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PERSPECTIVES

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SAVING SCHOOLS

A new bill would allow rich parents to give their children more while continuing to destroy the public education system



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

It has always been profitable to be the child of rich parents. Now that profit might become tax deductible.

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a bill that would allow parents in most income brackets to save up to \$2,500 each year for their children's educational expenses without having to pay taxes on the savings accounts. The money can go to any educational purpose, including private school tuition, uniform costs, school supplies or even transportation costs.

The Washington Post quoted one member of the National School Boards Association as describing the bill as "the BMW tax subsidy act." That's one way of explaining it, but we can think of some other names that fit a little better.

This bill represents the worst in a long series of bad ideas about education to come out of the Republicans in Congress. From school vouchers to prayer in school, the majority of Congress has been pushing to transform our public school system into a private marketplace set up to meet the needs of the financial and cultural elite in our country.

Congress praises such ideas because they provide choice for education consumers. The problem is that, for most of us, education isn't about consumer choices; it is about providing a basic level of competency to allow us to survive in a modern society. We don't pick high schools because of the color of their uniforms or the denomination of the chapel at which students are compelled to worship; we go to our neighborhood school and hope the voters are still willing to pay for books.

Even Bill Clinton, who has hardly proven to be a

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great fan of the poor in his time in office, has pledged to veto the House proposal. It isn't a difficult decision.

The bill would allow couples who make up to \$150,000 to contribute to the tax-free accounts. Clearly, this is not a proposal designed to aid what the average person considers the middle class, despite Republican claims to the contrary.

It takes a family with a six-digit income to take full advantage of this proposal. Not only can most poor families not afford to put aside \$500, much less \$2,500 in savings every year, but those families certainly can't afford the additional money the tax-free accounts don't cover.

Paying to put a student through private school costs more than \$2,500 annually. More significantly, you only reduce your taxes if you place the money in an interest-bearing account — not if you spend it directly from your paycheck.

The real beneficiaries of the tax-free accounts will not be middle-class families who manage to scrape up enough money to send their children to a private school; they will be wealthy couples who already have the tuition money and who use the accounts to pay for extra educational perks.

Beyond this, encouraging middle-class families to send their students to private schools is not a good idea. If the law achieved its intended effect, it would be an even worse piece of legislation.

A large portion of the cost of schools is paid by the middle class in the form of taxes. While it

would be nice to see this redistributed so that corporations and wealthy individuals pay a bigger share, the fact remains that a big chunk of school funding is always going to come from those with average incomes.

If these middle-class families begin to decide the public school system is no longer capable of serving their interests, they will turn to private schools. Forced to pay private tuition along with the taxes for public schools, the families will be justly upset.

Encouraging people to attend private schools won't cause public schools to increase their quality in the interest of competition. Instead, families will prove more reluctant to fund the public schools, causing those schools to degrade even further.

As public schools collapse and the middle class flee the wreckage, the poor and lower-middle class will be the ones who are trapped inside. Unable to raise the price of tuition, they will be stuck with an inferior education while those able to fund schooling refuse because the system is no longer "competitive."

Of course, none of that matters to the representatives who proposed the bill. Most of their children are safely locked up in private institutions where the realities of the rich/poor gap and the degrading educational system can never reach them. If the House has its way, this will remain the case — but now their kids will have a new computer to help them hide from the world.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Campus crusaders missing

Dave Frohnmayer calls Asians "Orientals" and feels compelled to wear a hair shirt. Betty Taylor makes an honest appraisal, in private, and the local media, the members of which obviously have too much free time, go ballistic. But Diane Baxter is quoted (ODE, Oct. 15) as saying, "Khalidi is one of those people who, despite the fact that he, himself, is a Palestinian, wants to see a resolution [to the Middle East peace process]," and although nearly two weeks have passed, the campus crusaders re-

main strangely silent.

Now I see two possible reasons for this: Either Professor Khalidi has the misfortune of belonging to one of the few groups (white, heterosexual males being another) about which it is permissible to make any negative comment, or else nobody is reading the Emerald these days.

I'll accept either explanation.

William Smee
 University staff

Take responsibility

Michael Hines' article about the

University drug survey (ODE, Oct. 17) opened with the statement: "Alcohol and drugs can cause riots, assaults and rapes. Given this fact..."

How can we hold such misconceptions when there is so much information to the contrary?

I find it disturbing that you have put forth this misinformation and misconception as fact! People commit violent crimes and sometimes drugs and alcohol are contributing factors.

As adults, we need to be responsible for our decisions and behavior.

We cannot hold drugs or alcohol responsible for our actions. We don't send drugs or alcohol to prison — we send people to prison for their crimes, regardless of what the influences are.

We make conscious choices in our lives; some of these choices include drug and alcohol use. If we commit a crime while under the influence of a drug, we are still accountable for our actions. Let's not condone crime by making drug use an excuse!

Dan Hodger
 Eugene

Thumbs



TO OREGON'S RANCHING LAWS:

Doctor owns land. Doctor's neighbor owns cows. Cows break doctor's fence and graze on doctor's land. Doctor shoots cows. Doctor could go to jail for more than 55 years for unauthorized use of livestock and other crimes, according to the Associated Press. Clearly, this isn't a simple story. Under ranching laws in Oregon and other parts of the West, landowners can be held liable for the fate of livestock grazing on their property, regardless of who owns the animals. The same ranchers and other Wise Use fanatics who have been rallying in favor of property rights obviously think people's ability to control their land ends when it comes to cows. Cattle ranchers benefit from ridiculously low fees on public lands and a variety of other subsidies. They don't need the added protection of laws giving their cows special privileges on private lands.



TO DUCK SAVER CARDS:

For \$5 you can buy a card that will allow you to save money the next time you crave a midnight snack. At the same time, you can help the Children's Miracle Network; all proceeds from the cards go to the charitable group. Cards can be purchased near campus at U.S. Bank, Blue Heron Bicycles and Face the Music. TO SLEEP: The end of Daylight Savings Time brought us all an extra hour of sleep. Frankly, after a month of class and production, we needed it.