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by PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

Box 618. Alton, 111inois 62002
Phone: 618-462-5415

TUITION TAX CREDITS

Tax credits to help pay tuition of students in private elementary and secondary schools as well as colleges is an idea whose time has come. Its easy passage in the House, once the Congressmen were compelled to face up to the issue, showed that they have been feeling the heat from their constituents.

Prior to passage by the House by a vote of 199 to 173, the Congressmen had been the targets of an intense lobbying campaign. While some voiced legitimate constitutional or financial questions, they were out-shouted by the anti-tuition credit emotionalism of those who cried, "But it will wreck the public school system!"

Mrs. Grace Baisinger, president of the National PTA, for example, pleaded with Congressmen to vote no because "we fear many people will pull their children out of the [public] schools."

That argument is a tremendous confession of weakness for the advocates of the public school system. What they are saying is that the public school system, which offe s its services to consumers absolutely free, cannot compete in the marketplace with private schools that charge tuition but get a small 25 percent tax credit.

It is easy to see why the Carter Administration is so eager to defeat the tuition tax credit plan. It has one fundamental feature that is anathema to the Big Government Bureaucrats. No money will pass through their sticky palms.

The C.:..rter plan is to "liberalize" existing loan and grant programs so that more middle-income students can get Federal money. After the shocking revelations of the high default rate among those students who have already received loans,

it takes a lot of gall for anyone to recommend expanding the program.

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Why are the teachers unions so opposed to the tuition tax credit plan? Passage of the bill cannot change the number of children who must attend school. All those children will still have to be taught by teachers, regardless of whether they are in public or private schools, so the same number of teachers jobs will be needed.

However there is still one difference between public and private school jobs. The private schools can set moral and academic standards. Private schools still have the right to fire teachers who are homosexuals, or who have an il·legitimate baby or an abortion.

The tuition tax credit bill is in perfect harmony with the new emphasis on consumerism. Like the postal service, the public schools keep increasing their costs but reducing the quality of their product. There is ample evidence that more money does not solve the problems.

Consumers should have an alternative to shoddy products and poor performance. The solution is the healthy competition of the marketplace. The place to begin improving moral and academic standards in the schools is in the pocketbooks of those who pay for them.

The tuition tax credit plan would also end the discrimination that exists in the present law that allows a generous tax credit to parents who put their very young children in some kind of pre-school or baby-sitting facility, but denies equal trectment to parents who care for their own children for the first five years of tAeir lives and then send them to schools that cost tuition.

The tuition tax credit bill allows for the maximum individual choice to select any school or college, public or private, religious or secular, traditional or experimental, all-purpose or designed for the talented or the handicapped. It assures American students the right to independence and diversity in education -- as Thoreau would have put it, the right to march to a different drummer.

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