

Charles R. Coombs

June 12, 1991

Your Views
The Oklahoman
P. O. Box 25125
Oklahoma City, OK 73125

To the Editor

We need to look more closely at the people who tell us that we, the Oklahoma voters, are just too ignorant to make the “correct” (read “socialist”) choice regarding HB1017.

These are people who hold masters’ degrees in English Education, yet have written maybe three papers apiece in their entire college careers. They’re certified to teach math, but no more than a fifth of those certified have degrees in that subject. They’ve never worked for any private enterprise, except possibly to pump gas or fry chicken in summer. They’ve certainly never successfully started or operated a business. They think that government is the source of wealth, and they’re telling our kids to believe that, too.

They’re teaching our children that the thing to do when you want something is to knock off work, flock to the capitol, and whine until you get it: that Uncle Sugar will take care of you, whether or not you contribute anything of value in return, just as long as you’re noisy, numerous, and obnoxious enough.

When they did finally get our gutless, LaFollette legislature to cram that bill down our throats, they were quick to chortle about all the benefits it brought. They told us how many more teachers there are now, and how much more each teacher is being paid. But they didn’t tell us that there’s been any improvement in our disgraceful rate of illiteracy. They didn’t say that fewer of our best and brightest are flocking to Texas where they can be managers and executives rather than the factory line workers who settle for the best our system offers. They told us, simply, that they’re spending the money, not that we chump voters are getting anything worth having for it.

What we need isn’t more numerous and highly-paid teachers — what are we paying for but socialism and idleness, anyway? What we need is some way of getting control of these people so that we can regulate the way they behave in front of our children. That means training and, yes, testing them in the basic, capitalistic principles this country operates on. It means certifying people who are qualified by practice and experience to teach the things that really matter, and to teach them competently. It means educating the people who educate the educators so that education majors don’t remain the dregs, the dross, the intellectual waste of their universities. HB1017 doesn’t do any of these things, nor does it promise to.

Those who can't do teach, and those who can't teach teach education. Let's trash 1017!

Charles R. Coombs

Charles R. Coombs

March 5, 1994

Your Views
P. O. Box 25125
Oklahoma City, 73215

To the Editor:

Whatever can you people have been thinking?

When the electronic media broadcast Sandy Garrett's glowing account of 1017-related improvements in Oklahoma education, they had enough sense to omit the numbers. Only The Oklahoman, as nearly as I can tell, had the ill grace to present the gains quantitatively.

This makes it look as if the improvements are down in the statistical noise. People are likely to see a stronger correlation between state involvement in education and falling test scores than between 1017 and this minuscule amelioration. I've actually heard one person quip, "Seldom in the course of human education have so many paid so much for so little. And that was in Massachussetts."

Worse, your irresponsible airing of the figures may make it hard for Sandy Garrett to show her face in Oklahoma as people draw uncharitable conclusions from your numbers about the job she's doing for us.

Shame on you all!

Charles R. Coombs

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March 24, 1996

Your Views
The Oklahoman
P. O. Box 25125
Oklahoma City, OK 73125

To the Editor:

Jeff Jacoby's editorial on "Young Christian vs. Liberal Lions" describes a homosexual teacher's harassing one of her pupils to the point of physical illness. Another article in the same issue asserts once more that what's wrong in education is the parents' fault, and that unless we change, public schools will never be able, say, to bring our disgraceful adult illiteracy rate below its current fifty percent.

To public educators, however, "Parental involvement" means affirming that radical lesbians like Polly Atwood are fit role models for our kids. If we don't slavishly pander to sodomite politics, ludicrous attempts at rewriting history, and dumbing down our population generally, well, we're just not really "involved." In the meantime, Johanna Jenei's parents are paying to send her to private school while contributing a full share of taxes to support the teacher and the system that abused their child.

Polly Atwood is one of the many fruits of the AFT, the NEA, and the OEA, whose actions cry out for the kind of parental involvement that demands accountability and performance. It needs to be made clear to this bundle of bosses that if they can't cut it professionally, we who pay for this will find someone who can.

Want to get involved? Call the Committee for Oklahoma Educational Reform (COER) at (405) 942-5358 or visit our home page at <http://www.telepath.com/crcoombs>. We have a plan to share.

Charles R. Coombs
Chairman, COER

Charles R. Coombs

November 10, 1996

Your Views
The Oklahoman
P. O. Box 25125
Oklahoma City, OK 73125

TO THE EDITOR:

With the elections over, it's time for Oklahomans to turn again toward recovering our failing public schools.

That our schools are indeed failing is evident in the announcement by the U. S. Department of Education that 43% of America's adult population is now functionally illiterate. We can turn this system around by applying methods that have worked for any number of other failing enterprises: First, we must make customers (parents, taxpayers) the primary focus of everything the schools in Oklahoma do. Second, we must restructure school management to make it more responsive and accountable to customers, and to empower school employees, especially teachers, to contribute ideas for needed change.

The COER scholarship system, a voucher system like the G. I. Bill, accomplishes the first goal by allowing parents to move their children out of the public school system in response to unsatisfactory performance, and to move them back in again as performance improves.

To better performance, the plan establishes a site-based system of public schools, each unit of which is managed by a single School Manager who is fully accountable for the success of his or her school. "Success" means impersonally-established student proficiency in the basics: reading and writing, mathematics, history, geography, and the physical/biological sciences. School Managers have authority commensurate with their responsibilities. They hire and fire, and direct all school operations. This not only lets managers pay teachers according to their contributions, but also encourages them to empower their employees to provide ideas for improvement, and to reward them for implementing ideas that work.

Similar solutions have worked spectacularly well for many failing business corporations. Will the COER plan, however, work for public education? The signs are encouraging.

Puerto Rico, for example, implemented a school reform plan in 1994. It featured a voucher system that, like the G. I. Bill and the COER Plan, allowed students to spend their education money at any school, public or private, they chose. Under the pressure for improvement these scholarships created, Puerto Rico took the 200 worst schools on the island and put them under strict, site-based, parental control, streamlining the management and making school administrations fully accountable to parents for the success of their schools.

The Puerto Rican law lacked the legal and constitutional bulletproofing the COER plan has, and was eventually overturned by the state Supreme Court. But in the time vouchers were in effect, more students left private schools to attend public schools than went the other way, testifying to the power of free-market school choice to make a positive difference.

The COER Plan has been continually in the making since early 1990. We've subjected it to stringent constitutional and legal examination by scholars from The Institute for Justice, The Center for Law and Justice, The Heritage Foundation, and others. They've all pronounced it sound. We've taken it before often hostile groups all over Oklahoma, and have incorporated their just criticisms into the plan to strengthen and improve it. When the time comes for us, as it did for Puerto Rico, Oklahoma will not fail.

To get involved — and there is much to be done — call (405) 942-4358, (405) 769-3680, or (918) 227-2544, or visit <http://www.telepath.com/crcoombs>. We'll put you to work for your kids and your schools.

Thanks for your continued support!

Charles R. Coombs
Chairman, COER

Charles R. Coombs

December 2, 1996

Your Views
The Oklahoman
P. O. Box 25125
Oklahoma City, OK 73125

To The Editor:

One can see how experienced educators like Stanley Lamb (“Point of View,” December 2) might produce a 43% functional illiteracy rate among adults in the United States. He wants to get “the government” out of education — despite the mandate for tax-funded, publicly-managed education in Articles X and XIII of the Oklahoma Constitution — while restoring power to school boards. He considers a detailed, coherent plan for returning control of schools to their local communities “only second best,” but offers no plan of his own. He acknowledges that teachers aren’t free to teach, yet ignores a cogent proposal for empowering them.

If Mr. Lamb will call us at (405) 942-5358 for a detailed explanation of our proposal, he’ll find we’re not far apart. I hope he calls. Frustration and anger do a soul more hurt than even confession relieves.

Charles R. Coombs
Chairman, COER