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## **Reject Officeholders Who Would Deny True** Opportunity In Education

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If we sincerely care whether all of Florida's schoolchildren are afforded equal educational opportunity, we must pay close attention to the people our politicians align themselves with on school voucher issues. The attention is particularly important this election year as we choose a governor who, like Jeb Bush for the past seven years, will frame and lead our education debate.

One should be wary of candidates who praise the Florida Supreme Court's recent ruling killing Opportunity Scholarships, the voucher program allowing children in failing public schools to attend private schools. These candidates cozy up to those who led the charge to destroy these scholarships: the teachers unions and myriad other constituencies that make up the public school educationist conglomerate. These are the groups that shed crocodile tears for the plight of underprivileged schoolchildren but are in fact terrified by competition and the light of accountability in schools.

Instead of standing up for a parent's most basic right to avail her child of the best possible education, these politicians shamelessly curry favor with those they believe will enhance their chances for election. I suppose courage wanes when one wants to soar politically.

I wholeheartedly agree with the pols - even of the shameless variety - who implore us to tackle the tough job of improving our public schools, especially those in our urban centers and poor rural communities.

But many of these politicians, like me, are fortunate to live within the right ZIP codes, allowing us to send our children to the best public schools in Florida. When the parents in these schools talk, educators listen and respond. And when the parents don't like what they hear, most can send their children elsewhere.

Do these politicians honestly believe that union-dominated public schools with a stranglehold monopoly on the education of poor, disenfranchised and captive children will actually do anything meaningful to improve on their own? Can they honestly tell the families of the children they casually condemn back to lousy public schools that they'll ensure those schools get it right before it's too late for their kids?

There are few more public and noble purposes for the use of tax revenues than providing for real education opportunity, in any venue, for all of our children. This is the spirit of uniformity so horribly mangled by our Supreme Court in its Opportunity Scholarship reversal.

We should be so committed to uniformity of opportunity as a vital education and public end that it renders irrelevant the question of where education takes place. Our public dollars should follow children wherever they may best learn - it's as simple as that.

And when we encounter schools - public or private, secular or religious - that abuse the public trust, our corrective action should be swift and forceful. Isn't our society's continued preservation through our precious children and grandchildren worth such a stand?

If the Supreme Court refuses to take this stand, then we should demand that our legislative and executive branches do so. Apparently this is lost on politicians concerned with protecting their political flanks above all else.

I'm not the least bit comforted by candidates - especially those of the gubernatorial variety - who stand with interest groups like the Florida Education Association and the American Civil Liberties Union, which are now training their legal sights to kill the McKay, Bright Futures, voluntary prekindergarten and corporate tax credit scholarship programs, which benefit tens of thousands of needy students throughout the state.

I'm not the least bit comforted by candidates who stand with the likes of teacher Ruth Holmes Cameron, one of the principal plaintiffs in the Opportunity Scholarship case, who actually made the following statement relative to vouchers:

"To say that competition is going to improve education? It's just not gonna work. You know competition is not for children. It's not for human beings. It's not for public education. It never has been; it never will be."

Did Holmes graduate from the Karl Marx School of Education?

How can any politician stand with such absurd thinking? I don't know about you, but I wouldn't let my children within a country mile of this teacher's classroom, and I definitely wouldn't want an ally of such a teacher within a country mile of the corner office in Tallahassee.

Most politicians begin their careers inspired to serve others, but too many lose their way as they seek greater glory. I don't believe the "others" any politician serves should be lobbies like teachers unions pining for a world where they account only to themselves, and whose sole purpose in life seems to be to consolidate their political power.

The tragedy of such alliances is that important things like educational opportunity, in the form of vouchers and true and healthy school competition, fall prey to political ambition.

We must demand that our politicians, and especially those seeking our highest state office, stand instead with our marginalized schoolchildren who need our help the most. We should not stand with any candidate who lacks the political courage to serve those least likely to scratch political backs.

