



American Jewish Committee Endorses Abolishing Public Schools?

Jason Bedrick

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In response to calls at the Republican National Convention for more school choice, the American Jewish Committee's spokesperson announced that not only do they oppose the taxpayer subsidy of private schools, but they even oppose public schools. [See for yourself:](#)

For more than 50 years, school choice has been a contentious issue for American Jews. Decades ago, mainstream Jewish organizations were vociferous in defending the separation of church-and-state, worried that if the government got involved in funding religious schools in any way, it could lead to infringement on Jewish religious freedom. Those fears, according to American Jewish Committee associate general counsel Marc Stern, remain today.

“The Jewish community has long been concerned that government not be in the business of supporting private education,” Stern said. “Communities that want to maintain religious schools should pay for them on their own without government support. People shouldn't be taxed to support things they don't agree with.”

Okay, so he didn't say it explicitly, but Stern is intelligent and knowledgeable enough to know that lots of Americans object to what is taught in public schools, so this was a clear endorsement by the AJC for the complete abolition of public schooling.

Heck, this “people shouldn't be taxed to support things they don't agree with” principle is something that my colleagues at the Cato Institute could really get behind. I'm sure that by the time the sun sets today, we could assemble a very long list of government programs to which many Americans object and we welcome the AJC's support in abolishing them as well.

Then again, it's always possible that the AJC's attorney misspoke. Perhaps they're not really in favor of abolishing the public school system and hundreds of other government programs, and the attorney just didn't think through the logic of what he was saying. But if the AJC isn't embracing anarcho-capitalism, then their “people shouldn't be taxed to support things they don't agree with” objection has no force or consistency. What they really mean is “we don't think

people should be taxed to pay for things we don't like, but they should be taxed to pay for things that we do like," which is not really a principle so much as an expression of political will, a *political* will that is fundamentally anti-pluralist, as I've explained previously:

Let's consider an imaginary "public" school district where there are three groups of people: Hobbits, Ewoks, and Terrans. Each group has very different and passionately held views about what should be taught in school and how it should be taught. All three groups are required to pay taxes to support the district school, which is ostensibly nonpartisan, nondenominational, and open to all. However, the majority of the district is Terran so the school reflects the Terran preferences. When the Hobbits and Ewoks open their own schools and seek equal per-pupil support from the local government, the indignant Terrans respond that the district school is meant for everyone. "It's your right to open your own schools," explain the Terrans, "but it's your responsibility to pay for them." Thus the majority brazenly forces minority groups either to abandon their values or to pay for two school systems. And lower-income minorities may have no choice at all.

Fortunately, other Jewish groups understand this and are willing to advocate for the greater freedom and pluralism that school choice programs deliver:

The Orthodox Union and the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America have both successfully lobbied for New York City and New York State to fund programs like security and special education for private schools. According to Maury Litwack, the OU Advocacy Center's director of state political affairs, more than 100,000 students attend Jewish day school in New York City.

"For parents who send their kids to Jewish day school, tuition is prohibitively high," Litwack said. "They pay property taxes and a variety of other taxes. In American education there's too often a one-size-fits-all approach to education. There should be more options."

Republicans agree. A section of the party's 2015 platform, titled "Choice in Education," says, "Empowering families to access the learning environments that will best help their children to realize their full potential is one of the greatest civil rights challenges of our time. A young person's ability to succeed in school must be based on his or her God-given talent and motivation, not an address, ZIP code, or economic status."

The AJC is an organization that claims to be committed to the principle of pluralism. I look forward to a day when they fully embrace the ideal of pluralism in education.

Jason Bedrick is a policy analyst with the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.