

## **N.H. Libertarians React To Claremont Decision: Amend Constitution To Free Education From State Control**

In a December 17th decision handed down by the New Hampshire Supreme Court, locally controlled property-tax financing of the state's public school system was deemed unconstitutional, thereby mandating more centralized state taxation, or even the introduction of a broad-based sales tax or personal income tax in New Hampshire, in order to continue the current educational system.

But Libertarians hold that now is the time for real, meaningful change -- with no new taxation. On the contrary, Libertarians are advocating a dramatic reduction in property tax for New Hampshire home and landowners by removing government 100% from the educational terrain.

Basing its decision on the Constitution's requirement that the State "cherish the interest of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries and public schools," the court ruled that an "adequate" education is a "fundamental right," and that the State has a duty to provide funding.

Paula Werme, the Libertarian Party's Vice Chair, 2nd New Hampshire congressional district, says of the ruling, "The state should not owe anyone an education. Once you introduce the element that the state owes an education to its citizens, it becomes no longer possible for schools to teach students about a free society, since one no longer exists. The right to pursue an education differs from the right to be educated by the government. Mandating what the state must provide only leads to fewer freedoms for everyone."

The party's Education Committee Chair, Brian Christeson, pointed out that government has done more to harm education than it has to help it: "Over the last 150 years, Americans have seen nearly universal literacy replaced by a society in which 40 million adults cannot understand a news article or balance a checkbook. Why? Because an ever larger, ever more centralized educational system has taken decision-making further and further away from those most fit to make the decisions: parents. It's time to give our children vastly greater opportunities for high-quality education by ending state mandates."

Expressing the Libertarian Party's overall position on the Supreme Court's ruling, NH party Chair Danielle Donovan issued the following statement: The framers of the New Hampshire Constitution crafted the document from their enlightened viewpoint about the importance of education. The shameful failure of government-run schools, however, has revealed a flaw in their good intentions. It is time for a new enlightenment.

The Court has misinterpreted the framers' charge to "cherish" education to mean "pay for" -- as is evidenced by its use of the word "mandate," which does not appear in the Constitution. If we look at the spirit of that document as a whole, it becomes evident that their intent was not to establish a government-run school system, but to assure that the State would construct no hindrances to the furtherance of education.

In order to "cherish" education and yet retain the constitutional principle of limited government, New Hampshire should amend its Constitution to place the responsibility for educating children where it clearly belongs -- with the parents.

The only guarantee parents will have of "adequate" education, is to make educational decisions for their own children -- not your children, not my children, their own children. And the only way to guarantee that parents will remain truly free to make those decisions is for the state to "cherish" education from a safe distance: by clearly

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rejecting any notion of government "mandates," and letting a free market provide a wealth of educational opportunities to New Hampshire's children.

In its ruling, the New Hampshire Supreme Court acknowledged, "We agree with those who say that merely spending additional money on education will not necessarily insure its quality." We agree, too -- and when schools are obliged to compete for students, teachers, and money, educational quality will soar while costs plummet.

Getting government out of education entirely would not only end the threat of a broad-based tax, it would slash property taxes by an average of 75% statewide. Contrast this bold initiative with the Republicans' incrementalist approach, which would tinker with the funding question, and leave the deadening hand of bureaucracy intact.

Education is too important to leave in the hands of self-styled experts. Schools inevitably teach moral values as they teach history, language, and mathematics. Parents already have the freedom to choose which churches their children will attend -- and they should have the same freedom to choose their children's schools.

If our goal is a free, socially and economically dynamic society, the Libertarian Party's dedication to a constitutional separation between school and state is the only sound, just, and viable position for the "Live Free or Die" state.