

FULL TRANSCRIPT

School Vouchers Public Debate University of Pittsburgh March 23, 1999

*Could School Vouchers Improve
the Quality of Education in Our State?*

Affirmative

Eugene Hickok, David Kirkpatrick & Denise Olczak

Opposition

Rev. Thomas E. Smith, Melissa Butler & Bianca Huff

Introductory Remarks

Gordon Mitchell: Greetings. My name is Gordon Mitchell. I work as an Assistant Professor of Communication and Director of Debate at the University of Pittsburgh. Welcome to the William Pitt Union for tonight's debate. I want to thank you all for coming. We haven't even heard the first argument in the debate, yet a strong statement has already been made tonight, and that statement has been made by the participants. Your collective presence, as advocates and audience members, says several things. It says that the future of public schools matters a great deal, it says that the citizens of Pittsburgh care very much about education, and it says that decisions about vouchers need to be made with public involvement.

This expression of citizen interest is very timely, because the Pennsylvania state legislature is preparing to consider and debate a new school voucher proposal soon. I hope that the immediate audience here tonight, and the extended state-wide audience that we reach through the Pennsylvania Cable Network, will take the energy of Pittsburgh's citizenry as a cue to realize that the time is ripe for public engagement and deliberation on school vouchers, given that the future of Pennsylvania's public schools hangs in the balance as our state legislators prepare to take up the issue in the next few weeks and months.

Let me first start off with some words of appreciation. Our debates could not occur without generous support from many quarters. First I would like to thank the Department of Communication, which serves as our academic home at the university. The professors and students there have been wonderfully helpful all year in generating ideas and providing resources for not only this debate, but all the debates we've put on this year. I'd also like to thank Patricia White at the PR office at the university - she has done a wonderful job in helping us promote this event and get the word out to the media. I'd like to thank the undergraduate students who put in long hours of research and preparation to make this debate possible. I'll talk a little more about the students you see up here in a

minute, but I also want to mention Bill Pittman and Becky Bealer, these are two students who worked hard last semester to get the project going, but unfortunately couldn't be here tonight. Finally, I want to thank our prestigious guest advocates for taking time out of their busy schedules to be with us here tonight.

Before I introduce the participants and discuss the debate format, I want to talk a little more about the topic that we're gathered here to consider tonight, "Could school vouchers improve the quality of education in our state?" In tonight's speeches, I predict that you will hear quite a bit of discussion about the concept of choice, because that really is central to any discussion of school vouchers. The whole idea behind school vouchers is that the government will enable citizens to exercise choices about where to send their children to schools, with additional subsidies from the state, in one form or another. But there's another dimension of choice that is important when you're thinking about school vouchers, and that is the *process* through which our community decides whether or not to pursue school vouchers as the cornerstone of Pennsylvania's educational reform policy. We've organized this debate because we believe that it's important that this larger process of choosing whether or not to pursue vouchers be made democratically.

Because education is perhaps the area of government policy that affects the lives of citizens most directly, it is important that changes in educational policy be made with citizen involvement. This point is particularly true when sweeping changes are proposed that promise to fundamentally reshape the nature of our educational systems.

Consider the metaphor of public schools as cultural mirrors. When we look into them, we may not see what we like, but what we see are nevertheless reflections of our ourselves, reflections of our values, our priorities, our culture. When advocates propose sweeping changes in the nature of public schools, this metaphor suggests that what they are also proposing are fundamental changes in community structure, major cultural shifts that promise to reorient society.

What are these major cultural shifts that underlie the proposal for school vouchers? Will vouchers not only improve education but also improve society and benefit the community as a whole? These are the questions that need to be discussed in robust democratic forums, and public debates are ideal sites of social learning where such dialogue can unfold. Each year, we put on a number of these public debate events that bring students, public officials, and other advocates together to discuss salient community concerns in public forums. We feel that these events are not only pedagogically valuable for students, in that they offer students opportunities to learn about critical thinking, research, and public speaking; Such debates also benefit the community by raising citizen awareness and also providing an opportunity for citizens to explore issues in an in-depth fashion that goes beyond the sound-bite sized analysis that one often finds in mass media treatment of public controversies these days. Tonight, we have this opportunity to interact with some very prominent advocates on the voucher issue, and now I'd like to introduce them, along with the student debaters who will be participating tonight.

Over to my right and to your left, we have the affirmative side - the advocates who will defend an affirmative answer to the question, "Could school vouchers improve the quality of education in our state?" Closest to you, we have Denise Olczak, who is a first-year student at the University of Pittsburgh. Let's give her a warm welcome of applause.

[applause]

Next to Denise, seated in the middle, is the State Education Secretary, Eugene Hickok. He was named to his current post in 1995, and actually when I talked to him last week, he said he was excited to do this debate, because he would be returning to his academic roots. In 1980, he was a teacher at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He also served as Director of the college's Clark Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Contemporary Issues. To my right, then, is David Kirkpatrick. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the Allegheny Institute. Mr. Kirkpatrick has published numerous books on vouchers, including the book *Choice in Schooling* and *School Choice: The Idea that Must Not Die*. He also has experience as a public educator, as an Easton Area School District high school history teacher in Pennsylvania. Actually, I just realized that we forgot to welcome Secretary Hickok, so let's double up on the applause for Secretary Hickok and David Kirkpatrick.

[laughter, applause]

Over to my left, and your right, we have the opposition. And these are the folks who will providing a negative answer to the question, "Could school vouchers improve the quality of education in our state?"

Rev. Thomas E. Smith: Alternative answer.

Gordon Mitchell: Okay, an alternative answer. Not necessarily negative - there are probably a lot of different ways of criticizing that proposition. Closest to you, seated on my right, is Melissa Butler, who is a first-grade teacher in the Pittsburgh Public School System, and also a parent-teacher organizer at the Pittsburgh Council on Public Education. Let's welcome Melissa Butler.

[applause]

Seated in the middle, we have senior Bianca Huff, who is an experienced public debater. Those of you who attended the 1997 citizen review board debate might have remembered her as a prominent advocate in that debate. Bianca just came back from a summer internship with the Labor Party in Britain. She's done quite a bit of work on vouchers, and I think you'll enjoy her arguments tonight. Let's give Bianca a round of applause.

[applause]

Finally, seated to Bianca's right is Reverend Thomas E. Smith. He is a pastor at the Monumental Baptist Church. Reverend Smith also serves as the Chairman of the Center for Family Excellence, Inc. He's also the Chairman of the Thomas Merton Center, and Chairman of the Religious Task Force on the Economy. Reverend Smith earned his BA in Urban Studies from Virginia Union University in 1975. He completed the requirements of a masters of divinity at the Virginia Union School of Theology in December of 1977, and he finished all his coursework for a doctorate of ministry back in 1986. Please welcome Reverend Thomas E. Smith.

[applause]

Finally, down on the lower level, we have a panel of three students who will serve as questioners in tonight's debate. Seated to the left there, and to your right, is Carrie Weletz, an undergraduate student at the University of Pittsburgh. In the middle is Ian Steinberg

from Penn State, and then Brendan Delaney, who is also from the University of Pittsburgh. When I describe the format, I'll tell you when they come in, but for now, let's welcome the panel of student questioners.

[applause]

The format for the debate is listed on the back of the program, so I won't go into too much detail, other than to say that we made a slight alteration in the times for opening speeches and questions. We took one minute from the student panel questions and added it into the speech times. So for part one of the debate, we'll have eight minute opening speeches by the advocates, and then that will be followed by three minutes of questions from the student panel. After each advocate has had the opportunity to lay out their basic opening arguments, we'll move on to part two of the debate, where we will invite audience members to come up and ask questions at the microphone that is standing right there in the front of the room. Finally, in part three, we'll move into closing arguments where the advocates will summarize their main points and finish off the debate. So without further ado, let me invite up to the podium the first affirmative speaker, who will present her opening speech, Ms. Denise Olczak.

[applause]

Part One: Opening Speeches

Denise Olczak: Vouchers. No other issue since creationism has created such a stir in education. School vouchers have been heralded as education's next savior as well as the ultimate deterioration in providing education to all people. Regardless of the voucher issue, I believe that all people, including parents, educators, and students, want the best education possible. We all want our children to excel and to grow, because they are our future. If they do not possess the knowledge necessary for success, knowledge that is provided through education, then how bright will that future be? If we want what is best for our children, then why do we deny them all opportunities, all choices available, for learning? This question is one question that supports why I believe that school vouchers can improve the quality of education in Pennsylvania.

First of all, before we begin the presentations tonight, what exactly are voucher programs? Generally, voucher programs involve the use of tax dollars given to parents so that their children can attend the school of their choice, whether it is public or private. This issue of school choice has come to the foreground recently with the Wisconsin State and United States Supreme Courts. In Fall of 1997, the Wisconsin State Supreme Court held a voucher program to be constitutional, therefore supporting that aspect of the use of public funds for school vouchers. The case was appealed to the United States Supreme Court to determine the official federal opinion on the nature of school vouchers. On November 9, 1998, the Supreme Court declined to add the Wisconsin case to its docket for the 1999 court season, and did not issue an opinion on this issue. The Supreme Court's dismissal of the Wisconsin case has set a very important precedent on the viable nature of vouchers.

Without the Supreme Court's voice, each state can make their own laws regarding these possibilities. Numerous reasons support the use of school vouchers, including increasing the options of education for every family, streamlining the current public system's bureaucracy, and improving schools for every pupil. However, I will focus my time on three specific and significant reasons that point to why vouchers are a possible solution to current problems in education. First, vouchers promote competition in the educational sphere; second, they can create incentives for parental involvement; and finally, they can provide a more effective, constitutional and student-friendly way to fund education.

First, school vouchers offer the opportunity to improve the quality of education through promoting competition in the school system. Currently, private schools can hold an upper hand by offering students a specialized education. With the use of vouchers, all educational institutions, not only private schools, will possess the increased opportunity to specialize their studies in areas such as the sciences, the international studies, or the performing arts. By establishing specialized schools, a more focused student body that is more likely to learn in innumerable ways is created. This is a way to find a worthwhile education that is appealing to all parties involved. I don't think that students and parents would reject a school that provides a healthy learning environment and that also promotes common interests and specialization in studies. With this method, teachers as well as administrators and principals will be more encouraged to be effective educators and incorporate varied teaching methods that capture students' imaginations, as well as their abilities, and increase their learning capacities.

If a school is not an effective place of learning, if they are not "making the grade," students will have an easier option to change schools. Ineffectual schools will simply not be able to survive under this voucher system, because when students leave, they take their vouchers with them. Increased competition between schools will compel any so-called "bad" schools to become more effective and efficient in order to continue to function.

A second reason in support of vouchers draws attention to the educational process itself. Instead of viewing money used for education as only a school tax that like other taxes, are forced to be paid, it offers the opportunity to be a very prominent investment in America's future. The investment can now be a center-stage issue for the real expense of education. Parents and guardians can be further educated in the dollars required to present their children with schooling. For example, the average tuition for private schooling in 1997 per child was \$3,116. In contrast, the public school system spent on average, \$6,857 tax dollars per pupil - a cost of more than twice the amount, per student for the private schools. These kinds of factors can be very educational for parents when they are deciding where to send their children to school.

Additionally, parents and students could also find themselves with a newfound ability to choose their child's educational program. They can be directly involved in selecting where their child should go to school, instead of being forced by the state to send their child to a certain public school. Vouchers can empower parents to select schools. Only then can they be a direct part in the often-touted school-community-student triangle of success. Parents are the necessary link to the success and vouchers provide a new path.

It can be advocated that under the current system, parents do have a choice in their child's education-they can choose to send their student to public school or private school. I wish the reality of this argument were so simple. Currently, parents who select a private school

for their child must pay twice for education. They must fund the entire tuition at the private school and then pay, through public taxes, for public school. Most parents quite simply do not possess the resources required for both institutions. Their supposed "choice" for education is simply nonexistent. Thankfully, vouchers could reduce the cost of desiring a choice in education.

Last month, on February 3, 1999, Governor Ridge proposed a five-year "opportunity grant" program that offers a best-of-both-worlds scenario, as a part of the year's budget. The proposal would provide tuition grants of between \$350 and \$1,400 for parents in certain parts of the state as a trial basis initially. In the first year, only families earning less than \$15,000 a year would be eligible; by the fifth year those earning up to \$75,000 would be included. The plan's five-year cost is projected at \$587 million. However, his proposal would not involve reducing state subsidies for public schools, unlike many tuition "voucher" programs in other states. Ridge, in fact, increased subsidies by \$190 million for Pennsylvania's 501 school districts. He also included \$35 million for an initiative called "Read to Succeed," which is designed to improve primary-grade reading instruction. Public schools will still receive their funding, thus alleviating one of the fears that the opponents would wish to give to vouchers, but individuals will now possess an opportunity to make an educational choice. That is, only if this plan is approved.

Finally, vouchers can be used, and the Constitution can still be protected and enforced. Much of the controversy surrounding this issue stems from the First Amendment clause that requires the separation of church and state at any cost. From a legal standpoint, vouchers can be regarded as a grant or reimbursement to the child or his or her guardian, not direct aid to the school. In this case, voucher money is used solely by the individual, and thus the state funds do not violate the Establishment clause. This concept is not new - numerous government programs, such as college tuition grants, the G.I. Bill and Social Security, already work in this manner. Individuals use the government stipends to purchase goods and services from a wide variety of organizations including for-profit, non-profit, and religious institutions. Vouchers are no different from these programs, except they are applied to basic education that is the foundation of our children's knowledge. If we can solidly conclude that vouchers are unconstitutional, I think we can suddenly bid a farewell to the other programs as well, a result that I'm sure will not occur without a fight.

With these options open on the table, it is imperative to continually question what is going on, and the policy actions that are being taken. After viewing both sides on this controversial issue, one substantially key area of the debate cannot be forgotten. In the end, students, and real people, will see the results of all the debating and arguing. It will be they who experience the inevitable changes that come to the educational process. This simple fact cannot be ignored in the games of politics and the desire to create history. However, let us give our children a bright future, where they have a voice in where they receive their foundation of knowledge. Allow our parents and communities to possess a direct involvement and investment in the future. Vouchers provide an additional path to better education and they can improve the quality of education for Pennsylvania, but only if we give them opportunity to do so. Thank you.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: Now, let's hear three minutes of questions from our student panel.

Brendan Delaney: Creating competition among schools, providing as many educational options as possible are among the central goals of school choice. Obviously, these goals are easier to achieve for students who live in or near cities such as Pittsburgh or Philadelphia. However, in many rural areas, there are few schools to choose from. How does school choice legislation affect these students?

Denise Olczak: Very good question. I lived in a very rural area, and I had to drive, I had to use the bus system, things like that, in order to get to school. I don't see how transportation would change if we used the voucher program. School choice, and being able to provide a selection of the school that you want to go to, is still applicable to rural students, it's just that the transportation issue would be a factor, and I don't think that would be bad in any way, shape, or form.

Brendan Delaney: Given that the amount of money that would be given under a voucher program would not be enough to cover the full cost of tuition in every school, would such programs only help the wealthy?

Denise Olczak: No, no, no. If you listened to my speech, and I don't mean to sound standoffish, looking at the programs we have available right now, it's only open to certain families, such as those who make less than \$15,000 per year. Because we have these restrictions already, it's not open, automatically, to the "wealthy." That doesn't mean that vouchers can only be used by certain people, either. In covering the cost of the entire education for a private school, this is just an initial step. Vouchers, if they work, and I do posit that they do, and they will, they suggest a starting point, and voucher money could be increased in the future.

Brendan Delaney: In your speech, you talked about parent involvement. If parents are generally apathetic now, why would they become more involved if their kids attend different schools? Why will school choice initiatives be enough to change their levels of involvement?

Denise Olczak: Right now, parents don't have a choice about where their children go to school. If you live in this school district, you go to this high school, and if there are a variety of high schools, then it's usually the one's that closest to you. Because parents do not have this kind of choice, and because they don't have voice in what's going on with their child's education, they don't really have an involved interest in it. I believe that once individuals do have a choice, and they do have the ability to make a choice, and then more involvement will increase.

Gordon Mitchell: Now, let's welcome, from the opposition, the first speaker, Bianca Huff.

Bianca Huff: Good evening, everyone. When I first heard about the issue of vouchers, I must admit that it sounded quite interesting. As I began researching school choice, several questions started circulating in my mind. You see, I wasn't elated by the promise of vouchers. As a matter of fact, I became increasingly confused, and ended my search somewhere on the verge of anger and despair. During my speech this evening, I will discuss several questions that have plagued me while researching. Does this issue really concern poor students? How have vouchers fared in other localities?

I would like first to address how school choice has been made into a civil rights issue by proponents claiming that this would aid poor students and minority students. Senators Marilyn Drew and Joe Lieberman said that eighty-five percent of African-Americans endorse vouchers. However, the *Wall Street Journal* took its own poll, and found that African-Americans opposed voucher programs “by a decidedly larger majority than the rest of the population.”

Voucher advocates are saying that they would like to act in the best interest of all children. Make no mistake, it is very difficult for me to stand in front of an audience tonight as an African-American woman and speak against an issue that’s classified under civil rights. I hope to demonstrate that school vouchers are not the best tools to aid civil rights, or to aid rights at all for students.

No one here is against choice, we’re just saying that vouchers are not a viable option. Remember that this legislation would deal a devastating blow to public education. Whether or not it is stated primarily, any choice system in which competition plays a major role will destroy the current school system. We all have this rose colored vision of private schools, but just as public schools, there are good and bad private ones. Some do provide adequate education while also supporting moral and religious needs.

Has anyone ever taken the time to think what this might do to private schools? Using vouchers to fund private education will inevitably result in governments having to go in and monitor those private schools. This might impede the progress of, let’s say a religious school, it might impede its progress.

Voucher programs have been presented to the poor community as a savior. But in actuality, these programs of choice are like holding a piece of candy to a group of starved children. For that one child who fights and gets that piece of candy, it is not enough to soothe his hunger, or take away his pain. The diversion of public funds into private institutions would only benefit a very limited number of poor children, and we’re trying to help as many children as possible.

Now I’d like to discuss a current choice program. We’ve all heard about the Milwaukee program of choice. Newspapers carry bits and pieces about this ten year long voucher system. To offer you some preliminary information about this system, only secular schools were allowed to receive vouchers, so students were offered a very limited number of schools to begin with in 1990. That number did increase, because schools were actually created just for voucher usage. The University of Wisconsin-Madison undertook an extensive research project on the Milwaukee voucher system. The groups of students were labeled “public” for public school students, “choice” for students who were able to use their vouchers, and “rejects” who did not receive a placement in a voucher school, or had to leave their voucher school for some reason. I’d like to give you a brief rundown of the results after five years of studying the voucher system in Milwaukee. The “choice” versus “public” comparison indicated absolutely no difference in math, and actually showed a small advantage in reading for, get this, Milwaukee public school students, not “choice” students. The “choice” versus “rejects” students was different. There was also no difference shown for reading [in this comparison], but the data did indicate that the “choice” students fared a little bit better in math.

I'd like to discuss the schools that were actually created for voucher use [in Milwaukee]. The Exito Education Center received \$90 million in overpayment due to their major over-reporting of the number of students attending their school. The principal is now facing criminal charges of fraud. The Milwaukee Preparatory School now owes \$300,000 because of inflated enrollment, not to mention that teachers left after repeatedly not being paid. The Woodson Academy was reported to be in complete disarray when people came in to monitor the school, and there was no set curriculum to speak of set for students. And the last one I'll speak of is the Medgar Evers School. This school was reported as having severe financial difficulties, and teachers were also not being paid at this school.

One student spoke out against her own voucher school, her name is Tenasha Taylor, and she went to the University School of Milwaukee. She gave a speech criticizing her school at a public assembly. She criticized it for racism. She was suspended for this action, and she consequently sued on the grounds of free speech. Now this is the interesting thing. The court said, "protections afforded by the Bill of Rights do not apply to private sectors." They further claimed that the rights protected in a public school could not be recognized as a private institution. Ms. Taylor's rights were clearly violated because of her own school choice. Like the saying goes, we learn something new every day, and these students in these voucher schools learned that their teachers weren't paid, their rights were violated. These students learned that legislators probably did not have their best interests at heart when the program started.

The rhetoric surrounding this issue has seized upon words of choice and equality. Proponents say that lower income parents would be able to choose good schools for their children. Can school choice really be any type of authentic decision for most students? That's what we want to ask ourselves. Let's become amateur economics students for a minute. Is a private enterprise ever concerned with delivering high quality, low cost services to consumers, as it is with making a profit?

Choice is a rather attractive term that appeals to all of us as Americans. It connotes feelings of freedom and worthiness. However, choice is also a code word which perpetuates positions of privilege that are inherited and not earned. Do the affluent choose to live in nice homes, while the poor "choose" to be homeless? No, because nothing is ever as easy as a choice. What matters are the results that follow one's decision.

Please remember that public schools have obligations that private schools never have to shoulder. Public schools must take and teach all kinds of students. Those with physical disabilities, emotional problems, where English is not their first language, and even disruptive students, most definitely. They do not get a choice on who is to be taught in schools. We can consider this not a debate about choice, but about options, and not everyone has the same set of options under a voucher system. This is exactly why vouchers should not be used. Thank you.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: Now let's have questions from our student panel.

Ian Steinberg: Hello, Ms. Huff, how are you doing tonight?

Bianca Huff: Fine, and you?

Ian Steinberg: I'm doing great. In your speech, you talked a lot about how vouchers might hurt public schools by shifting resources and students to private institutions. But the advocates of vouchers suggest that with school choice, the quality of public schools will improve as public schools compete with each other to attract students. What is your view on the claim that vouchers will help promote educational reform within the public school system, by increasing competition between public schools?

Bianca Huff: I think that choice can be implemented as a reform. We can increase competition between public schools without having a voucher system - they've done it in other places. Would you like examples?

Ian Steinberg: Yes, please.

Bianca Huff: East Harlem actually has a great program of public choice, without involving private schools at all. Every child can go to any school in the area. Each school has its own curriculum, which is a great thing for each student with their own interests. The missions are diverse, but all meet high standards, and are accountable. There's free transportation to every school. This is how choice could be implemented without using a voucher system.

Ian Steinberg: In terms of the accountability of public schools to raising the quality of education, are there alternate ways to ensuring that this will happen?

Bianca Huff: I think there are alternative ways. We can't always say that money will solve the problem. We need community activism to fix problems in public schools, and that can come from parent involvement, but parent involvement doesn't have to be vouchers. Thinking that parents can choose their schools by handing out money is not that much parent involvement. We have to work on other ways to involve parents in students' lives.

Ian Steinberg: Currently, should the school choice options in Allegheny County be limited or changed?

Bianca Huff: I don't think they should be limited; they should be increased, as a matter of fact. There can be more magnet schools created, there can be more open enrollment, not just by districts, but by counties - that's what needs to be done.

Gordon Mitchell: Now let's hear from the second speaker from the affirmative side, David Kirkpatrick.

David Kirkpatrick: Thank you, Gordon. Allow me to give a little background about myself, only because we have not heard it tonight. You hear so much that this is a matter of people out to destroy public education, this is a matter of privatization, it's a far-Right conspiracy. I know that the proponents are sitting to the right tonight, but I assume there's nothing symbolic about that. I'm a career public educator from a *family* of schoolteachers. I'm now retired as an educator, but obviously still active. I spent over a dozen years heading major teacher unions affiliated with the NEA and the AFT, and even the American Association of University Professors. I'm hardly out to destroy public education. My sister's still a public school teacher, she's younger than I am, now in her thirty-sixth year.

This is not a matter of public vs. private, to me, of good vs. bad, secular vs. sectarian, competition. All of these issues play into it, and the constitutional question as well. But I

come at it from a little different point of view. I'm perhaps not the only one in the country, but there aren't many of us. To me, this whole issue is a matter of justice. It is, if you will, a moral issue. The United States Supreme Court, in 1925, ruled *unanimously* that no child in this country be compelled to attend a public school, with a provision that the parents see to it that the child is educated someplace. So everybody has this as a constitutional right, and most of us exercise it. Not the 5 million youngsters who are in non-public schools, that's one way. But a national public survey of public school parents a couple of years ago asked the parents what role the school played in where they lived. Fifty-three percent said they live where they do so they can go to that public school, as I did with my four youngsters.

Now I happened to live in the district where I taught, Easton, because it was a fairly good school district. We had several elementary schools, and even as a schoolteacher, also working another job on the side, I not only lived in the district, I could afford to live next to the elementary school I wanted my children to attend. When I moved to Harrisburg over 25 years ago, I talked with my then-friends at PSCEA and elsewhere about what school district was the best in the area. When they told me which one, that's the one I moved into. The poor cannot afford that. They have no options. In Harrisburg, they're locked in.

Do we accept everyone in public school? Yeah, we do, but only if you live in our district. Radnor Township, one of the wealthiest in Pennsylvania, accepts no students from anywhere. The suburban school districts, Central Dauphin, outside of Harrisburg, hires investigators to check the buses of kids coming to school to make sure none of them are from Harrisburg. They will not accept a Harrisburg student. Now there's a reason for that, because Harrisburg students don't pay taxes in Central Dauphin. But, it doesn't mean that we accept everybody, we only accept them in certain places. So Harrisburg is a result. There are twenty-three school districts in the three county Dauphin, Cumberland, Perry county area. Harrisburg, and I live in the city, and have for decades, has more minority students, more free lunch students, AFDC, you name it, minority, disadvantaged, than the other twenty-two districts combined. They are segregated and left behind because people fled the district and left the poor there, who have no options.

Will it help the schools? Well, let's go back to the G.I. Bill. I happen to be old enough, I have a World War II G.I. Bill. I used it a long time ago, obviously. There was a debate like this at the time, much more subdued, because very few people went to college in 1944. But there was some concern about whether these veterans were good enough to go to college, would they destroy the system? In 1944, eighty percent of the college students were in private institutions, and twenty percent in public. Fifty-five years later, with PHEAA grants, PELL grants, private grants, university grants, eighty percent are in public institutions, and twenty percent are in private. And the private didn't get hurt because so many more went to college than they did fifty-five years ago.

I might point out to those that think this [school choice] is a radical experiment. Not only does this exist in every developed country in the world, including Russia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, (foreign Communist countries which have now instituted this), [but] in the state of Vermont, it's been done from the beginning. One-third of the communities in Vermont have no public elementary school, or high school, and in some cases, neither one. Vermont was ranked a couple of years ago as the best state in the nation in which to bring

up children. It was listed by the U.S. Department of Education earlier this year as number one in the nation in percentage of high school graduates.

The NEA did a survey of its teacher members a couple of years ago [asking] how important are you in deciding what happens in your school district? Now this was a self-evaluation by the teachers. They had four different categories, and Vermont teachers ranked first in every one. So it's hardly destroyed public education. Does it change districts? I don't just read these [stories], I travel all over the country on this, and even as far away as Saipan Commonwealth in Northern Marianas Islands, out there awhile back at the invitation of the Governor of the Commonwealth to discuss this. In Albany, NY, a woman had enough money, and instead of scattering the scholarships around, she concentrated on one school. I was in Albany two weeks ago yesterday, she concentrated on one school, and about twenty percent of kids left, she made it available to everybody, a significant number of them left, but not a majority, and not enough to destroy the school. What did it do? It caused the superintendent to replace the principal, the assistant principal, some of the staff, teachers, transfer them, and gave the school an extra \$125,000. Some people with millions of dollars, fifty million in fact, have concentrated on the Edgewood district, which is in part of San Antonio, Texas, and there, a significant number of students have left. The Edgewood district is now pouring more money into the schools that have the greatest need.

But most of all, let me take Milwaukee, because it's got the longest history and it's cited the most. In addition to being a Senior Fellow with the Allegheny Institute, just for the past six months or so, I have for years been a Distinguished Fellow with the Bloom Center for Parental Freedom and Education at Marquette University in Milwaukee. So, I have been there, and I pay attention, and I know people there, such as Mayor John Norquist, and others. Howard Fuller, who was the former superintendent when this was introduced in 1991, and he's an African-American, he since left the district and now heads the Institute for Transformation of Learning at *Marquette*, and is a strong advocate of choice.

Let me talk about the [Milwaukee] school board. Of course, they fought this originally, tooth and nail. And originally, it did not include religious schools. That's been changed. Now it does, and the Wisconsin Court upheld it. When [the court case] was going through the final stages, a number of members of the current and former Milwaukee school board went in as friends of the court and asked the judge to uphold the constitutionality of the state program. More important, there's a very large privately funded program in Milwaukee, by the Bradley Foundation, which has like \$300 million. In that case, recently, they were trying to raise some more money for the voucher program, the private voucher program. This time, the Milwaukee school board *unanimously* issued a statement, asking citizens and other people in Milwaukee to contribute to the private voucher program to keep it going. And also, recently, because they have a charter school law, one of the schools in the system (they all did not close, the ones that joined the choice movement), one was the Guadeloupe School. At the beginning of this school year, the Milwaukee school board signed a contract with the Guadeloupe School which has been so successful, and they now treat it as if it is a school within the Milwaukee school system. So it has changed the district. The board has changed its position on it. The city, the major, is strongly for it.

Just a couple of quick points. Vermont is the most rural state in the nation, along with Idaho, on a percentage basis, and it works. Why does it work? Because you've got to get out of the box of thinking of a traditional school of three hundred, five hundred, a thousand kids. A teacher in Middlebury, Vermont a couple of years ago started an elementary school with seven students in his home. Because in Vermont, they give you as much money as the public school spends. It can be six or seven thousand dollars, and if the town meeting approves, they will pay more, so it works. In one sense, this thing is academic, because this is spreading all over the country. There are now hundreds of thousands of students in charter schools, in private voucher programs, public programs, and the courts are increasingly upholding it. You cannot, and fortunately will not, stop this movement.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: So now we'll have three minutes of questions from our student panel.

Ian Steinberg: Hello, Mr. Kirkpatrick. In my view, the commodification of schools is the largest single factor contributing to the decline in the quality of education today. Look at the cost-saving devices introduced by corporate interests to maximize profits: larger classes, less teachers, cheaper teachers, more standardization, and less personal attention. When education is commodified, and students are looked upon as consumers, teachers are forced into the uncomfortable position of having to water down courses, become entertainers, and do things that might add to school profits but end up compromising the quality of education for students. With this being the case, why is the answer to education reform the embrace of free market ideology rather than stronger attempts to insulate school systems from the excesses of the free market?

David Kirkpatrick: In the first place, that's a lot of rhetoric, with all due respect, without any facts. There are very few corporate schools, there are some. Pekin Management, for example. The charter school movement. I was just in Denver four days last week, for the second annual charter school conference, sponsored by the United States Department of Education. Even Clinton is for it and has appropriated over \$100 million this year. The first charter school in this country was in St. Paul, Minnesota, started by two public teachers who were members of the Federation of Teachers, and it exists, and is successful. Of the first four hundred charter schools, one quarter were started by public teachers, and they're still running.

To the extent that corporations get into this, that's an exception. But even if they do, one of the problems is that on both sides, we do a lot of demonizing. It doesn't matter if John Walton favors this or not, or if I favor it or not. The question is, is it a good idea? We should get away from the idea that, well, it's a terrible idea because corporations favor it, and because corporations favor some of these programs, it's terrible. I have an advisory committee that I work with, made up of teachers from all across the country, literally from Maine to California, the teacher of the year, three times in New York City, twice in New York State. Tracy Bailey, national teacher of the year in Florida, 1993, a Federation member. I worked, almost largely, with public school people and Howard Fuller is one of my advisors, as well. I have nothing to do with corporations. I have nothing to do with non-public schools, I'm not even Catholic. This is a good idea, teachers are for it, and they're getting involved in it, too.

Ian Steinberg: In several essays on your School Report website, and tonight, you have remarked that as a result of class stratification in communities, and the disparate results in the funding of public education, that elite suburban schools are better than inner city or urban schools ...

David Kirkpatrick: No, I didn't say they were better. I said that they closed their doors in many cases.

Ian Steinberg: Okay, but given that these inequalities have resulted from market forces, why do you feel so confident that the so-called "invisible hand" of the market will work to create greater equality under a voucher system?

David Kirkpatrick: Because the public system draws artificial lines - where you must live. Not only the district, but they even tell you what school, what attendance area you live in. Non-public schools and charter schools, which are public schools by law, the law of Pennsylvania calls them public schools, they have no boundaries. They will accept students, and do accept students, from anywhere. Public schools do not, and in many cases, will not.

Gordon Mitchell: Now let's welcome the second speaker from the opposition side, Ms. Melissa Butler.

Melissa Butler: Hello. The other side sounds moderate. The other side sounds *reasonable*. Let's look farther, let's probe deeper, and let's see what larger public issues are at stake. Who is behind the voucher movement? This movement is part of an overall corporate educational reform movement which seeks to privatize educational services. No matter what choice you may want, this is what's behind the voucher choice *policies*. Who are the players? The Bradley Foundation, the Heritage Foundation, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Heartland Institute. All push narrow, organized agendas and fund research to solidify their agendas. The Bradley Foundation gives \$55 million to conservative think-tanks. Specifically, they give \$2.7 million to the Heritage Foundation. Both of these foundations are key players in the vouchers movement; both are responsible for free-reign voucher policies in Milwaukee, and other similar attempts nationwide.

How do the players operate? Well, it's not a conspiracy of little evil men in cloaks hiding behind a curtain. It's much more systematic. It's much more procedural, and it's not hidden. The money, paper, and number trail is easy to follow. All you have to do is do a little digging. And, the way their hegemonic power operates is through fairly good PR campaigns, giving the facade of "helping people." An example is Messmer High School in Milwaukee, that often is used as a backdrop for photo shoots for the Heritage Foundation and the Bradley Foundation, to show that this Catholic, all-black school is part of the voucher movement to "help children of color."

Their agenda is clear, and it's two-fold, and they state it specifically. Number one, they want to push vouchers grass-roots, state-by-state. Number two, they want to solidify and fund research as proof to convince the public that vouchers are good. The goal? Dismantle public education. Why? Their slick rhetoric tells us that this is necessary to help children struggling in trapped, failing public schools. But this masks the danger that hides behind their particular notion of choice.

The Right's notion of choice rests its faith in the free market. We give you a voucher, now you're free to choose, now you have access to any quality you want. But this ignores a few things. It ignores number one, that vouchers don't cover all costs. So many children, in fact, the children that need the most, will be left behind. Number two, it ignores the fact that *schools* do the choosing, especially under Pennsylvania law. If schools don't think that you are the quality (you have behavior problems), you are not the "quality" we want - "no choice, you can't come!"

The Right's notion of choice sees the dismantling of public education as the main ingredient in their overall plan to dismantle social entitlements and government responsibility for societal needs. This coalition of people see people like Milton Friedman and Charles Murray as guiding visionaries. The Bradley Foundation funded \$1 million for the research of *Bell Curve*, which argues that there are innate racial IQ differences, and these are the reasons for social stratification in our society. The consequence of this is that the idea of social programs is a waste. Why should we fund people at the bottom of the scale if they don't have the intellectual "capacity" to improve? Thus, we allow a little choice, we give a little money in the middle, it allows a kind of survival of the fittest to take place. This is why the *Bell Curve*, in Chapter Eighteen, offers "voucher choice" as the educational reform strategy. Now I have to ask, educational reform for *whom*?

They say that the cognitive elite need choice for Rolls-Royce schools, and this innovation will trickle down to the basic product of McDonald's schools - they use those terms. Our communities' children are not basic products. This trickle-down economics, this trickle-down innovation, it won't work for education. The market doesn't work that way. It doesn't help people struggling at the bottom. The market can't spur innovation in schools left with half of their resources, when they're currently struggling with status quo funding. A market-based school system will encourage the *advertising* of the school to be more important than what happens *within* the school. Schools will be more concerned with marketing themselves than with teaching. It will be what school is the cleanest, what school is the glitziest, what school has the most gimmicks. And when voucher schools are established, as have been established in Milwaukee, the bottom line is *profit*, not education.

The invisible hand is poised to slap quality education in the face. What we need is a deeper commitment to the public. I'm certainly not here to defend the status quo public education. I work every day to change the public schools, and I will until the day I die, and many of you out there, and many people around the country are struggling to create democratic, responsible reform within our public schools. This issue over whether public or private systems provide better educational services is important, but it masks a larger point. The more specific issue is about how choices are made within these public and private systems. Public spaces are essential, and the types of dialogue, debate, and decision making that happen in public are what allow us to fight for fairness and equity, and in fact, even allow us to have those terms. Privatization erodes these spaces. It changes schools from being accountable to citizens, to having schools being accountable to investors, advertisers, and the bottom line of profit-making.

The issue still remains - there are substantial problems with our public education system. But these problems, including segregation, poor facilities, lack of quality teachers and curriculum - these problems are not because the schools are *public*. These problems exist because people with power don't *choose* to *care* about the public. Our current problems

with public schools are linked to larger economic and political problems - poverty, and the colonization of African-American and Latino communities. Since people don't usually like to name poverty and colonization as problems, they've systematized a diversion. Vouchers. Lack of individual choice. As if a coupon, worth part of tuition, will suddenly erase all material limitations to choices that exist now. Uh unh.

Vouchers don't even make a *dent* in the material limitations to choice. And it's not surprising that public schools are being blamed at the same time that urban public schools are being increasingly populated by more and more African and Latino children. We don't hear that public schools are monopolies with inefficiency in Fox Chapel, Quaker Valley, Cranberry Township. Uh unh. They only become a problem when white, middle class children try to go to school in the inner cities that are populated by "non-white" children. Then, the problem suddenly becomes *public* education. If people won't talk about race and economic injustice in our current government education system, what makes you think that these same people will suddenly care about justice under a free market system? No way.

In reality, there are people struggling every day, and their choices are limited, including their choices to public schools. What are some livable, responsible choices we could make as a community? Choices that care for people, not products. Choices that prioritize people and equity, over economic privilege.

We *should* be discussing the way that schools are funded in the country, and how we could change from a property tax system to a more equitable *income* tax system. In fact, Vermont is the only state in the United States that has actually made that equitable change, and I will discuss Vermont as an example more later. We *should* be talking about curriculum reform, and how to involve parents and children in decisions about *what* is taught. We *should* be talking about the role that public schools can play in community struggles, serving community needs, providing resources, family care, access to information. These educational reform discussions are necessary, and they are not too radical, but they have been pushed to the margins over the past fifteen years. That's why, when we are faced with severe poverty and colonization, that impacts *all* of our public spaces, including schools, the political forces that *created* these problems, are disguised with diversions that make inequities worse.

In order to make the vouchers plan politically acceptable, the advocates must get support from poor communities, Black communities, and working class communities, and they are *buying* that support with an illusion of choice. By pretending to offer genuine choice to those who have been systematically denied choice by the market, vouchers proponents prey, like vultures, on the carnage of neglect.

Why should we trust people who argue that there are genetic IQ differences between the races? Why should we trust people who want all government responsibility for social equity to be left to the market? Why should we trust people who *never* struggled for more equitable funding in schools? Why should we trust people who are reviving an educational policy that was first used to avoid desegregation after the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision? As a community, we cannot allow this to happen.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: Now, let's hear some questions from our student panel.

Carrie Weletz: You discussed the importance of schools as public forums. In my experience of thirteen years in public schools, I really found this statement to be completely untrue. In my school, information was kept from students, and I actually quote my principal, he said we have to “keep a happy environment.” Our newspaper had to be signed off by the principal, and he frequently took out articles based on his ideas of what was right and what he thought his students could hear. What concrete evidence can you present to show that currently, public schools are operating as progressive public forums?

Melissa Butler: The answer is, they’re not - they’re not *progressive* public forums. The attack on public schooling and public institutions comes from many levels, and it includes privatization. It also includes censorship. It includes people pushing to get rid of sex education, to get rid of people talking about diversity, we can’t talk about homosexuality, we can’t talk about gender differences, we can’t talk about different cultures. It’s an attack on multiculturalism, and that attack on public schools has happened since the 1980s, and that [censorship] is a part of the attack on public schools.

But let’s take the concern a little bit further. At least you can make a complaint in a public school system. If you are in a private school, that argument doesn’t register. That complaint doesn’t register. If you want to take it to larger civil rights violations, like the example that Bianca gave about Tenasha [Taylor, from Milwaukee], you start saying that a school is racist, you start making an individual claim, you can’t go there. There’s no due process within the system.

The thing about the public system is that dropout rates, suspension rates, problems, all things are accountable to the public. In a private system, you don’t have to be accountable to the public; you don’t necessarily have to follow ADA regulations, IDEA regulations. In fact, the “strings” that they say are attached to public schooling that are creating this bureaucracy are in fact civil rights protections. There are numerous examples of progressive public schools, and I don’t have time to go into them. I know many in Chicago, New York City, and even here, but all progressive public schools happen from choices made from parents and teachers as activists in the community pushing for struggle. It doesn’t happen from this notion of choice in the free market.

Carrie Weletz: Another question - we’ll continue this line. You say that public schools are held accountable to the public then, and that’s how they are somehow superior. If public schools are held accountable to the public, then why are they failing now?

Melissa Butler: It depends on how you look at it. The biggest reason why they’re failing is because they’re not funded enough. They’re not cared for enough. They’re not treated with respect. They’re not cultivating the essence of what a good public system is. Right now, we have a bad situation. What do we want to do? Do we want to make it worse and move farther to the right and actually create a corporate system where the only way we can have innovation is through the market, or do we want to actually rely on grassroots community struggles that would push for higher standards, that would push for different curriculum, that would push for greater parent involvement, that would push to see schools serving community needs, being open twenty-four hours? There are a lot of policies. We don’t hear them, because of who controls our informational access, and all of these attacks have been happening since the 1980s.

Gordon Mitchell: Now let's move on to the third affirmative speaker, that's State Education Secretary Eugene Hickok.

Eugene Hickok: Thank you, Gordon. I'd like to thank the University of Pittsburgh and the William Pitt Debating Union for putting on this event. I guess I'd like to put some of the comments from both sides in some kind of perspective, at least from where I stand. I've been talking about this issue long before I became Secretary of Education. As a college professor of public policy, one of my major concerns was to force my students to consider controversial issues, and as is quite obvious from this evening's discussions, this is among the more controversial. I think that what I would argue is that we need to be willing, all of us, *all* of us, to think differently about all of our public institutions.

If you think about what's been going on in this country, other than education, all of our public institutions, in the last ten years, have undergone a tremendous transformation. Look at the health care industry. Look at the insurance industry. Look at the banking industry. Look at government. These transformations are ongoing, many are with great, great difficulty, but the fact is, we live in an age in which all of us are rethinking how we look at public institutions. There is one area of public policy that has been resolute in its defense against this kind of transformation. It is education. And I would argue *all* of education, not just public K through twelve, but all of education.

I would argue that the men and women who helped make this nation, helped create public education, hundreds of years ago, if they could come back through time and visit public education today, they would sit there and say, you know, it looks pretty good. You've got a teacher, a student, a chalkboard. Things haven't changed much. I would argue that's part of the problem. We have to be willing as a people to consider change. The nation is not the nation of fifty years ago, or even fifty days ago. Why are we so afraid to consider change? In addition, I would argue that we need to confront the facts of our dilemma in education. It is one thing to argue that public schools can do great things. I can tell you about some great public schools that are doing some great things, all over Pennsylvania. But as our most recent speaker just pointed out, they're not progressive. To make a difference, you have to fight the system. We should be willing to think about ways to *empower* people, and the system, so that it can be more progressive, that progress is not the exception to the rule. Progress is what goes on.

It has been argued that vouchers, whatever shape it might take, represent a threat to public education, that it might destroy public education. I think vouchers represent an opportunity to improve public education. And if you look at the proposals that the Governor unveiled in his budget address, they will get more details in the coming weeks, we would propose to spend, over a five year period, in total, in *total*, less than eight-tenths of a percent of what you, the taxpayers of Pennsylvania, will spend over five years, on public education. We would propose to spend, over five years, about what Philadelphia spends in four months, today. If that is a threat to public education, then surely public education is in far greater danger than we ever thought it was. For those who would argue that it is somehow the far Right that is trying to manipulate individuals into false choices, all I can say is, I have greater confidence in the ability of men and women to make choices than they do.

Right now, there are more than 25,000 people, in the city Philadelphia, seeking to participate in one of these "very disturbing" private funded voucher programs. No one

asked them, no one forced them. These are individuals who are *desperately* trying to find ways to improve opportunities for their children. Why is it we are so afraid to provide opportunities? Why is it we are so nervous that parents might make choices? And for those who argue that we open the door to, and it's an interesting phrase, "the commoditization of education," that there will be large class sizes, the corporations will somehow manipulate the system, the great virtue of this whole system is that *you* exercise the choice, as parents. Do we really think that as parents, we will blindly choose schools that have too heavy a class size, and poor quality teachers? I would argue the exact opposite.

To put a broader set of issues on the table, I would argue that we need to be willing to make a distinction between public education and public schooling. I would argue that we need to rethink what we mean by public education. I think we should be interested in a system of public education that is centered on the students, not centered on the system. I don't really care where a child goes to school. I care that a child gets a good education. I don't care about making sure that this district, versus that district, versus this system, is being funded. I care that the students in those schools are getting a good education. We would argue that this is about your money. This is not about government money being diverted to private schools. This is about your money being given back to you to make educational choices. I would argue that we need to get away from the notion that somehow there is such a thing as "government money." It is *your* money. They are your schools. They are your children.

We would argue that it is very important that we introduce, *at least* a greater possibility that you, as taxpayers, and as parents, *you* decide where your child goes to school, not the system, not the district. We would argue that this is the ultimate form of accountability. You choose where to send your child to school, and if you're not satisfied, you remove the child from that school. That's accountability. Right now in this country, we fund schools, all over the country, that are failing *miserably*. That's not accountability. That's a recipe for continued breakdown.

We would like to argue that when people see a direct connection between their investment and the quality of education that investment purchases, they take a greater interest in education. I think we can all agree on at least this one point. In this country, there has been a disconnect of the community, and of parents, with schools. We think vouchers, public school choice, private school choice, might strengthen that connection, because you see a direct stake in your involvement. Instead, we labor in this illusion that somehow, we have a free public education system. It's not free, you pay for it - \$14 billion this year in Pennsylvania. That's your money, and yet you don't see the direct connection.

Finally, we would argue that vouchers, school choice, is only a part of a much larger series of opportunities. Charter schools. Academic standards. Technology. We have never argued that somehow, vouchers or school choice, is somehow a silver bullet that will cure all of what ails public education. We do feel that it is part of what should be made available. And as part of what is made available, we can lead a reformation of public education that we think in the end, will lead to where we started, years and years ago - the *best* system of public education in the world.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: Now three minutes of questions from our student panel.

Carrie Weletz: In explaining the benefits of a proposed voucher system in Pennsylvania, I found that the State Department of Education employs a “benefits formula” assuming that tuition cost is about or around \$4,000. As I sit here now, and as I sat there last night, looking through the tuitions in Pennsylvania, I found three counties that were under or even near \$4,000. So this discrepancy seems to suggest to me that under vouchers, parents will be required to pay much more out of pocket than your analysts suggested. I have a two-fold question for you. First, why did your office decide to use such a tuition figure to figure this out, and second, if parents choosing a voucher option will be required to pay upwards of \$600 to \$1,000 to exercise their choice, how will your policy reach the families that actually need help the most?

Eugene Hickok: First of all, on the material on the web page, one thing we wanted to do was to provide an illustrative example that was easy for folks to understand, as I think it is relatively obvious, this is a very complex issue. We also recognized that there is a need to provide actual calculations for the relevant school districts that might be in the pilot, for example. So you are going to see on our web page relatively soon that if you actually calculate, given your income, given your voucher, what you would end up paying if you decide to go to that school, in that school district. Secondly, obviously, we tie the pilot proposal that I think you were referring to, to income, and we target, at the first year, the very lowest income.

Our purpose here is really quite simple, that educational opportunity grants under the pilot should go first and foremost to our low income, most-needy families. But even with that, we think that it’s important, to reiterate a point that was just made, that parents recognize that they have to make a commitment. They have be interested. There are lots of very low income families that are sacrificing a lot to send their kids non-public schools now, so we think that that level of commitment needs to complement any voucher that would be made available by the state.

Carrie Weletz: Secondly, the Pennsylvania state constitution states, in article 3, section 15, “No money raised for the support of the public schools of the commonwealth shall be appropriated to or used for the support of any sectarian school” and in article 3, section 29, “No appropriation shall be made for charitable, educational or benevolent purpose, person or community nor to any denominational and sectarian institution , corporation or association...” Although I know that the state does give money to students for college, this program had to have the state constitution amended. Absent a state constitutional amendment, is a voucher program constitutional?

Eugene Hickok: I think that the constitutional question at the federal level has been resolved. On the state level, I’m willing to argue that there’s room for debate. But I will say this, what we’ve attempted to do, not just in this proposal, but in previous proposals, is to pass a constitutional test. As has been pointed out by others in other places, we would propose to send EOG (grants) to parents, not to schools. Whether or not we would be able to prevail in Pennsylvania constitution is something that we would have to find out, but I guess what we’re arguing is that it would be an opportunity to test it in court, at least, before you tell us that somehow it should be an opportunity that we should deny our parents.

Gordon Mitchell: Now please welcome the final speaker for the opposition, Reverend Thomas E. Smith.

Thomas E. Smith: Thank you, and good evening. Could school vouchers improve the quality of education in our state? Certainly the possibility exists, but for whom, at what price? Thomas Jefferson was convinced that democracy can be effective only in the hands of an enlightened people. He offered Virginia's lawmakers a plan, in 1779, to educate schoolchildren at public cost. When Jefferson died in 1826, the nation stood on the threshold of a stupendous transformation. During the ensuing quarter century, it expanded economically, enormously in space and in population. All cities grew larger, and new ones even more numerous. The era saw the coming of the steamboat on the river, and the railroad. Commerce flourished, and so did agriculture. The age witnessed the rise of the common man with the right to vote and to hold office. It was a time of overflowing optimism, of dreams, of perpetual progress, moral uplift and social betterment. Our nation was growing toward those ideals which gave every man hope for a better tomorrow.

Such was the climate that engendered the common school, open and free to every child, and upheld by public funds. It was to be a lay institution, under the sovereignty of the state, the archetype of the present day public school. Bringing common schools into being was not easy. Against it was the doctrine that any education that excluded religious instruction was godless. Nor had there been any great recession of the contention that education was not a proper government function, and for a state to engage therein was an intrusion into parental privilege.

Still more distasteful was the fact that public education would occasion a rise in taxes. Nevertheless, Massachusetts, followed by Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New York, mustered support for state boards of education. Administered locally everywhere, schooling of the United States, masses in a republic's youngest days, was immensely diverse. In New England, primarily, schooling enjoyed public support. In the south, apart from supplying a meager learning to pauper children, the state abstained from educational responsibility. In the middle states, elementary schools were sometimes public. More often, they were parochial, or supported by philanthropic interests. Only beyond the Alleghenies were there any federal provisions for education.

Time will not permit me to fully develop the historical perspective, but I want to suggest that much of the thinking of the proponents of school vouchers is deeply rooted in the opposition to public school education, and to the protection of privilege: religious preference, parental rights, states' rights, and to the protection of power, control of decisions affecting major institutions, funding, and taxes, to the detriment of a common good.

The concept of getting parents a voucher that can be used at any school, public or private, to educate their children, seems, on the surface, to be a sound idea. Public schools are not doing a good job of educating our children, and not everyone can afford to send their children to a private school that may be able to provide a higher quality of education. Why not give all parents a voucher and let them choose where their children will go to school. The free market system will do its work, and mediocre schools will be forced to close, and better schools will flourish.

Unfortunately, the free market system could prove to be the fatal flaw in the school voucher plan, because the voucher system addresses only how education is funded, and not how it is designed. Consider this. If vouchers are given to all students, thus making a private school education available to all students, it is presumed that parents will naturally want to place their children in the best available schools. This will cause the best schools to be overwhelmed with applications for enrollment. How are schools with excellent reputations and limited facilities to decide which students will be accepted for enrollment? One way would be for the schools to set minimum enrollment requirements, and test students prior to enrollment. This would allow the school to select only the best students for enrollment. But isn't the idea of vouchers to allow parents to select the school, rather than the school select the student?

Maybe another way might be for schools to accept all students who apply, and just make do with existing facilities until more could be built. This is the model of our current public system, and would result in the same kind of overcrowding and substandard educational environment that vouchers are supposed to improve upon. A third way to select students and control student population would be for more desirable schools to charge more than the voucher is worth. Only those who could afford the extra could attend the better schools. This is the situation we have now with private schools and universities. The net effect of this scenario is to shift already scarce funding from public schools to private schools, while leaving poor students stranded in substandard, underfunded public schools.

The voucher system is based on the idea that every parent would choose to send his or her child to the best school; If only it were affordable. Unfortunately, the voucher system ignores the reason that private schools tend to provide a better education - smaller schools, with smaller teacher-student ratios can focus on education better than larger, overcrowded, administration heavy schools can. While vouchers can result in a system of smaller, more focused schools, it's equally possible they could result in larger corporate institutions, whose focus is on the shareholder, and not on the student. One need only look to managed health care to find examples of corporate profit taking precedence over customer service.

Doesn't it make much more sense to face the problem head-on, and work toward solving it directly? Why not work toward changing our public school model to one of smaller schools with more teachers, and funding going to the classroom instead of the administration. Why not be clearer about the educational objective, focusing on the development of human beings as a productive, contributing resource, living in a peaceful society, rather than a product for the corporate gain. As a society, we should demand more from our educational system than a better employee. We need human beings who can manage their lives in a responsible way. Thank you.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: Now we'll have three minutes of questions from our student panel.

Brendan Delaney: Reverend Smith, many who support school choice legislation do so because they believe that the public school system is beyond repair and no longer serves the needs of students. You obviously believe that the system can be reformed. Is there any way that public schools could deteriorate so much or anything could happen that you would be forced to support school choice legislation?

Rev. Thomas E. Smith: I don't see anything that would force me to support vouchers. There is a need for reform. There is a need for more parental involvement. I think we need to be clear about the educational focus of our schools - I think that's the real failing. We look to the corporate community to tell us what kind of product they need for employment, while the corporate community exports jobs out of the country. So there's something wrong with that scenario. We need to be more focused on the development of human beings to be productive in more ways than just in employment. There are other, very important ways that we need to help people develop.

Brendan Delaney: Currently in the Pittsburgh area, and across Pennsylvania, there are very few, if any, schools that serve corporate interests directly. Under your scenario, are you assuming that new schools will be created for profit, or are you assuming that the current schools would be created for that purpose?

Rev. Thomas E. Smith: I am suggesting that part of the problem with public schools at the present time is the tendency to look toward corporate interests to determine what curriculum to put in place, and how to gear the educational process. I think we should rethink that. We are in a time of great transition now, and we've come a long way in terms of technological advancement. We really need to look at how to restructure our society, restructure our work, and make education the kind of tool that will enable people to enjoy a better quality of life. It should be more than just preparing people for a better job; it should be preparing people for a better life.

Part Two: Public Audience Questions

Gordon Mitchell: Okay, now we're going to move into the second stage of our debate, and that's the audience questions. We have a standing mike that is set up there in the front of the room. If you have a question for either side, or a particular advocate on one of the sides, you can come up and ask your question. One thing, I'll just request that you make it a one time question, no follow-ups, in the interest of getting more voices involved. And also, if you are directing a question to a particular side, please identify that side, and if it's a specific advocate that you're interested in talking with, you can identify that advocate. Go ahead.

Audience question: Thank you very much. My name is Jerry Bowyer, I'm with the Allegheny Institute for Public Policy. I want to thank Reverend Smith for quoting my favorite American political philosopher, Thomas Jefferson. My question is this. Are you aware that during Mr. Jefferson's political career, he was, for a time, the president of our capital's school district, and at that time, he regularly made appropriations of public dollars for parents to send their children to private, religious schools, in other words, vouchers?

Rev. Thomas Smith: Absolutely. There's no doubt that during the formation of our country, there were a lot of wonderful ideas that were promoted. They were promoted by persons who were concerned about the protection of their privilege and their power. Unfortunately, all people were not included, not afforded the opportunities of those grand ideas. Fortunately, we are continuing to move toward, hopefully, a day when there is

greater opportunity for all people, and all interests will be protected by the wonderful ideas that were espoused by those persons who helped to initiate our public school system.

Gordon Mitchell: We have time for a quick reply from the other side

David Kirkpatrick: In 1779, it's true, Jefferson proposed a school system for a number of schools around Virginia, for three years. But he also said once the state built the schools, they should be run by the parents, like Clinton's putting up front money for charter schools, that anybody who thought the state could run a school better than parents didn't know what they're talking about (I'm paraphrasing), and that the parents in fact should pay the tuition for the schools, and if they couldn't afford to, then the state would help them. You can look up the legislation in 1779, or the one place he spelled it out later, in 1781, in *Notes of Virginia*. He wrote a long section. He did not believe in government owned and operated schools.

Audience question: This is for the affirmative side. Before you came up with the whole idea of school vouchers, did you look at any other ideas? What about taking the money that you're going to put into the private schools and put it into the public schools to better that system of education?

Eugene Hickok: I'll respond, at least in terms of what the administration's position is. As I said just a few moments ago, our approach on school choice and educational opportunity grants, or vouchers, is that it should be a part of a lot of things that we're doing. If you look at the last several budgets submitted by this Governor, and you look at the budget submitted and being discussed right now in the legislature, there is a substantial increase, a *substantial* increase of new money for public education. One thing that we've tried to do is make sure that we target some of that for things like technology, academic standards, and performance incentives. When you add all the new money up, it's an increase of over 6.5% that we recommend in this budget. So, it's not as though we're saying don't increase public education money, give us vouchers. We're saying that we need to step up and increase support for public education, but we also need to look at alternatives.

Gordon Mitchell: Let's have a 60 second response from the other side on that question.

Melissa Butler: The question hasn't been answered, though. What's the intrinsic benefit of vouchers? If we're going to do other things, we all agree that we should do other things, but they have to prove that vouchers could improve education. My question is, what is it intrinsically that vouchers allow that would improve this package, this toolbox of which you speak, of educational reform?

Eugene Hickok: I think one of the arguments in favor of vouchers is that we're trying to challenge the system by empowering their clients, parents and taxpayers. If we merely continue to fund the system, even in ways that we think represent statewide priorities, like academic standards, the fact is that the system has been resistant to change, and as you pointed out just a few moments ago, is resistant to being progressive. One way you have to change the system is to recognize human nature, and try to harness the power of human nature, which comes out in school vouchers.

Audience question: My name is Dr. Reed, I'm a former school principal at one of the largest elementary schools in the city, and I have a question for you, Mr. Hickok. The real

issue, particularly in inner city communities is, what will happen to those children who are left behind by these voucher systems? Where will they go, and what will happen to the public schools' continuous deterioration? I'd like to know. The wealthy and the elite have always been able to take care of themselves. What happens to the poorest of the poor when this voucher system is put into place?

Eugene Hickok: That's a very important question. Under the two proposals being discussed, one is a pilot, the other is the Academic Recovery Act, we have two different, but we think related and important responses. Under the pilot, for the five years of the pilot, we would hold school districts harmless on state money, which means as students might leave Pittsburgh schools, Pittsburgh does not lose money that it gets from the state for those students leaving. That means, in essence, that Pittsburgh will have more money per student to spend, which is one argument we hear all the time, that we need more money per student. Under the Academic Recovery proposal, we would also try to empower school districts by giving them new tools and new opportunities so they might be able to do things differently to respond to the unique challenges they have as urban school districts. So the goal here is to empower the districts, to make sure they are funded well, but also to empower parents.

Gordon Mitchell: Is there a response from the other side?

Melissa Butler: First of all, that protection of the districts is only up to five years, and that ignores the fundamental point that you only have a certain voucher worth \$700 (for an elementary school) and up to \$1,000 (for a high school), which ignores that most people won't ever have that voucher choice. Eighty percent of the people that will get choice under vouchers are already going to private schools. So who is really benefiting from this choice? It ignores the idea that *additional* educational reform is not taking place. To institute a voucher plan, and to prove that it's intrinsically beneficial, in addition to public reform, they need to prove that competition is what is necessary in our educational reform. But there's no proof that they have that competition, over time, as a policy, after five years down the road, will improve public education, especially for the people who are struggling now. They haven't proven that, and unless they've proven that, there's no way that they're improving the quality of education in Pennsylvania.

Audience question: My name is George Mongell, and I have a question for the opposition. First I want to thank all the panelists for coming, it's been a very interesting debate. We've been discussing the opportunities of the voucher system this evening, and in listening to all the evidence and the facts as they have been stated, I'm still kind of perplexed and confused on why an individual, as a parent, wouldn't want to give their kids the opportunity to go to a private institution that may benefit their education? So my question is, basically, with this system, and looking at systems that have happened in other states, why do you think that this is such a negative thing for the state to adopt, in giving a parent the right to choose to send their child to a better institution for education?

Rev. Thomas E. Smith: My problem with it, that's why I tried to give some historical perspective of how public policy gets shaped in this country. There are some foundational problems in our society that prompt policy changes in certain ways, and this is one of those attempts to affect public policy to help maintain status for the privileged that we need to be concerned about. We need to be concerned about every child in the Commonwealth, and every child in this country, and to ensure that every child has a proper education. We

already pay for education. We don't get free education. Our tax dollars pay, in the present system, for education. We should demand that the present system be held accountable, and provide the kind of education that we would expect from a private institution. That's my concern. Why shift the burden, when we've made such an investment in a public system? We should do what's necessary, meet it head on, deal with the problem in the public system, correct it to make it do what it's supposed to do.

Audience question: I'd like to address this to the opposition. I regret to say that I am old enough to have been around to have heard all of this rhetoric before. I heard this rhetoric ten years ago. I heard this rhetoric twenty years ago. I'm old enough to have heard this rhetoric thirty years ago. So it seems that the public schools have been in need of reform for thirty years, and thirty years later, the people who are supporting the public schools are saying, "Why don't you just let us reform ourselves, and everything will be all right?" I'm wondering why thirty years isn't long enough, and I'm also wondering exactly how you propose that the public schools shall be held accountable, when the complaint has now existed for thirty years, and the situation is worse?

Rev. Thomas E. Smith: If I might, slavery existed for 300 years, and the voting rights act was only passed in 1965. We've come a long way. We still have not overcome or corrected for past injustices. We have not corrected the structures that help to maintain and perpetuate some of the flaws that are within our system. I don't think that it's going to be remedied overnight. It took us four to five hundred years to get into the situation that we find ourselves in. It may take another thirty years to correct it, but we need to have the will to want to do that. Thus far, we have not committed ourselves to correct the past wrongs, in my words, the past sins, in order to get on with the future. Until we revisit the flawed foundation and correct it, we will continue to have these debates.

Audience follow up question: That's in agreement with my position. The question is how are you going to hold them accountable, given that so far, you haven't been able to do it?

Melissa Butler: There are many ways to hold people accountable. We should be arguing about how we can more equitably fund public schools. We should be arguing how to change to an income tax system. The spaces of public schools are there to allow accountability. It's what people are doing *to* those spaces that erode them, and at this present time, in this day and time, the other side is committing a fallacy. They're saying what we need are private, select, precise individual choices, and that all of those individual market choices will add up to a collective public, that will somehow help the public, but it's not like that. What we need is to have a bigger investment in the public right now, and to come together and struggle against what has been hurting our public schools for so long, and that is a commitment, and that is accountability, and the space now does exist for that accountability.

Audience follow-up question: At \$6,000 per pupil

Gordon Mitchell: ... Thank you very much for your questions.

Part Three: Closing Remarks

Gordon Mitchell: Now we're going to be moving into the third part of the debate, the closing remarks. I am afraid to say that Secretary Hickok actually has a plane to catch, and so he needs to leave us at nine o'clock, and it's really our fault for getting started a little bit late, with the microphones. So in the interest of allowing him to make his flight; we want the secretary of education from Pennsylvania to make it to Washington, D.C. in time for his business tomorrow morning. So what we'll do is have Secretary Hickok start off for the affirmative side for the first closing remarks for three minutes.

Eugene Hickok: Thank you, Gordon. I do apologize; we did get started a bit late, and I am sorry that I have to catch a plane. A couple of things that I would ask you to leave with this evening. One is that this is an issue, however you frame it, that deserves your serious scrutiny, that merits your serious attention. I don't think it's going to be one of those issues that is going to change the world as we know it, but it has the potential to change some things for the better, in my opinion. So I encourage you to continue your discussions, and your deliberations.

Second, it is an issue on which men and women of good will can disagree. The most important thing is that we be honest with the facts, that we be willing to discuss the facts, and that we be civil with those disagreements, rather than question motives, or intentions behind them.

Third, I would argue that in the end, if we are not willing, as a people, to look at the way that we provide an education for our children, with an eye toward fundamental reform, if we are not willing to look at the idea that somehow public education, if it is truly to serve the public interest, merits serious reform, because far too many of our students are not getting the education we all agree they deserve, and that any reform idea should be something to consider, along with serious, systemic change within our public schools. If we are not willing to think outside the box, and ask those sorts of questions, then I would argue that this debate will continue, and continue for a long time. But in the meantime, a lot of damage is being done to a lot of young people that deserve more. I don't think we have all the answers, but I do know we need to start asking the right questions. Thank you very much.

Gordon Mitchell: Okay, now let's hear from the first speaker on the opposition for closing remarks, three minutes from Bianca Huff.

Bianca Huff: As I said earlier, we are not against choice. As a matter of fact, school choice as a reform might be the only thing that everyone up here does agree on tonight. It does not have to be done through vouchers, however. I mentioned East Harlem as one example of how vouchers are *not* used in school choice. Los Angeles also enacted an open enrollment policy, which has been used by over 60,000 students since 1995. Now that is making a significant difference in public education, and it was not done through vouchers. St. Louis created twenty-six magnet schools without vouchers, and the most exciting thing about St. Louis' program was that suburban students actually moved into inner-city schools - that was the right choice for them, and it was done without vouchers.

I'm a product of public schooling, and I can smile and think back to a young man, a fellow classmate of mine, who was dismissed a few minutes early from class each day. You see, he was performing his daily good deed of actually leading his blind brother through the hallways. We just thought he was a really nice guy, but now I see the deeper ramifications

of this. The school protected his blind brother's rights, and it offered me a small piece of reality, that in America, there are all different types of people.

The issue of school choice is not a new one. It has been tried and re-tried, discussed and researched. Choosing one's own school could very well be used as a reform method in public schools, but not under a voucher system. We are not afraid to confront change. We are afraid to aid in destruction. Thank you.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: Now let's hear again from the affirmative side. Denise Olczak will deliver three minutes of closing remarks.

Denise Olczak: The state of Pennsylvania is required by its constitution to "provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education," and I do quote that. After examining the points given tonight, vouchers can provide just one more way to improve education for all the people, by providing a new pathway for students, but only if precautions are taken.

The opposition has given you many ideas on why vouchers are so evil, including possible racism in schools. But private schools must possess some accountability for their actions if they opt to accept school vouchers. In the worst case scenario, it could produce semi-private schools, but even in this scenario, the children still possess an option. This is something that they do not have right now. They do not have a voice. They don't have any degree of a voice in where they attend school. This is an option that we simply do not have.

When considering everything tonight, it is first and foremost that I must reiterate what [Secretary] Hickok said, that children will experience the end result. They will bear the full brunt of possessing the ability to have a choice, or to continue in the present system, where they have no other options. I'm not advocating to give up on public schools. I have never supported that idea. Many public schools are excellent, and even with the institution of a voucher program, there will be *no difference* in the registration numbers. However, with the opportunity to use vouchers, all educational institutions will possess the increased opportunity to specialize their studies, and the students, in the end, the students possess and reap the end benefit.

Secondly, if a school is not a place of learning, if they're not an effective place of learning, they're not "making the grade," as I stated earlier, and not effectively educating students, as schools should, students will have an easier option to change schools, again, something they do not have now. Ineffectual schools will simply not be able to survive. This action places a responsibility, a responsibility that Ms. Butler was offering earlier, on all schools.

And finally, remember the concept of vouchers is not a new one. In fact, many government programs, such as social security, the G.I. Bill, and college tuition grants, something that I know a lot of people at the University of Pittsburgh, in particular, take advantage of, already work in a similar manner to the proposed vouchers. Individuals can use the stipends, already, to purchase goods and services from a wide variety of organizations, as I've previously mentioned. Vouchers are no different from these programs, except they are applied to the basic education. That is the foundation for our children's knowledge. In the end, the voucher program, especially when combined with a

program that offers support for public schools, *empowers* parents to select schools and provide new options to all people involved.

As I stated earlier, the state of Pennsylvania is required by its constitution to provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education. However, with the addition of the voucher option to state educational funding, we can assure the maintenance of a more complete and efficient system, and thus, improve the quality of education for Pennsylvania.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: And now we'll hear from the second speaker on the opposition side for her closing remarks, three minutes, Ms. Melissa Butler.

Melissa Butler: I'm angry that I have to defend a system that has been struggling against these same powers for too long, and then they get up and say that I shouldn't question their motives, and that we should just try it, that it's only part of the package - just put in vouchers, it's only part of it. We *must* question their motives. We must question their motives. None of the arguments that I initially presented have been answered.

Vouchers are a diversion. Let's look specifically - they don't work. The Pennsylvania legislation that proposes vouchers won't cover all of the tuition payment. Many children won't be allowed to even have a voucher, or even have a choice, and even if they do have a choice, what schools will be there to serve them? They will be based on [the schools'] market competition. [The voucher proponents] have not proven that this innovation will trickle down to the people that need it most. Eighty percent of the people in Pennsylvania that will be helped by this legislation already go to private schools. It won't be the people that are currently in struggling public schools. It's the people whose parents struggle the most who won't be able to make the parent-teacher meetings, or might be "disruptions" in the current public school system, who will be excluded from these choices. The *schools* do the choosing. The children don't do the choosing. The families don't do the choosing.

What are their examples of success? Their only examples are Vermont. It's rural. I have an email from the ACLU. They don't *have* a voucher choice program. They don't spend state money for choice. The only way they have choice is for the two cities in Vermont that don't have a high school, and so they pay for them to go to a neighboring town to go to the high school. Their other evidence of support is the Milwaukee system. The four schools that were voucher schools closed out of corruption, and furthered the inequities of the status quo.

The issue over vouchers is full of complexities, and the stakes are high. What we need is more public conversation, and we need a referendum to be brought to the citizens of this state. Governor Ridge has proposed a referendum on gambling, and he said he would not make any decisions without a referendum. He has *not* proposed a referendum for vouchers. Are we to conclude from this that Governor Ridge thinks that gambling is more important than education? Of course not. Of course not. And so what we must do is push for a referendum. The action that we must take, right now, is to write to our Congresspeople, and to say we must have a referendum. Don't let this slide through in this curriculum toolbox, and vouchers are right there at the end. Uh unh. Pick up the *False Choices* literature from the Rethinking Schools people on the back table. Give me

your name and number, and we can organize together to be a part of standards-based reform in the Pittsburgh district and across the state of Pennsylvania. You talk to people. You ask questions.

This debate is fundamentally about how we want to decide the future of public schools in Pennsylvania: Do we want individual consumers communicating silently by spending money in the market, or do we want groups of citizens deliberating *together* about how best to protect and nourish a precious gift held in common, public education? Public schools are one of the last spaces left which have the potential to bring people together from various races, cultures, ethnicities, socioeconomic status and language backgrounds. Our neighborhoods are segregated. Our workplaces are segregated. Our religious institutions are segregated. How can we *possibly* imagine a world where differences are respected? How can we possibly start to organize toward real reform, where different ideas clash and spur new thinking? How can we possibly imagine that under their worldview? They're putting us in the position of defending something that's failing, but they're moving it way, way, way farther to the right. As we make choices, tonight, and later, individual and collective, let us remember *all* children. As John Dewey states, what one person wishes for her or his child, let the whole community wish for all its children. Thank you.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: And now for the final speaker from the affirmative side, please welcome David Kirkpatrick for a three minute speech.

David Kirkpatrick: I was a little premature when I got up the first time and said you hadn't heard any personal attacks, thank you Ms. Huff. The next speaker, that's all you heard for eight minutes, attacking groups like the Bradley Foundation and corporations, attacking individuals like Milton Friedman, and concluding with a general comment calling all of us vultures. My experience has been the weaker your argument, the angrier you get, and the more you call names. Now that can be effective, we've all seen it in general politics. Negative ads often elect people to office. It often demonizes us. But the one thing *ad hominem* attacks can't do is solve the problem.

I'm sorry we didn't have more time with Vermont. It so happens I'm a native Vermonter. There are not two towns. There are 246 towns, over ninety of them do not have an elementary school or a high school, or both. And they don't call it vouchers, they call it tuitioning, and there's no limitations. They can not only go out of state, because it borders Canada. They've had students go to Paris, France - the local government paid the tuition to Finland. In January, 1994, the Vermont state Supreme Court upheld, constitutionally, unanimously, under both the state and the federal constitutions, the attendance of a Vermont boy to a religious school in the state of Delaware.

Also the comment was made, when have the choice proponents ever lifted a finger for equitable financing. I'm glad you raised that, because ten years ago, I was the executive director of PARSS, the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools. I organized that lawsuit. I visited around the state, picked the districts - Clairton, Harrisburg, Reading - that are in that lawsuit. I organized the news conference that announced that lawsuit in January of 1991, so yeah, I've lifted a finger for equitable funding, as others should, as well.

The comment that schools select the students, the students don't select the schools. If that's the case, then we should abolish the higher education system, because those of you here at the University of Pittsburgh, or at Carlow, or Duquesne, or wherever, you didn't pick the school, the school picked you. The first thing is, you have to apply.

The system doesn't work? Well, those who don't want to believe it won't believe any evidence to the contrary, but then again, look at higher education. Every higher education institution is a charter school. They are all schools of choice. Nobody is assigned there, students, faculty, or anybody else. Practically all of the thirteen million full time students have vouchers, have a grant from somebody. Our higher education system has got its faults, because I've taught in it too, but it's the pride of the world. People come from all over the world to attend universities such as this one, so choice does indeed work.

Finally, what it comes down to is, I've never debated anyone, and I've been at this for years, I first put it in writing when I was president of PSCEA in 1970, I've never debated anybody who had their child in a school, at a high school in Pennsylvania, where eighty percent of the students drop out. Three years ago, at a middle school, it was so bad the police, at this time, two-thirds of the school year, the police have been called there 220 times, an average of almost twice a day. It got so bad, the school is a multi-million dollar school, only twenty years old, the school decided to not even try to rehabilitate it, they tore it down. The final statement is, the people who oppose this, by and large, and I've not debated one, there may be one someplace, exercise choice for their own children, usually in the public system, like I did. But don't accept anybody's rhetoric, including mine. Study it, look it up, because it is spreading, it is successful, and keep this in mind. I say it's a moral issue. If a school is not good enough for you or your child, it's not good enough for anybody's child, and it's immoral to force some child to be in a school where it's unsuccessful.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: Our final speaker tonight is the third speaker from the opposition side, Reverend Thomas E. Smith, for a three minute speech.

Thomas E. Smith: I didn't use all my time last time, so I should have an extra minute.

[laughter]

I tried to be nice, not to call them names or anything. But Mr. Kirkpatrick, you've been in a lot of places where you could make a lot of difference, and I want to thank you for your presentation tonight. I want to thank the university for the opportunity to be here, as well. Communities are desperately seeking answers to this problem, and I think it's regrettable that the state would dangle money before people in desperate situations, rather than face the problem headlong and try to really deal with the real problem that we face in our society.

The tragedy of this debate is that the proponents of this, and similar measures, have little regard, if any, for the masses, [and] are primarily concerned about protecting the privilege of the few. It's unfortunate that people fled inner city schools to go to situations where they felt safer, as opposed to trying to correct problems where they were, and sticking in those communities to make a difference. Such an attitude is deeply rooted in the

foundation of this nation, so it's understandable that such measures enjoy the level of support that they do.

This country was founded by rebels and descendants who desired to build a nation where freedom would truly exist. Yet even in our freedom, we must be accountable to those who seek to enjoy the same freedom we would have. There are many examples in our history where the protection of privilege and power has resulted in oppression and discrimination of other human beings. Education should not be used as a tool to continue a history we are trying to overcome.

The major argument is that competition will improve the system. Have we forgotten that we are talking about the development of human beings competing in a process where there be winners and losers? We must be involved in a system of education where every child is a winner, and our society is ultimately made the better. Why isn't there a greater commitment to preparing all children to be a part of a productive and peaceful society? Certainly not because of their lack or ability to learn, nor our lack of resources.

Yes, we must think outside the box. But we shouldn't be put in the trick box of vouchers. We must promote a shared national identity, with common national values, and a historical perspective that celebrates the maturing of human beings. If America is to be America, we must be honest with one another, and stop playing these games with the lives of our children. Thank you.

[applause]

Gordon Mitchell: That concludes tonight's debate. Thank you all for coming, and have a safe trip home.

[applause]