

Breaking the Rules for Business Support of Education

By J. Patrick Rooney

In early 1991 there was a legislative effort in Indiana to get the state legislature to approve educational choice funding. It did not go anyplace, but that is no surprise. Anybody who has ever worked with legislation knows that it is a lot easier to prevent a change than it is to get one, so the advantage is all on the side of the opponents who want to keep the status quo.

We have been interested in poor people and minority people for a long time, and have been successful in several areas. In Indianapolis we are not only a major employer, but we are a major employer of minority people that are coming out of the inner city. And we know that many of them do not have the skills necessary to obtain good jobs.

Now, the demands of the marketplace are getting more severe, not less severe. We have very few jobs, if any, where it is only important that you have a strong back and a weak mind. We need people with strong minds, and particularly with the educational fundamentals. Probably reading is the most important skill. Workers have to be able to read and follow instructions. We sit people down to a computer terminal, they push the right buttons, information and instructions come up on the screen, and they have to be able to follow those instructions. And we know that the number of qualified job applicants is going down and our demands are increasing. So, what can we do about it?

One thing we can do, and probably will do next time there is the long session in Indiana. (Indiana in alternate years has a long and short session. In 1991 there was a long session, in 1992 a short session and in 1993 there will be a long session again.) When that comes we will probably be there with parents and students advocating the funding of educational choice.

Investing in Education. But in the meantime, what could we do to help these under-educated people? We were concerned about them, and Indianapolis happens to be where we have many employees. We decided corporations give for charitable purposes, and probably nothing that we could possibly give money to would be as beneficial to our society in the long run as helping these children get a better education.

Now, we know that the more prosperous people have two alternatives. One is they can pack up the family and move to a better neighborhood. They can compare the quality of schools and then move to a community that has a better school system. The alternative that the more prosperous people can choose is pay the tuition to go to a private school.

But for a lot of people—the low-income people in the inner city—neither one of those alternatives is possible. We decided that we would pay half of the cost for low-income parents if they wanted to send their child to a private, non-public school. We were asked if we would set any criteria for the school? We decided we would not if we were really interested in power to the people, or empowerment.

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I want to talk about those two expressions. In the late 1960s, the left in this nation was talking about power to the people. And today the Republican party is talking about empowerment; but as far as we know, they are the same thing. Giving people power and choices does not belong either to the left or to the right, it belongs to all of us. So we decided we would do something for the parents to give them the power to make a choice.

What we agreed to do was to pay half of the tuition, up to \$800. Now how did we get to the \$800 figure? We actually enquired of the non-public schools, and except for a couple of elite schools, the tuition was \$1,600 a year or less. Only one school, a sectarian school, had tuition of \$1,800. So we decided that we would pay up to half of \$1,600, that is \$800, or half of whatever the school was charging. In fact, some of these schools had a "cheaper-by-the-dozen" tuition. I go to a church that has a school and I believe the tuition is \$1,315 for the first child and only \$180 more for the second child. Now we know that that does not cover the marginal cost for the school, but that is their problem. We are not running the school, we are simply trying to fund parents who want to take their children to a non-public school.

We talked about it. We knew that we wanted to contribute these funds. We decided that we would guarantee to help 500 children and we would guarantee to do so for three years. We did not want anxiety about what was going to happen the next year. Now the fact is that we intend to continue doing this until the government takes it over and grants educational choice to everybody. And when that takes place, then our action will not be required anymore; but in the meantime, we decided we would guarantee our support unconditionally for three years.

Income Criterion. And whom will we do it for? We were asked if we were going to screen the students. We decided we would screen them only as to the income of the parents; and if possible, we preferred to use an independent criterion rather than our own. We decided we would pay half of the tuition cost for those children that qualified for the reduced-cost lunch program. There is a federally funded, reduced-cost lunch program and the income criteria are fairly generous. It is not policed by us, and the school has to submit information to the federal government to get reimbursement to the school. We decided that if the child qualified for that, then the child would qualify for our grant. Some 57 percent of all the children in the Indianapolis public school system do, in fact, qualify at the present time. It may indeed be more than that, but 57 percent are currently getting the reduced-cost lunch program. There may be another 10 percent that would qualify whose parents are sending lunch with them.

We decided we would do it for grade school. We would love to be able to do it for both grade school and high school, but there was a limited amount of money that we were willing to commit. So we committed \$1.2 million for three years, which would meet this tuition grant of \$800 per child for the next three years.

We made this commitment to help the low-income and minority children to get a better start on education, because we thought there was probably nothing that would be as important that we could do. It is very common for corporations to make grants and for a building or Chair to be named for them so their names are perpetuated. But we believed that if we were really interested in doing good, we ought to help the children get a better start in life. It is our impression that if they do not get the fundamentals in the beginning, remedial education does not work very well. I am not saying remedial help does not work at all, it just does not work as well as getting it right the first time. So we decided we would fund the fundamentals so that they would get it right the first time.

Golden Rule Insurance Company writes group life and health insurance, but as far as we know, we are the largest provider of individual health insurance. If you happened to leave your employer and go to work for yourself and were buying individual insurance, you would very likely be buying it from us. And, of course, we employ a lot of people in clerical roles.

Now we have been joined by a number of other companies that are deciding that funding tuition is a good thing. Approximately 800 children are funded.

I want to tell you how we have positioned it. We have positioned this as assistance to the children and to the parents. This is not intended to be an attack on the public school system. We have not disparaged the public school system, but let me tell you what the community in Indianapolis knows, because they read it on the front page of the newspaper. The empirical evidence is that the test scores—Indiana has a state-wide testing program called ISTEP—of the children in the private schools are much better than those of the children in the public schools.

Public School Police. I am told that the public schools in Indianapolis have the third largest police force in Indiana. Indianapolis has the largest police force, Evansville has the second largest, and the third largest police force in Indiana is operated in the public schools to control violence in the public schools. And we know that on the front page of the newspaper they are telling about dogs that sniff for drugs, and that is not happening in the private schools.

So one of the things we learned after we started this program is the response of the parents. The parents who are involved are delighted and it appears that their response is, "My child is working harder. I like the environment and the fact that my child is safer." Either in reality the child is safer, or the child and the parent feel safer, which is probably the same thing. But as we have positioned it, we are granting help to parents and children so that they can go to another school if they choose to; and of course, when they do, they have to pay half. Now because of this "cheaper-by-the-dozen" phenomenon, the cost to the parents is not actually averaging \$800 a child. It is \$800 for the first child, and maybe as indicated at the church where I go, the tuition is \$90 for the second child.

I want to tell you about the possibility for replication of the program. We are providing to anybody that wants them, complete copies of all of the documents that we have created. When we created the program we had a form that was this long and had many questions on it—Social Security, where the parents worked. So help me, we may even have had their shoe sizes on the form. But what did we need with all this information? All we needed really was to find out: did they live within the confines of the Indianapolis public school system; did they qualify for the reduced-cost lunch program, and was there a non-public school system that would take the child?

By the way, as far as I know, except for the few elite schools, the other private schools take the children without any criteria applied. They just take them if they apply and if they can pay the tuition. So, as far as I know, the non-public school systems are not testing the children to go, but we developed a very simple form.

Spreading to Other Cities. As to the matter of replication, we are giving to other cities and other groups of people copies of anything we have done—the articles of incorporation, the by-laws, the application form, the question and answer sheet that we produced, and so on. We believe that a number of cities are going to be replicating the program. I am going to Lansing, Michigan, next week to speak at the opening day of a choice charitable program that will take place in Detroit and Grand Rapids, I believe. The reason for going to Lansing is that it is the capital of Michigan.

I understand that today—on April 15th—San Antonio, Texas, is announcing with public display their choice charitable program for this coming year. They have a couple of prosperous corporations that are providing the foundation funding, but yet a number of other corporations and individuals are participating.

Next month I am going to Atlanta, Georgia, to speak on the subject. I am also going to Cleveland. All of these have a program started up, and hopefully it will generate enough funding that it will be able to go next year. I do not wish to leave Chicago out, because Chicago is close to us. A man by the name of Patrick Keleher is a leader in an organization called "TeachAmerica" in Chicago, and it is putting together a choice charitable program for next year.

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poor crime victim out of the ditch and take care of him? How generous would he have been if he had drawn on taxpayer funds to pay the innkeeper for nursing the poor fellow back to health? It's a point worth pondering—as I'm sure many have already suggested.

It is clear, then, that a governmental charity program—especially one conducted by a government which is based on a fundamental separation of church and state—cannot be motivated by religious principles of charity. Instead, humanist virtues are conjured up, as easily endorsed by the Gorbachevs of the world as anyone else, and programs are conducted in their name.

It would be fair to object that, surely there are people who undertake their governmental duties with truly Christian virtue, and I admit that this is true—and I encourage it. But we must recognize that, from the point of view of the system, if a government program happens to be administered in the spirit of Christian charity, with a closet Christian exercising true *caritas*, it is clearly by accident, and probably illegal. Thus the system prevents the Christian from manifesting the most valuable virtue of all to his work. What a waste!

Is it any wonder that one government program after another fails when it attempts to do work that was once the province of religious endeavor? We have seen it happen thousands of times before. A certain endeavor needs "aid." The government moves in, first with an almost benign presence—but not for long. Soon the wall of separation is imposed, someone is offended by a prayer, or a creche, or a teaching, or a crucifix (displayed in reverence, not in urine). And because the state practices the Brezhnev doctrine—never retreat once you have taken new territory—religion must make its exit. When it does, the result is, invariably, disaster. Here are some examples:

- X **Education, when taken out of the hands of religious parents and handed to the political hacks of the NEA, becomes our worst national scandal. Today you can hang pictures of condoms or loving homosexual couples on the wall, but not the Ten Commandments.**
- X **Hospitals and health care, once the realm of charitable organizations whose intention was charity, now offer endless opportunities to self-enrichment by ripping off the government. Meanwhile, the more the government is involved, the higher health costs soar.**
- X **A program designed to provide affordable legal services to the poor is perverted into a political campaign machine for homosexuals, illegal aliens, and radical ideologues.**
- X **A program designed to aid poor families instead encourages the destruction of families, and has proven especially destructive to the black family, a point that Robert Woodson recently tried to make on a Sunday morning show, to the astonishment and indignation of everyone else on the program.**
- X **Foreign aid programs designed (we are told) to help countries out of poverty instead seem to entrench oppressive elites in those countries, even as population programs are frantically applied to stem the births of the "undesirable poor." (Remember, studies show that families reaching middle class status seem to choose to limit the size of their families voluntarily; so our population programs are aimed solely at the foreign poor.) Thus, U.S. aid programs which insist on the required population portion of the package send a message to the poor, often religious, people in those countries that they are the problem, and that we are merely trying to keep them from being born. (Contrast that with the Christian view of man.) Meanwhile, not one of these "developing" countries has ceased being "underdeveloped" in over twenty years.**

X A program designed to provide art for the people at large, not just the elite, instead encourages works that trashes every commonly held principle, symbol, and virtue in the culture. Dare to raise your voice and you are against "free speech"—but please don't ask us to support any religious art, because that's proselytizing.

Last year I was in Moscow, and saw a most remarkable and beautiful exhibit of religious art in the Russian White House. That's the building where Boris Yeltsin mounted the tank on that fateful day of the coup. While he was outside, there were 150 linear meters of beautifully portrayed scenes of the suffering Christ, at least a dozen depictions of Saint George slaying the dragon, St. Joan of Arc, and other historical and contemporary renderings of striking religious themes. Frank Shakespeare, our former Ambassador to the Holy See, was with me, and we remarked then that, while that exhibition was permitted in what was then still the Communist Soviet Union, it would never have been permitted in the National Endowment of the Arts grantee list.

Now many of the principles I'm discussing here were obviously known to conservatives twelve years ago. Today there are lot more data to prove their worth. Perhaps we are now more sober about politics. But, in the light of all this, why did conservatives, and especially Christians, become so enthusiastic about politics in the first place?

Triumph of Politicians. Clearly many of us were so excited about the Reagan "victories" in 1980 and 1984 that we were willing to put great faith in politics—as long as we had a shot at winning. We transferred much of our religious enthusiasm and our most fervent energies to political activity. Sadly, this has heralded the triumph of the politicians—the government sector—over the rest of American life. And here's the key: People who once knew that government could not possibly perform certain tasks (properly reserved by the Tenth Amendment to the states and to the people) now believed that government could do the job—if only they were in power.

Now for the philosophy majors, that position reflects a Kantian, not a Christian, approach; it is clearly anti-Augustinian and anti-Madisonian. It appears to be the position of not only the liberal community, but also of the "no-nonsense" types like Ross Perot of Texas or John Silber, formerly of Texas but now President of Boston University. The notion of limits on governmental power has not yet emerged in the rhetoric of contemporary political animals; in fact, while they constantly intone the mantra of "greed" and the "rich," we never seem to hear them speak of the evils of the lust for power, or the deadly sin of envy. But no Christian can ignore the perils of those temptations.

At the foundation of this fundamental error that has caused so much damage to our body politic lies the denial of what our nation's founders knew were self-evident truths: that all men are created—equal, yes, but only in view of their creation—and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that all this flows from the laws of nature and of nature's God.

I assure you, I am not speaking in the terms of the Declaration and of natural law only because I think you might thus find the rest of my analysis tonight more persuasive. Rather, I am focusing on those foundations of our liberties because I sincerely believe that their rejection, in theory by liberal ideology and in practice by liberal programs, has been the ruin of this country.

And no government program is going to get this country going again. Only the free people of America can do that, and they must do so first by recognizing that our government, so long as it celebrates the "wall of separation," denies everything that our nation's founding affirmed. When our government takes our founding documents and removes references to man as created, then the rights with which he is endowed by his Creator disappear as well. There is simply no other source for such fundamental rights—certainly not wishful liberal thinking. So Christians live on in that contradiction, while our efforts to sanctify our community are frustrated by the

government's perversion of everything we stand for. The result is a national schizophrenia: a godly people, a godless state.

Clearly, the state is subject to the natural law, and thus government programs can seek the common good, but not under the recipe offered by advocates of the radical separation of Church and State. To them, all truths are equal and the "celebration of diversity" (usually the celebration of the worst, or, almost as bad, the celebration of no standards at all) is the only option.

Modest Proposal. So, with this preamble, I come to the modest proposal which constitutes the programmatic, rather than the analytical, portion of my remarks tonight. I have made my preamble so long, ~~perhaps, because I have no extensive point-by-point agenda to recommend.~~ Instead, let me offer some principles which might guide the work of the Fourth Generation—and those of us who are left from the First, Second, and Third Generations as well—in the future. Starting now.

First of all, I think the record shows that a lot of people in Washington are very, very tired. And the rest of the country is certainly tired of Washington. Moreover, people are frustrated, for the reasons I outlined above: They expected politics to deliver what it could not deliver. But Nikos Kazantzakis used to say, "You should not curse the apple tree because it does not bear cherries."

Perhaps many good folks are not truly exhausted; maybe they're just tired of politics. So I suggest that we return to the free sector—in fact, that we take back the free sector. This is the unique challenge to all of us in the 1990s.

Of course we should go first of all to our strengths—to education, to health care, to welfare—truly the focal points of the failure of politics in the last generation, and the pride of the charitable works of all religions in our nation's tradition. Frankly, many of us have lost our energy and dedication to these institutions because we thought the government could do it. Well, the government can't do it. So let's roll up our sleeves and do it ourselves.

We all know what kind of schools we can build in the free sector—free of politicization, free of tenured bureaucracies (unless we want them, of course), and free of secular curricula. Let's build them—we can do it at half the cost of the government schools, with much better results. We can't wait for the government schools to fail—as if they haven't already; instead, we have to take this Administration at its word and say, "Give us the choice that is promised in America 2000, and we will build schools that Americans everywhere will want to choose. And by the year 2000 we will guarantee you a better America."

The same goes for health care. I was talking with Stuart Butler earlier this week and I know how much Heritage could offer to private organizations interested in revivifying the religious community to enter the health care field. So I won't go on about details because I think they're obvious to all of us.

Re-ordering Priorities. Another obvious area is welfare, which was once the province of religion, and, as I tried to point out, which is much better off in the hands of the free sector. But the real problem here is the re-ordering our priorities, and I want to address the difficult dimension which that imposes.

I think we need to make the free sector our first priority today, even if we work for the government. We must be prepared to give much more of what the papal encyclicals call our "excess"—determined by our own conscience, not by some bureaucrat from the IRS—and we must use that excess to build the institutions in the free sector that have fared so badly under government rule.

Now, this excess doesn't mean only money—yes, it means money, but it means taking on an entirely new approach to free institutions: it means that we really have to spend a lot less time

watching reruns of *Casablanca* and a lot more time working not only in individual acts of charity, but to build institutions that will embody and perpetuate these labors.

Examples: schools. We should tell every parent in every town where the schools encourage promiscuity that we're opening schools here that will teach real morality. We'll do everything possible to make room for your kids and we'll go the extra mile to pay their tuition, not out of philanthropy but out of charity—in the proper sense of the word. We would have to draw on a community to do this, but it would be a community based on voluntary cooperation—remember that charity by definition cannot be mandatory. We should build good schools and recruit people to teach in them and one or two people to run them—we don't need 50 percent administrative staff like the government schools. We need to instill a missionary spirit in our fellow Christians and the reason is obvious: This is mission country, and the policy analyst has to recognize that the future of public policy lies in the realm of public freedom, not in the realm of government.

What about the government? Ignore it as much as possible. Where possible, find people there who understand and ask them kindly to begin their retreat back within the proper limits of the Tenth Amendment. Once our schools are up and running—and we're willing to make them affordable to everyone, and to sacrifice (another Christian virtue) enough to make them that way, then the government schools will collapse of their own weight, or radically reform themselves.

The same formula should be applied to health care. I know it's demanding a lot, but we have to begin, first one person at a time and then in solidarity—another Christian term, by the way—to make this work. It will take great strides in charity, hard work, sacrifice—it will truly constitute a revolution. But it will be genuine, because it will be voluntary, based on an appeal to freedom in both the recipients and the providers of each of these services.

Welfare is another area where charity provided in freedom is so much better than anything that government can provide. Local charity, shorn of the bureaucracy and affording the opportunity for people to help people they know, in areas they're familiar with, can be much more effective than government giveaways of other people's money; and the possibility of graft, waste, fraud, and abuse will be reduced to virtually zero.

Reasserting Freedom, Standards. Please note that I'm concentrating here not on the particular aspects of the programs, thank goodness, because the folks at Heritage have worked so many of those out. I'm calling on the good, free people of this country to reassert their freedom, to reassert the standards of education, health care, and welfare that our country is worthy and capable of, and tell the politicians to leave us alone.

That is an essential ingredient. We don't need a government grant. We cannot ask for government help or the whole vicious cycle will start all over again. I think that this is what President Bush might have meant with his insistence on a "thousand points of light." Just remember that, for us Christians, it's the light of Christ that we're reflecting. That work can be done best in freedom. The secret is that people of all faiths, and even people with no faith at all, will immediately see how much better this approach can be. And then they might have a little less faith in government and a little more faith in the laws of nature and Nature's God, from whom all blessings flow. And that's what it's all about.

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