumbing down to the lowest common denominator, and extremes of conflict like the fight over evolution versus ID. I prefer the middle ground of pluralism. Liberals do too. Or at least they used to.

So come on over, Ms. Mann. One side's traitor is another side's hero. I know that almost no one has ever defected from a winning side in a D-11 election before. But there's always a second time.

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