



April 5, 2005

FREE OUR CHILDREN
Testimony Before The House Committee On Public Education
Regarding House Bills 12, 1263 and 3042
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In my testimony today I am not going to pretend that I can persuade any of you on the committee one way or the other regarding school choice. I do not have anything particularly original to add to anything you have heard or will hear about the success of voucher programs.

What I want to tell you is why *I* support education vouchers. Then, I want to refute a few of the arguments against school choice that you are likely to hear.

I have given you two handouts. Neither of them specifically addresses school choice. They are relevant, nonetheless, if you will indulge me one minute. One is entitled *I, Pencil*. It's an old essay about how complex it actually is to assemble a simple, yellow, wood pencil. It speaks of how resources literally from all over the globe are brought together to assemble a simple wooden pencil and the fact that no one person knows how to make, start to finish, a simple wooden pencil. Despite the complexity, all the stages of production are coordinated through markets a lot better than a central government authority could do it.

Now, if a wooden pencil is so complex as to defy a central authority to produce it effectively and efficiently, why in the world would we think that education in all its complexity is that simple? It is the height of hubris!

I have three children. My wife homeschools two of them. She has, at times, struggled mightily to figure out the best approaches to teaching our children. What works for one doesn't work for the other. She proves how impossible it is for our cookie cutter education system to ever work well. Despite our best efforts to get our centrally governed schools to respond to every student's individual needs, they cannot do it.

Why can't they? Well, for one thing, nobody is that smart. While we've created more pigeonholes in an effort to meet individual student needs, they are pigeonholes nonetheless. Another issue has to do with the incentives in the system, which brings me to the second handout.

It consists of excerpts from a work by one of the Pilgrim Fathers. William Bradford describes how the pilgrims solved their chronic food shortages by switching from collective ownership and farming to private farming and then outright private property ownership. He describes how the

pilgrims, acting in their self interest under a collective system, avoided work, even going so far as to feign illness. But, with private property, they all became very industrious.

There are no private property rights in public education. Just like the pilgrims, the institution of collective ownership and rewards does not encourage industry. The pilgrims, an industrious people with a common purpose, acting with one another in a spirit of good will nearly starved themselves acting in their own self-interest under collective ownership. Private property and a very real profit motive are what it took for them to work themselves out of constant famine.

We have famine in our public schools. I've testified on this before and you'll hear plenty of evidence about it this evening. I will not repeat myself here. But I do want to stress that I do not blame teachers or administrators or school board members for our education famine any more than I blame the pilgrims for their food famine. It is the collective system that is at fault, not the people who struggle in it. Just as there were pilgrims who kept working hard, there are public school employees who do the same, but the system will beat them, just as it would have beaten the pilgrims eventually.

I believe in vouchers because markets work. When people have choices before them they take the time to inform themselves. Those who don't still benefit from those who do. So, I see parents becoming more active in their children's education. Administrators will have an incentive to reward truly good teachers instead of their favorites, so good teachers will stick around instead of leaving the profession. Teachers will respond and, I think, want bigger classes for the financial reward that can bring, as long as the classes aren't so big as to truly lower performance and a teacher's worth. I also see pedagogical ideas being tested for whether they really work rather than for whether they are the latest fad. Finally, I see education becoming more efficient instead of less so. Just as the cost of laser eye surgery has come down because the government has yet to get its mitts on that service, so could the cost of education come down.

Now, I do not think vouchers will turn education around on a dime. Some voucher plans and programs are better than others. By far, I think Rep. Riddle's bill is better than the other two. Because it is more general, and could be more widespread, it would be a far better test of vouchers. It also contains an important market-like incentive in that parents are encouraged to shop around since tuition saved can be saved for college.

I am realistic. I know that only one of these proposals is likely to move forward, so I support all three. Rep. Harper-Brown's bill ranks second in my list of preferences. What I want, though, is a fair test of the voucher concept. The pilgrims first tried just letting people have plots to work but still owned the land in common. They found that this half-measure created problems and eventually went to full private ownership.

So it is with vouchers. A too-limited program is a program designed to fail and I think the pilot programs proposed are as limited as they can be and still have any validity. In fact, they should be broader to be a true test of school choice. The private sector will be much slower to react than it would to a well-constructed, broad school choice program.

That gets me to a few of the arguments you will hear against vouchers. A common argument is that the problems with charter schools prove that vouchers will not work. Well, let's forget the problems with public schools that get swept under the rug and the fact that charters have, on the other hand, been under a great deal of scrutiny *not* reserved for the schools 99 percent of public school students attend. Let's also forget the fact that *every* deregulated industry has had transition problems in moving to competition but that consumers have *always* demonstrably ended up better off.

Instead, let's just consider the charter law, from its inception. It is a textbook example of how *not* to create a market experiment. In 1995, that law had three fatal flaws not in SB 1 when it came out of this committee. First was the time limit, set by the SBOE to 5 years. This limited capital inflow to charter schools and essentially begged for fly-by-night operators to run charters. Second, the requirement that charters be non-profits has necessitated contractual relationships that held no one ultimately accountable. Third was the limit on the number of charters, keeping true competition from ever having a chance to flourish and preventing the winnowing of poor performers through market forces.

A slogan, rather than an argument, you will hear is, "No public money for private schools." Now, I would ask you, what does this even mean? Every employee of public schools is a private citizen and every one of them is paid with *taxpayer* money. *Taxpayer* money is used to fund roads, paying private contractors to build those roads. *Taxpayer* money funds the Lonestar card, allowing private citizens to buy groceries from private food stores. Logically, the slogan is absolutely meaningless.

The last argument against vouchers that I want to address is that they "take money from public schools." Supporters of the status quo will tell you that the public schools are just great, but then they express the fear that given half a chance, people will flee them in droves. Well, which is it, are they great or are they going to lose money? Both cannot apply!

Recognize, too, that this assumes that the *public schools* are entitled to the money, not the children whose educations are funded by that money. People who use this argument are far more interested in funding a system than they are about making sure children are educated.

And that, bottom line, is what parents who want educational choice are really reacting to. They want freedom from a system where their child is considered little more than a modest pile of money. They want the liberty to choose a place for their child where the child is more than a warm body in a seat bringing down state and federal dollars. Parents want *their* choices to matter. They want to make choices for their children specifically tailored to their children's needs.

This will never happen when 95 percent of children in the state get a free education in a monopoly system. It is not possible for neighborhood schools subject to market forces to flourish when the vast majority of people naturally will opt for free schools, even if they are unresponsive monopolies.

I ask you. I beg you. Free us. Free us all from educational famine. Free us all to bring our individual talents to bear on the education of children. Free the human spirit, in preference to the bureaucratic spirit, to work its magic in the most important thing any of us has to do on this earth – to prepare the next generation to carry on.

I, PENCIL



My Family Tree as
Told to Leonard E. Read

I am a lead pencil -- the ordinary wooden pencil familiar to all boys and girls and adults who can read and write. (My official name is "Mongol 482." My many ingredients are assembled, fabricated, and finished by Eberhard Faber Pencil Company, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.)

Writing is both my vocation and my avocation, that's all I do.

You may wonder why I should write a genealogy. Well, to begin with, my story is interesting. And, next, I am a mystery -- more so than a tree or a sunset or even a flash of lightning. But, sadly, I am taken for granted by those who use me, as if I were a mere incident and without background. This supercilious attitude relegates me to the level of the commonplace. This is a species of the grievous error in which mankind cannot too long persist without peril. For, as a wise man observed, "We are perishing for want of wonder, not for want of wonders" (Chesterton).

I, Pencil, simple though I appear to be, merit your wonder and awe, a claim I shall attempt to prove. In fact, if you can understand me--no, that's too much to ask anyone--if you can become aware of the miraculousness which I symbolize, you can help save the freedom mankind is so unhappily losing. I have a profound lesson to teach. And I can teach this lesson better than can an automobile or an airplane or a mechanical dishwasher because -- well, because I am seemingly so simple.

Simple? Yet, *not a single person in the face of this earth knows how to make me.* This sounds fantastic, doesn't it? Especially when it is realized that there are about one and one-half billion of my kind produced in the U.S.A. each year.

Pick me up and look me over. What do you see? Not much meets the eye -- there's some wood, lacquer, the printed labeling, graphite lead, a bit of metal, and an eraser.

Just as you cannot trace your family tree back

very far, so is it impossible for me to name and explain all my antecedents. But I would like to suggest enough of them to impress upon you the richness and complexity of my background.



My family tree begins with what in fact is a tree, a cedar of straight grain that grows in Northern California and Oregon. Now contemplate all the saws and trucks and rope and the countless other gear used in harvesting and carting the cedar logs to the railroad siding. Think of all the persons and the numberless skills that went into their fabrication: the mining of ore the making of steel and its refinement into saws, axes, motors; the growing of hemp and bringing it through all the stages to heavy and strong rope; the logging camps with their beds and mess halls, the cookery and the raising of all the foods. Why, untold thousands of persons had a hand in every cup of coffee the loggers drink!

The logs are shipped to a mill in San Leandro, California. Can you imagine the individuals who make flat cars and rails and railroad engines and who construct and install the communication systems incidental thereto? These legions are among my antecedents.

Consider the millwork in San Leandro. The cedar logs are cut into small, pencil-length slats less than one-fourth of an inch in thickness. These are kiln dried and then tinted for the same reason women put rouge on the faces. People prefer that I look pretty, not a pallid white. The slats are waxed and kiln dried again. How many skills went into the making of the tint and the kilns, not to mention supplying the heat, the light and power, the belts, motors, and all the other things a mill requires? Sweepers in the mill among my ancestors? Yes, and included are the men who poured the concrete for the dam of the Pacific Gas & Electric Company hydroplant which supplies the mill's power!



Don't overlook the

ancestors present and distant who have a hand in transporting sixty carloads of slats across the nation

Once in the pencil factory--\$4,000,000 in machinery and building, all capital accumulated by thrifty and saving parents of mine--each slat is given eight grooves by a complex machine, after which another machine lays leads in every other slat, applies glue, and places another slat atop--a lead sandwich, so to speak. Seven brothers and I are mechanically carved from these "wood-clinched" sandwich.

My "lead" itself-- it contains no lead at all--is complex. The graphite is mined in Ceylon. Consider these miners and those who make their many tools and the makers of the paper sacks in which the graphite is shipped and those who make the string that ties the sacks and those who put them aboard ships and those who make the ships. Even the lighthouse keepers along the way assisted in my birth--and the harbor pilots.



The graphite is mixed with clay from Mississippi in which ammonium hydroxide is used in the refining process. Then wetting agents are added such as sulfonated tallow--animal fats chemically reacted with sulfuric acid. After passing through numerous machines, the mixture finally appears as endless extrusions--as from a sausage grinder--cut to size, dried, and baked for several hours at 1,850 degree Fahrenheit. To increase their strength and smoothness the leads are then treated with a hot mixture which includes candelilla wax from Mexico, paraffin wax, and hydrogenated natural fats.

My cedar receives six coats of lacquer. Do you know all the ingredients of lacquer? Who would think that the growers of castor beans and the refiners of castor oil are a part of it? They are. Why, even the processes by which the lacquer is made a beautiful yellow involves the skills of more persons than one can enumerate!

Observe the labeling. That's a film formed by applying heat to carbon black mixed with resin. How do you make resins and what, pray, is carbon black?

My bit of metal--the ferrule--is brass. Think of all the persons who mine zinc and copper and those who have the skills to make shiny sheet brass from these products of nature. Those black rings on my ferrule are black nickel. What is black nickel and how is it applied? The complete story of why the center of

from California to Wilkes-Barre!

my ferrule has no black nickel on it would take pages to explain.



Then there's my crowning glory, inelegantly referred to in the trade as "the plug," the part man uses to erase errors he makes with me. An ingredient called "factice" is what does the erasing. It is a rubber-like product made by reacting grape seed oil from the Dutch East Indies with sulfur chloride. Rubber, contrary to the common notion, is only for binding purposes. Then, too, there are numerous vulcanizing and accelerating agents. The pumice comes from Italy; and the pigment which gives "the plug" its color is cadmium sulfide.

Does anyone wish to challenge my earlier assertion that no single person on the face of this earth knows how to make me?

Actually, millions of human beings have had a hand in my creation, no one of whom even knows more than a very few of the others. Now, you may say that I go too far in relating the picker of a coffee berry in far off Brazil and food growers elsewhere to my creation; that this is an extreme position. I shall stand by my claim. There isn't a single person in all these millions, including the president of the pencil company, who contributes more than a tiny, infinitesimal bit of know-how. From the standpoint of know-how the only difference between the miner of graphite in Ceylon and the logger in Oregon is in the *type* of know-how. Neither the miner nor the logger can be dispensed with, any more than can the chemist at the factory or the worker in the oil field--paraffin being a by-product of petroleum.

Here is an astounding fact; Neither the worker in the oil field nor the chemist nor the digger of graphite or clay nor any who mans or makes the ships or trains or trucks nor the one who runs the machine that does the knurling of my bit of metal nor the president of the company performs his singular task because he wants me. Each one wants me less, perhaps, than does a child in the first grade. Indeed, there are some among this vast multitude who never saw a pencil nor would they know how to use one. Their motivation is other than me. Perhaps it is something like this: Each of these millions sees that he can thus exchange his tiny know-how for the goods and services he needs or

wants. I may or may not be among these items.

There is a fact still more astounding: The absence of a master mind, of anyone dictating or forcibly directing these countless actions which bring me into being. No trace of such a person can be found. Instead, we find the Invisible Hand at work. This is the mystery to which I earlier referred.

It has been said that “only God can make a tree.” Why do we agree with this? Isn't it because we realize that we ourselves could not make one? Indeed, can we even describe a tree? We cannot, except in superficial terms. We can say, for instance, that a certain molecular configuration manifests itself as a tree. But what mind is there among men that could even record, let alone direct, the constant changes in molecules that transpire in the life span of a tree? Such a feat is utterly unthinkable!



I, Pencil, am a complex combination of miracles; a tree, zinc, copper, graphite, and so on. But, to these miracles which manifest themselves in Nature an even more extraordinary miracle has been added: the configuration of creative human energies--millions of tiny know-hows configuring naturally and spontaneously in response to human necessity and desire and *in the absence of any human master-minding!* Since only God can make a tree, I insist that only God could make me. Man can no more direct these millions of know-hows to bring me into being than he can put molecules together to create a tree.

The above is what I meant when writing, “If you can become aware of the miraculousness which I symbolize, you can help save the freedom mankind is so unhappily losing.” For, if one is aware that these know-hows will naturally, yes, automatically, arrange themselves into creative and productive patterns in response to human necessity and demand--that is, in the absence of governmental or any other coercive master-minding--then one will possess an absolutely essential ingredient for freedom: *a faith in free men.* Freedom is impossible without this faith.



Once government has had a monopoly of a creative activity such, for instance, as the delivery of the mails, most individuals will believe that the mails could not be efficiently delivered by men acting freely. And here is the reason: Each one

acknowledges that he himself doesn't know how to do all the things incident to mail delivery. He also recognizes that no other individual could do it. These assumptions are correct. No individual possesses enough know-how to perform a nation's mail delivery any more than any individual possesses enough know-how to make a pencil. Now, in the absence of a faith in free men -- in the unaware-ness that millions of tiny know-hows would naturally and miraculously form and cooperate to satisfy this necessity--the individual cannot help but reach the erroneous conclusion that the mail can be delivered only by governmental “master-minding.”

If I, Pencil, were the only item that could offer testimony on what men can accomplish when free to try, then those with little faith would have a fair case. However, there is testimony galore; it's all about us and on every hand. Mail delivery is exceedingly simple when compared, for instance, to the making of an automobile or a calculating machine or a grain combine or a milling machine, or to tens of thousands of other things.

Delivery? Why, in this area where men have been left free to try, they deliver the human voice around the world in less than one second; they deliver an event visually and in motion to any person's home when it is happening; they deliver 150 passengers from Seattle to Baltimore in less than four hours; they deliver gas from Texas to one's range or furnace in New York at unbelievably low rates and without subsidy; they deliver each four pounds of oil from the Persian Gulf to our Easter Seaboard--halfway around the world--for less money than the government charges for delivering a one-ounce letter across the street!

The lesson I have to teach is this: *Leave all creative energies uninhibited.* Merely organize society to act in harmony with this lesson. Let society's legal apparatus remove all obstacles the best it can. Permit these creative know-hows freely to flow. Have faith that free men will respond to the Invisible Hand. This faith will be confirmed. I, Pencil, seemingly simple though I am, offer the miracle of my creation as testimony that this is a practical faith, as practical as the sun, the rain, the cedar tree, the good earth.

LIBERTY

A Lesson from the Pilgrims

An Excerpt from:

Bradford, William, *Bradford's History of the Plymouth Settlement; 1608-1650*, rendered into modern English by Harold Paget and published in 1909, originally titled *Of Plymouth Plantation*, reprint by Mantle Ministries: San Antonio, TX, 1988, pp. 115-116, 141-142.

William Bradford recorded the experiences of the Separatists who came to the New World on the Mayflower and later voyages some years after the events actually occurred. His memory was evidently aided by personal letters that had been retained as well as his own contemporary writings. The following occurred around 1622 and 1623, 3 years after the establishment of Plymouth colony. It involved not more than probably two-dozen families. For some time, the "Pilgrims" had raised meager crops, running short of food stores every winter. Infusions of new mouths to feed on ships from England did not help, but that, it turns out, was not the source of their problem. Mr. Bradford can speak for himself.

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"All this while no supplies were heard of, nor did they know when they might expect any. So they began to consider how to raise more corn, and obtain a better crop than they had done, so that they might not continue to endure the misery of want. At length after much debate, the Governor, with the advice of the chief among them, allowed each man to plant corn for his own household, and to trust to themselves for that; in all other things to go on in the general way as before. So every family was assigned a parcel of land, according to the proportion of their number with that in view, — for present purposes only, and making no division for inheritance, — all boys and children being included under some family. This was very successful. It made all hands very industrious, so that much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been by any means the Governor or any other could devise, and saved him a great deal of trouble, and gave far better satisfaction. The women now went willingly into the field, and took their little ones with them to plant corn, while before they would allege weakness and inability; and to have compelled them would have been thought great tyranny and oppression.

The failure of the experiment of communal service, which was tried for several years, and by good and honest men proves the emptiness of the theory of Plato and other ancients, applauded by some of later times, — that the taking away of private property, and the possession of it in community, by a commonwealth, would make a state happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than God. For in this instance, community of property (so far as it went) was found to breed much confusion and discontent, and retard much employment which would have been to the general benefit and comfort. For the young men who were most able and fit for service objected to being forced to spend their time and strength in working for other men's wives and children, without any recompense. The strong man or the resourceful man had no more share of food, clothes, etc., than the weak man who was not able to do a quarter the other could. This was thought injustice. The aged and graver men, who were ranked and equalized in labour, food,

clothes, etc., with the humbler and younger ones, thought it some indignity and disrespect to them. As for men's wives who were obliged to do service for other men, such as cooking, washing their clothes, etc., they considered it a kind of slavery, and many husbands would not brook it. This feature of it would have been worse still, if they had been men of an inferior class. If (it was thought) all were to share alike, and all were to do alike, then all were on an equality throughout, and one was as good as another; and so, if it did not actually abolish those very relations which God himself has set among men, it did at least greatly diminish the mutual respect that is so important should be preserved amongst them. Let none argue that this is due to human failing, rather than to this communistic plan of life in itself. I answer, seeing that all men have this failing in them, that God in His wisdom saw that another plan of life was fitter for them."

pp. 141 - 142

"These matters premised, I will now proceed with my account of affairs here. But before I come to other things I must say a word about their planting this year. They felt the benefit of their last year's harvest; for by planting corn on their own account they managed, with a great deal of patience, to overcome famine. This reminds me of a saying of Seneca's (Epis. 123): that an important part of liberty is a well-governed belly, and patience in want. The settlers now began to consider corn more precious than silver; and those that had some to spare began to trade with the others for small things, by the quart, pottle, and peck, etc.; for they had not money, and if they had, corn was preferred to it. In order that they might raise their crops to better advantage, they made suit to the Governor to have some land apportioned for permanent holdings, and not by yearly lot, whereby the plots which the more industrious had brought under good culture one year, would change hands the next, and others would reap the advantage; with the result that manuring and culture of the land were neglected. It was well considered, and their request was granted. Every person was given one acre of land, for them and theirs, and they were to have no more till the seven years had expired; it was all as near the town as possible, so that they might be kept close together, for greater safety and better attention to the general employments."