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January 4, 2010

[Should Republicans Self-fund the DC Voucher Program?](#)

Should Republicans see to it that the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program remains alive, through private donations? Erick Erickson [wrote about this idea in April 2009](#), but it seems that very little discussion regarding the topic has since occurred, anywhere. I would like to write about it now, in order to encourage a more serious consideration of the matter.

According to [The Wall Street Journal](#) in May 2009 (emphasis added):

About 1,700 kids currently receive \$7,500 vouchers to attend private schools under the Opportunity Scholarship Program, and 99% of them are black or Hispanic. The program is a huge hit with parents — there are four applicants for every available scholarship — and the latest Department of Education evaluation showed significant academic gains.

According to [the Cato Institute's Andrew Coulson](#), DC “public” schools spend \$25,000 per student. Our own federal government has admitted that the parent-driven voucher program is out-performing the government-run schools, and at 1/3 the cost.

The [Heritage Foundation covers the DC voucher program here](#). Even the liberal *Washington Post* gets it. From [one Post editorial in favor of the program](#):

Hoping no one notices, congressional Democrats step between 1,800 D.C. children and a good education.

From [another Washington Post editorial](#):

It's clear, though, from how the destruction of the program is being orchestrated, that issues such as parents' needs, student performance and program effectiveness don't matter next to the political demands of teachers' unions.

More from the May 2009 *WSJ* article:

The Education Department released its annual evaluation of the D.C. program last month — tellingly, without a press release or media briefing — and it showed that voucher recipients are reading nearly a half-grade ahead of their peers who didn't receive a scholarship. These academic benefits are compounding over time. The study revealed that the program's earliest participants are 19 months ahead of public school peers in reading after three years. Nationwide, black 12th graders as a group score lower on reading tests than white 8th graders. The D.C. voucher program is closing this achievement gap.

President Barack Obama cares about racial minorities, right? As they say, actions speak louder than words, and Obama appears ready to re-pay the government employee unions that helped elect him in 2008.

From Andrew Breitbart's Big Government on December 31, 2009: [“Democrats Officially Kill Successful DC Voucher Program.”](#) Big Government quotes a December 10 [press release from the Chicago-based Heartland Institute](#), “DC School Choice Leaders Blast Appropriators' Decision to Kill School Voucher Program.”

The leaders of D.C.'s school choice movement, Kevin P. Chavous (former D.C. Councilman) and Virginia Walden Ford (executive director of D.C. Parents for School Choice), today issued the following statement:

“House and Senate Appropriators this week ignored the wishes of D.C.'s mayor, D.C.'s public schools chancellor, a majority of D.C.'s city council, and more than 70 percent of D.C. residents and have mandated the slow death of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. This successful school voucher program—for D.C.'s poorest families—has allowed more than 3,300 children to attend the best schools they have ever known.

More from [the press release](#) from DC school choice proponents Kevin P. Chavous and Virginia Walden Ford. They make clear what is happening, and who is doing it:

Despite the clearly positive results and the proven success of this program, Sen. Dick Durbin, Rep. Jose Serrano, Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, and Secretary Arne Duncan worked together to kill the [Opportunity Scholarship Program]...

What is incredibly disappointing to low-income families in Washington, D.C. has been the silence of President Barack Obama. The President, who benefited from K-12 scholarships himself, worked on behalf of low-income families in Chicago, and exercises school choice as a parent, has stood silently on the sidelines while his Secretary of Education belittled the importance of helping such a small number of children in the nation's capital.

Moe Lane at RedState wrote, [“Democrats resegregate DC school system.”](#)

1,700 students at \$7500 per student equals a little less than \$13 million. Let's assume that it will take about \$15 million to keep this program going. To me, it seems to be a worthwhile effort. I don't see why it would be difficult to organize and administer a non-profit organization that would replace the government's role.

If Republicans were to arrange for the private funding of this program, it would accomplish at least four enormous things:

1. Over time, thousands of children would be given what may be their only true opportunity for economic prosperity. What a great charity this would be.
2. Republicans will always increase their chances of winning over black and Hispanic voters through expanding freedom — too often, we try to “buy” votes through entitlement programs. Rarely does it accomplish anything of long-term value to expand government and entitlements, when there is a private-based option that is available.
3. In the short-term, this would likely be a helpful party-building activity, at all levels.
4. It would simultaneously result in consistent, positive news stories on behalf of Republicans, while causing Democrats to attempt to justify the indefensible.

It might even cause Democrats to re-consider whether they should kill the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

To reach \$15 million, here is one of many possible funding formulas, for the first year:

- 178 sitting US House Republicans x \$10,000 personal donation = \$1,800,000
- 40 sitting US Senate Republicans x \$15,000 personal donation = \$600,000
- RNC, NRSC, NRCC, and RGA x \$50,000 each: \$200,000
- 23 sitting Republican governors x \$15,000 personal donation = \$350,000
- 50 state parties x \$5,000 average (based on population, perhaps) = \$250,000
- 325 well-funded 2010 US House candidate committees x \$5,000 = \$1,600,000
- 30 well-funded US Senate candidate committees x \$10,000 = \$300,000
- 30 well-funded campaigns for governor x \$5,000 = \$150,000
- High-profile Republicans agree to appear on behalf of the first 250 state and local candidates who successfully raise \$10,000 = \$2,500,000
- 500 matching contributions of \$15,000 = \$7,500,000. Businesses small and large, leadership PACs, foundations, individuals, etc.
- An additional \$25,000 donation from Alabama's Parker Griffith, to show us he's serious about being a Republican, after being a life-long Democrat.
- An additional \$100,000 donation from the US Chamber of Commerce, to show us it's serious about supporting both education and business, after taking anti-educational and anti-business actions such as [endorsing card-check supporter](#)

[Mary Landrieu](#) in 2008, who beat Republican John Kennedy by 52-46%; and such as labeling [the left-leaning Olathe, KS, Chamber of Commerce](#) among its top 1% of all local chambers (as one example, the KC-area Olathe Chamber refuses to join the state-wide Kansas Chamber in opposing ObamaCare).

= more than \$15 million.

There are many ways to fund the program, and there are many ways to operate it. For example, it might be more feasible to run the program at a \$4,000-per-student level.

At minimum, I find this discussion to be a necessary one, and the topic one that should not be dismissed.

Benjamin Hodge publishes [KansasProgress.com, based in Greater Kansas City](#). From 2005-2009, Hodge was a [trustee at Johnson County Community College \(JCCC\)](#), representing 300,000 voters and 40,000 students. He was a state representative from 2006-2008 and was elected in 2008 as a [delegate to the Kansas Republican Party](#). [Hodge's record](#) is recognized by AFP, the NRA, the Kansas Press Association, the Kansas Association of Broadcasters, Kansans for Life, and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. Connect with [Hodge on Facebook](#), at [Hodge's political Web site](#), and on [Twitter at @benjaminhodge](#).

by Benjamin Hodge @ 9:45 am. Filed under [Uncategorized](#)
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5 Responses to “Should Republicans Self-fund the DC Voucher Program?”

1. [Dustin Siggins](#) Says:
[January 4th, 2010 at 11:01 am](#)

Mr. Hodge,

I've written on this a number of times since April- I'm glad to see this up. I like the angle you take, and the well-researched position you have.

2. [Martha](#) Says:
[January 4th, 2010 at 11:07 am](#)

Great article, Benjamin. Great idea.

3. [Right](#) Says:
[January 4th, 2010 at 1:26 pm](#)

I moved further to the right on all issues except one – vouchers. I’m exhausted of the state intervention on every facet of our private sphere. No industry stays uncorrupted while they’re on the public dole. Vouchers will corrupt our private education system. It will encourage the creation of essentially ‘shell’ private schools whose existence is entirely dependent on voucher money. No thanks.

4. *Swint* Says:

[January 4th, 2010 at 2:27 pm](#)

I really, really like this idea. Not only will it help a valuable program stay alive the GOP puts money where it’s mouth is that they care about people and their well being. Specifically, inner-city minority kids who are the largest beneficiary of the voucher program.

Also, I am not overly concerned about the impact on our private education system. First, I don’t believe it will be anywhere as dire as Right recommends. Second, the percentage of kids in America going to private school is small. While a majority of our kids are getting terrible education through the public system. If the voucher program helps alleviate the terribleness of the system, more power to them.

5. *Benjamin Hodge* Says:

[January 4th, 2010 at 6:21 pm](#)

#3, Right: I do understand your concerns. And to be clear, I don’t think the federal government should be involved at all in education for the states; but it seems constitutional to me for the feds to be involved in DC.

So, where I would support vouchers would generally be at the state level. I have heard arguments with regard to a state government having much less authority to audit a private school when the “source” is a tax deduction/credit, when compared to a voucher (a check from the state).

To your main point: again, I understand that a private enterprise can lose its liberty and its soul, if it becomes dependent on government. But government-run education is here to stay; in my mind, the question becomes, do we give parents and children the freedom to choose a high-quality educational service?

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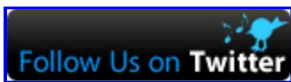
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