

OCPA FaxLine Report

A public policy information service for members of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, Inc.

Dear OCPA Member:

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

Imagine if you will, the arcade game “Groundhog.” You remember playing it, I’m sure. The game has lots of holes in the top of a flat board that toy groundhogs randomly pop up from. To score points on the board, players hit the groundhogs with a big mallet, driving them back in the ground before they disappear. It’s a fun game of course, unless you’re a groundhog.

Now imagine this -- you are a disadvantaged youth from a poor neighborhood with great potential, but unfortunately you have few prospects for getting a quality education. You want to exit your circumstances, but not being savvy to the ways of the political world you fail to realize that the moment you attempt to rise up, special interests are going to drive you back underground. What’s worse is that these are special interests you have been taught to trust. However, they are special interests acutely compromised with a serious case of *self-interest*. They claim they want to help you better yourself, but not if they perceive that it will impact their power base in any way – so one *whack* and you’re back in the tunnel wondering if you will ever escape.

Well no doubt that’s exactly what happened to Oklahoma youth last week at the state capitol. Senate Bill 2148 was a modest proposal which would have been referred to as the “Great Schools Tax Credit Program Act”-- sounds very promising, doesn’t it? The legislators who authored it apparently thought so too. It provided for an educational scholarship “to eligible students to cover all or part of the tuition, fees and transportation costs of a qualified private school, located within the geographical boundaries of the school district of the student’s residence, which is accredited by the State Board of Education or an approved accrediting association approved by the Board.” These scholarships for inner-city kids would have been funded entirely from private sources, encouraged by partial tax credits.

But for some unknown reason the very day the bill was to be heard, it had been conspicuously pulled by one of its authors. Now what do you think happened from the day it was filed to the day it was supposed to be heard? We may never know, but if history is any guide, very powerful political forces were quickly brought to bear on this little bill and its authors. We certainly have plenty of history to draw upon. Throughout the fifteen years of OCPA’s existence, we have tracked how special interests of the education bureaucracy operate; how they crush attempts to gain freedom for kids in our schools.

They are not bashful about their dominance at the Capitol. According to the OEA website, the organization “has a rich heritage of *fighting and winning battles for public education* [emphasis, mine]. Then it continues by saying “The Association’s work with local and state governmental agencies and the Legislature and the governor is well-documented.” *Whack! Whack! Whack!* Poor little groundhogs.

But one needs to remain hopeful, because another lesson of history reminds us that for those who persevere, freedom always triumphs over oppression.

Until next time. . . Brett A. Magbee, Vice President for Operations

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