

## **How I Found Myself Squirming Uncomfortably in Support of Tax-Funded Education Vouchers**

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EDUCATION LIBERATOR: David, how long did you believe in tax-funded vouchers?

DRH: From 1968, when I first read an article by Milton Friedman, until early 1995. I liked the idea because I thought they would reduce the role of government in education.

EL: What happened in early 1995 that caused you to reconsider?

DRH: Actually, I started rethinking the whole voucher issue at the Hoover Institution conference on education reform in May, 1993. An economist at the conference, Estelle James from SUNY Stony Brook, who incidentally was not particularly pro-voucher, gave some strong evidence that state funding of private schools had led to state regulation in many countries where it had been tried. Afterwards, Bill Evers said, "That's the issue we really should be looking at." I found myself squirming uncomfortably. He had planted a seed.

EL: Did you immediately change your mind?

DRH: No, because I still couldn't think of a better solution. But as I wrote my Hoover essay, "The Case for School Choice," I felt the need to have a section dealing with the dangers the tax-funded vouchers would bring. I found myself barely persuaded of my own position that vouchers were beneficial on net.

Then Richard Minter of Insight Magazine called me in the fall of 1993 because he was doing an article on Proposition 174, the California Voucher Initiative. Richard was the first articulate conservative I had heard argue against vouchers. Then I realized that until Minter, all I'd ever had to deal with was anti-voucher arguments by liberals. Those were fairly easy to refute because liberals don't trust markets. I do.

But conservatives tend not to trust governments. Neither do I. Here was a guy who liked markets and distrusted government who gave a plausible case that the government will ultimately control what it funds. I even found myself hesitating before voting yes on Prop. 174.

EL: How did you feel when Prop. 174 was voted down by a 70:30 margin?

DRH: A sense of relief.

Meanwhile, I was asked by Insight to write the case for the tax-funded voucher, with Lew Rockwell writing the case against them. I don't like admitting this, but I am ashamed that I used the combativeness of the other side's arguments as an excuse for not examining my own view more carefully.

When the magazine came out, I felt Lew had won. I can see now that it was only a matter of time before somebody gave me the final push into the anti-voucher camp. That happened when Marshall Fritz guest-lectured in the Policy Analysis class I teach at the Naval Postgraduate School. In fact, I can remember his four words that delivered the coup de grace: "Fake rights destroy responsibility."

I finally saw that tax-funded vouchers are a horrible idea.

EL: What have you done since then to help others gain this insight?

DRH: In every discussion where the issue of vouchers has come up, I share why I think they'd be destructive of true education. Then I add the necessary next step by offering an alternative idea so the person has something practical to work on, and that is that we can deregulate homeschools by eliminating compulsory attendance. This is a far better idea, and I think even politically more doable.

EL: Did your "conversion" affect you in any other way?

DRH: Definitely. An hour after Marshall's lecture, I went home and told Rena (my wife) that I was ready to sign the statement of non-intent to enroll Karen (our daughter) in the government school she had been attending, and instead to

sign her up at a private school. After discussion all around, we did just that. And, we're all very pleased we did it.