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Free to Think

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I am speaking as a private citizen and as pastor of an American Baptist congregation. I have great concerns over making changes to the state constitution concerning public education.

Make no mistake that SJR9 is an attempt to hijack the public education system in this state and across the nation by wealthy corporations and a few wealthy individuals. This constitutional amendment is presented, in the same way, in other states, under the guise of school choice. The proposed change is based on false and misleading ideas about our public schools which denigrate and disparage public education. This change in our state’s constitution would put public dollars into religious and private entities.

While the rhetoric that surrounds this purports to fix something we are already doing, that is, giving public money to private schools, then the entity that is supposed to be guarding our public education dollars, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, is not doing the work it is supposed to do, or the rhetoric is misleading.

The tyranny of the majority or the wealthy may be at play here instead of caring for and protecting minorities and the welfare of all citizens. Our founding parents recognized a need to keep religion out of government. Although we recognize our cultural foundations of religion we also recognize and hold valuable our freedom of religion. This freedom came to us from the past days of tyranny. Public money going to religious and private entities undermines this freedom.

The state is tasked with equality of education and is the basis for the foundation formula which has been undermined the last few years, stating that education is not meeting the needs and then, moving the funding. In this case public education moneys would be diverted to religious or private entities. This does not meet the needs of our children nor does it meet the equality standards that have been set by our state. I would think that another lawsuit like Moore vs. State is not needed to ensure equality of education.

In sum, this is a bad idea to change the constitution to divert public dollars to religious and private entities. If we are already doing this then stop it through the regulations we already have.

Keep public education dollars in public schools for our state’s future and the future of a free America.

Sarah R. Welton