

## Give Parents Their Proper Charge

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*  
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While I support anything that reduces extortion, *ceteris paribus*, I will not do so at any cost. South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford's proposed "Put Parents in Charge Act" (PPIC), which is sponsored by *South Carolinians for Responsible Government*, has received widespread support among political conservatives and some libertarians. Even homeschoolers have been caught up in the euphoria. What's the great draw? Well, speaking candidly, it's the money. Considerable real property and income tax credits (for those earning under \$75,000 annually) and some fine-sounding social goals could be realized.

The South Carolina government school, widely regarded as a failure, is responsible for consuming about half of the state's budget and two-thirds of county budgets (\$9,260 per student annually). Yet only 53% of South Carolina's high school students graduate—the lowest rate in the nation. PPIC is supposed to make education more competitive (thus improving quality using market forces), alleviate "wasteful spending and unresponsive bureaucrats", and allow wider parental choice to engender improvement in public school output. Moreover, since Leftists and liberals oppose PPIC shouldn't true conservatives and libertarians support it by default?



Not necessarily. PPIC's purposes should give us pause. According to article 1 (section 12-15-20) of the bill, its stated objectives are: (1) to restore parental control of education, (2) to improve public school performance, and (3) to expand educational opportunities for low and middle income families. But are these objectives laudable? I think not.

First, parental control of education does *not* need to be "restored". Home and Christian (or private) schooling parents already have control. They gain nothing through PPIC. So the first objective provides me with no reason to support it. Second, PPIC's other two objectives are wrongheaded, proactive policies which should be opposed by anyone who loves liberty. True conservatives and libertarians should want to *decrease* public school performance—even to the point of allowing it to go down the drain!

In a letter published in *The Greenville News* (January 20, 2005), one concerned citizen boldly asserted that PPIC is an assault on public education: "The governor's proposed 'voucher' plan will destroy public education in South Carolina. It will divert already scarce education funding resources from the public school system and undermine the value of a public education." Well, I only wish it were that easy! The big problem is that is really hard to get rid of "public" education. It is a behemoth barnacle with a strong grip—indeed a stranglehold over modern America.

*Times Examiner* columnist Thomas Sowell notes: "In the long run, the greatest weapon of mass destruction is stupidity. In an age of artificial intelligence, too many of our schools are producing artificial stupidity" (*Capitalism Magazine*, March 25, 2003). Moreover, as Bruce Shortt emphasizes in *The Harsh Truth about Public Schools* (2004), the government school is a "pagan seminary": a hub of secular humanism, coupled with undisciplined behavioral ethics and amoral practices. Similarly, I argue in *Bible and Government: Public Policy from a Christian Perspective* (2003), that it is an inherently evil and non-transformable institution. Indeed, the government school is the Left's major indoctrination center that thrives on the marrow of society. Only a social upheaval of massive proportions can possibly pry it off.

In addition, the expectation that wider consumer choice will increase home or private school enrollment (thus putting pressure on the public school to improve) is based on the rather dubious presumption that some parents would be principled if they only had more money. Their economic situation has prevented them from doing what is right or best for their kids. Frankly, I have some doubt about whether they would move their kids from public to alternative schools if they were simply to receive a tax credit to help offset tuition and materials costs. Would they also attend church more faithfully if they were paid?

Third, the state should not be encouraged to use extorted money or its other "helping" powers to benefit relatively poor people do anything—especially at some "poor" taxpayer's expense. Even if PPIC does increase the level of tax-advantaged donations that corporations will utilize to make more scholar-

ship funds available, PPIC is not cleansed. Such an incentive merely shifts tax money from one redistributive program to another while keeping all of the state legislature's regulatory strings attached.

Therefore, while some libertarians and conservatives—even the Home School Legal Defense Association's Senior Counsel Dewitt T. Black III—might view PPIC's objectives as noble at first glance, I hope they will quickly reconsider their thinking once they realize that PPIC merely fosters greater socialism and baneful proactive policies. While any policy that de-funds the public school and reduces taxes is potentially good, let us beware of the stick while gazing upon the carrot. The present tax savings of some people under PPIC hardly justifies the impositions that will likely be faced by families in the future. Plus, what if PPIC actually did help public schooling *improve*? Such a result would be counter-productive to the cause of truth and liberty. Let's not forget that the government school is the darling of the statist and the Leftist; it is the icon of anti-liberty and anti-Christian forces in society.

Enacting PPIC is like opening Pandora's Box. The state has an uncanny ability to regulate us beyond what we can ask or think. This legislation is deleterious to the cause of freedom not so much because of what it is but because of what will likely stem from it. If PPIC passes, don't be surprised if five years from now the Legislature finds it convenient to regulate what, when, where, and how home and Christian schooling is done. In that case, you would love to find a way to pay a bribe of equal or greater amount than your current property tax bill just to keep the state from meddling with your family. So let's not let the camel's nose into the tent. Next thing we know the whole camel will be inside too.