

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
PRESS RELEASE 876
SCHOOL CHOICE AND SEGREGATION.**

In America, as in Australia, the ‘School Choice’ movement of the private, religious sector, has deep, conservative roots.

In both fragile democracies, the dark side of the religious and private sector with its demands for taxpayer’s money for ‘school choice’ has been exposed. In recent times we have been confronted internationally with the sex abuse scandals and the violent siege of the Capitol in Washington by white supremacists.

Australia tends to repeat the mistakes of America after they have become proven failures. But in both countries the ideological underpinning of the private ‘education choice’ ideology has its roots in segregation along the lines of class, creed and - colour.

Avi Wolfman-Arent [writes at the Philadelphia PBS website WHYY about the uncomfortable dilemma of the “school choice movement.”](#) At least some of the choice champions have not come to grips with the fact that their movement was funded by Trump supporters. Perhaps the reckoning might have caused them to wonder if they were being used. It’s easy to forget—or perhaps never realize—that the school choice movement was [created by Southern segregationists](#), borrowing the rhetoric of libertarian economist Milton Friedman. It is worth pondering why and how the Democratic Party abandoned its longstanding belief in equitable, well-resourced public schools as a common good.

He begins:

When Philadelphia-area mega-donors Jeff and Janine Yass [made headlines recently](#) for their contributions to Republican politicians — some of whom tried to overturn the presidential election — it stirred up a familiar debate in local education circles.

The Yass family has a long history of donating to Republican politicians and conservative causes. They also are among the largest donors to Pennsylvania’s school choice movement.

Therein lies a dilemma that, for some Democrats who support school choice, has caused increasing bouts of self-reflection.

On the ground, many charter school employees and school choice advocates are left-of-center, motivated by a desire to shake up an educational system that they see as not acting urgently enough to help low-income students of color.

But the movement’s growth — and success — has long relied on the political and financial capital of conservatives, who see school choice as a way to inject free-market thinking into the educational bureaucracy.

None of this is new.

What's new is the reckoning forced by the Trump era, culminating in a violent insurrection that was fomented by Republican lawmakers — carried out with symbols of the Confederacy — who, on other days, could be a charter advocate's best ally.

“For a period of time, this coalition was able to exist without some of the tensions we're talking about threatening to rip it apart,” said Mike Wang, a veteran of the Philadelphia education scene who once headed a leading school choice advocacy group that lobbied in Harrisburg.

Will this unusual alliance survive? Can it find new political strength under an administration promising reconciliation and unity? Or will it disintegrate in an era of increasing political polarity?

At what point do well-meaning liberals understand that we can only come together in a stable democracy in public schools established for the common good? There is a fundamental contradiction between segregating children with the free market - and equity. Segregation and the free market produces winners and losers, not equity.

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