

Subject: Issue on Scholarships

Dear Editor,

Chris Zuppa's Portrait of the Issues, October 29th, was very well done. As a parent with a child on a Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship, I find it exasperating that something that has been such a positive change for our children and for the future of our state has turned into a key political debate. Why is it that some politicians can't see that these scholarships are giving parents like me who don't have the money to buy a house in the neighborhood zoned for the best schools a chance to give our children what they deserve?

Laquanda Fields is a poster child for the success of these scholarships and she truly shows that these scholarships are giving children a second chance at an education and a future. It is my wish that people take a deeper look at how the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarships and vouchers are giving children from all walks of life a quality education, which is something that all Florida citizens can agree upon.

Sincerely,

Tonja Anderson

A Caring Parent...

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Oh, and he kicks helpless puppies

By HOWARD TROXLER, Times Columnist
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Charlie Justice, 38, is a mild-mannered Democrat from St. Petersburg. His job is to advise college students.

But according to the stack of campaign brochures sitting on my desk, he is a bad man.

Justice is a member of the state House. He is running for the state Senate in District 16, which lies on both sides of Tampa Bay. His Republican opponent is Kim Berfield, another state representative.

Here's the first mail piece. Its cover is a big radar picture of a hurricane hitting Florida.

The headline says, in big letters, "LIBERAL CHARLIE JUSTICE has an insurance scheme for you."

The next brochure has two poor barefoot girls on the cover. This headline says, "Charlie Justice turned his back on us." The inside says Justice won't help sick kids.

The next shows two children holding hands and wearing backpacks. The headline: "Are your children safe at school?" (Hint: No, and it's all Justice's fault.)

The next one: "Charlie Justice is putting our children in harm's way."

And the next: "Material Not Suitable For Children." That one says Justice won't protect kids from computer porn.

A second piece about porn has a picture of a kid sitting in front of a computer covering his eyes. "What is Charlie Justice allowing your children to view?" it asks.

The next is a sad-looking little girl sitting on a stack of books. "Going back to school is never so taxing," the headline says. Inside, it says Justice "taxes you coming and going."

By the way, one of Berfield's TV commercials criticizes Justice for running a negative campaign against her.

Let's check out the return addresses. "People for a Better Florida Fund Inc." That's a group largely funded by the medical and hospital industry. There's also the Republican Party of Florida, and a group called "All Children Matter."

I looked up All Children Matter. The Florida branch is headed by John Kirtley of Tampa, a leader in the school voucher movement.

That group has gotten more than \$600,000 this year from All Children Matter-VA. The biggest contribution to that group, in turn, was a bequest of just over \$2-million from the estate of John Walton of Bentonville, Ark., son of Sam, killed in a plane crash in 2005.

I suppose it doesn't matter that Justice has indeed supported filters on computers, money for sick and poor kids, background checks for school employees and sales tax breaks for parents. Just because he didn't like specific Republican versions of those things that contained other bad ideas, or voted against an overall state budget that he didn't like, it does not make him an enemy of the people.

Democratic candidates and their shadow groups do it too. Don't believe Democratic attacks either. The local one I liked the least this year was when Phyllis Busansky, running for Congress against Gus Bilirakis in the 9th District, took a Bilirakis quote out of context to try to make it look like he was indifferent to the Mark Foley sex scandal.

Neither is this an endorsement of Justice. If you like Berfield better or Justice less, then vote for her. Check out her mostly positive Web site at www.berfield2006.com, and Justice's at www.charliejustice.com.

But this cynical, sneering, dishonest style of politics is killing our democracy. Why do political professionals do it? Here's the worst part: Because it usually works.