

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 498#

NEWS FROM ED DOERR : CHURCH AND STATE IN THE US AND CANADA

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By Edd Doerr

Here in the US we have seen well over a half century of controversy over efforts to divert public funds to religious private schools, through vouchers, tax-code vouchers, changes in state constitutions to allow such misuse of the public treasury, and other gimmicks. These efforts have led to 28 statewide referendum elections, 27 of which resulted in crushing defeats for such efforts, [most recently in Florida on November 6, 1012](#).

There have been numerous federal and state court battles over the matter, not to mention unnumbered struggles in Congress and state legislatures. The main arguments against government aid to religious schools are these :

Such misuse of public funds violates the constitutional right of citizens not to be compelled to pay for religious institutions, one's own or someone else's, a right spelled out in most state constitutions, in the US First Amendment, and in our country's founding documents;

- Channeling public funds to religious and other private schools damages religiously neutral public education,
- Fragments the school population along religious and other lines,
- Turns education into indoctrination, and
- Promotes interfaith disharmony.

For a complete discussion of the issue, see my article "The Great School Voucher Fraud" on the Americans for Religious Liberty web site – arline.org. at http://arline.org/pdf/Doerr_The_Great_Voucher_Fraud.pdf

Ed Doerr comments on the Canadian Situation

If you want to see a real mess, take a look at what has been going on to our north, in Ontario, Canada's most populous province. Because Canada was originally a French colony that was absorbed into the British empire after the mid-18th century French and Indian (Seven Years) War, it is officially a bilingual country. Under the British North America Act of 1867, Ontario is obliged to provide tax support to both English and French public and "separate" schools. This means that 11% of the kids in Ontario attend French language schools, 106,150 in Catholic schools and 126,224 in public schools. (All of the figures in this article are for the 2009-2010 school year, and are supplied by the Ontario Ministry of Education, courtesy of the Civil Rights in Public Education organization based in Pembroke, Ontario.) Of the 89% of kids in English language schools, 30% are in Catholic "separate" schools and 70% in public schools. No public funds are provided to Protestant, Jewish or Muslim schools, which discrimination violates a UN agreement that Canada is party to.

Now here is where it gets interesting. The French language schools cost Ontario taxpayers an average of about \$39,000 per year per student. The English language public schools cost taxpayers an average of \$10,790 per student per year while the English language Catholic schools cost \$13,311 per student per year. Opinion polls have shown that most residents of Ontario oppose this absurd arrangement, but are divided as to what to do about it, and the provincial legislature sits on its hands. Among the objections to this listed by the Civil Rights in Public Education group (CRIPE) are these: 1. The discriminatory provisions separate students and teachers by religion, which is especially harmful to smaller communities; 2. The financial costs of this two and four way fragmentation of education unnecessarily costs Ontario taxpayers BILLIONS of dollars; 3. This generous public funding of Catholic schools has not prevented the closing of 40 parishes in just the London (Ont.) diocese.

The neighboring province of Quebec ended funding of Catholic schools years ago. According to Father Real Ouellette of Quebec, "I think it was one of the most positive things that's been done."

An interesting contrast is the poorer and less populous province of Newfoundland, which became part of Canada only after World War II. At that time Newfoundland had no public

schools, only five systems of tax supported church-run schools, an arrangement that produced the lowest level of school performance in Canada. Rising dissatisfaction led to the provincial government's abolishing the system and going to a single tax-supported public school system in the 1990s. The Catholic Church opposed the move, so it was voted on by the people of the province and upheld three to one.

With the school voucher movement still going strong in the US, there are lessons we can learn not only from Canada but also from Australia, the UK, the Netherlands and other countries.

[Here is a column Ed Doerr just wrote for Free Inquiry magazine \(here in US\).](#) Edd

Post-Election Cogitations

By Edd Doerr

November 6 was a good day for President Obama. The Democrats increased their majority in the Senate and gained a few seats in the House. The popular vote for the House favored the Democrats, but the Republicans retained control thanks to gerrymandering in "red" states after the 2010 election. The percentage of women in Congress increased, though not by enough.

On balance, November 6 was pretty good for religious liberty, church-state separation, public education, and reproductive choice. A Republican victory would have meant the probable addition to the Supreme Court of one or more clones of Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas and Robert Bork (Romney's chief judiciary adviser). It would have given a tremendous boost to Religious Right extremism and the movements to divert public funds to church-run private schools, to privatize public education, and to further shrink reproductive choice.

Let's look at the issues that have long been among the main focuses of this column, issues that have received too little media attention.

[Florida voters scored two important hits. By 55% to 45% margins they defeated two proposed amendments to the state constitution. Amendment 6 would have undermined and](#)

shrunk abortion rights and access. Amendment 8 would have watered down the religious liberty and church-state separation section for the purpose of facilitating tax aid to church-run private school (through vouchers) and other religious institutions. Florida's Catholic bishops endorsed and pushed both amendments, but majorities of Catholic voters ignored them. Coalitions of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, teacher, women's, civil liberties and other groups opposed the amendments, as did the state's leading newspaper, the Tampa Bay Times [ital.]. Florida's defeat of Amendment 8 was the 27th (sic!) defeat for school vouchers or their variants in statewide referendum elections from coast to coast. (For details, see my position paper "The School Voucher Crisis" on the Center for Inquiry web site.)

Although Indiana voters went narrowly for Romney and a Republican governor, they soundly defeated Republican Senate candidate Richard Mourdock, who late in the campaign made the utterly idiotic remark that if a pregnancy resulted from rape it was "God's will". That was too much even for conservative Hoosiers. Indiana voters also elected Democrat and public school teacher Glenda Ritz to be state school superintendent by 53 to 47, ousting incumbent Tony Bennett, even though Bennett outspent Ritz by 4 to 1. Bennett had shown disdain for public school teachers and their unions and supported the massive school voucher plan passed in 2011 by Governor Mitch Daniels and a Republican legislature. As a native Hoosier I am pleased.

While Wisconsin went for Obama (Paul Ryan did not even carry his home town), voters curiously returned the state senate to Republicans, who will probably try to expand the state's pioneer school voucher plan, which the state school superintendent has shown to be useless.

California voters approved a needed tax increase for K-12 public schools, but school funding measures were defeated in Arizona, Missouri and South Dakota. California also defeated Proposition 32, which was designed to weaken teacher unions. South Dakota defeated by 2 to 1 Referred Law 16, which would have ended teacher tenure.

Voters in conservative Idaho handily shot down three measures passed by Republicans meant to end teacher tenure, tie teacher evaluations to test scores, and ensure that every high school teacher and student had access to computers.

Washington State and Georgia approved charter school measures. A Stanford study has shown that only 17% of charter schools are better than local public schools, while 83% are either worse than or no better than public schools. It is increasingly clear that much of the diverse charter school movement is aimed at weakening or privatizing education and undermining teacher unions, but the subject is too complicated for further comment at this time.

Democrat Maggie Hassan won the New Hampshire gubernatorial race, beating Republican Ovide Lamontagne, who “wanted to voucherize education, teach creationism in public schools, criminalize abortion, and outlaw many forms of birth control”.

While November 6 was a pretty good day for Humanists and the majority of mainstream Catholics, Protestants, Jews and other Americans, we cannot relax. The Religious Right, the school pseudo-reformers, and the misogynist anti-choicers are not giving up. The dust has hardly begun to settle and already Republicans are thinking about running Jeb Bush in 2016. Bush No. 3 has long supported school vouchers and restricting reproductive choice, apparently oblivious to the oft registered opposition of Americans across the religious spectrum.

Edd Doerr, president of Americans for Religious Liberty, is a former editor of Church & State [ital.] and The American Rationalist [ital.] and author of a column in The Humanist [ital.] for over 30 years.

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