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# RESOURCE

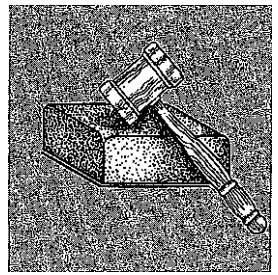
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## Charter Bill Dies in Committee

### TEA Double-Cross, Tax Reform Cited as Reasons

In May, Oregon and Oklahoma passed America's 36th and 37th charter laws. But in Tennessee, the House K-12 Education Subcommittee killed charter school legislation for the third year in a row. On Tuesday, May 4, the subcommittee split five to five with one member absent, and the bill died for lack of a majority.



The bill's defeat has been attributed primarily to a double-cross by the Tennessee Education Association. After the union blocked the passage of last year's bill, Education Commissioner Jane Walters met with TEA officials and drafted new legislation that addressed their stated concerns.

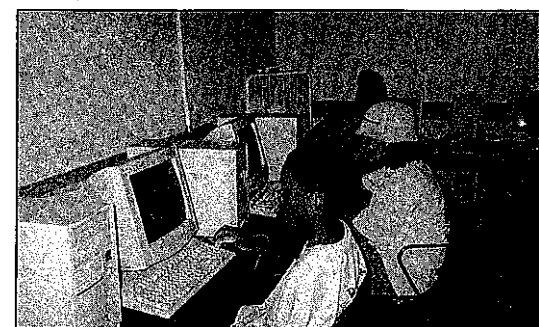
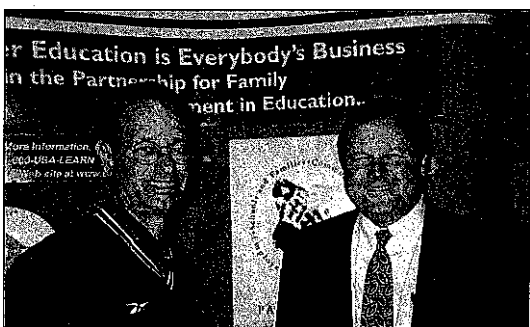
Union officials had published their concerns in a variety of places and had repeatedly stated that they would support

legislation that addressed these concerns. Charter school proponents in the state agreed to accept major compromises in order to gain the support of the TEA.

Despite this, the TEA aggressively *opposed* the bill, and they even came up with a whole *new* list of reasons to do so. A campaign of misinformation regarding the legislation was initiated, and when the bill came up before the house subcommittee, the TEA packed the hearing room to show its opposition.

(The subcommittee meeting took place in the middle of a school day in a city where one-fourth of all public school students fail to graduate, yet the entrenched interests in public education had time to pack the hearing room to protect their funding source.)

*Continued on page 3*



At the U.S. Department of Education's National Conference on Charter Schools in Denver, CSRC Executive Director Dale A. Berryhill chats with Kent Amos (left), who runs the largest charter school in America in a low-income area in Washington, D.C. While in Denver, Dale also visited the P.S. 1 Charter School (right), where students work with computers at every grade level.

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# CHARTER SCHOOL RESOURCE CENTER OF TENNESSEE

Supporting Excellence in Education in Tennessee

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## A Personal Message from Our Executive Director

### "Why We Need Your Help!"

Dear Charter School Proponent:

On Tuesday, April 20, America watched in shocked disbelief as the television networks played the videotape from the Columbine school massacre in Littleton, Colorado. Who will ever forget the sight of students running from the school with their hands over their heads, the bloody young man being pulled to safety through a broken second-story window, or the grainy yearbook photos of the children who didn't make it out alive?

As bad as that day was for all of us, it was especially disheartening to me. For it was on that very morning that the Governor's proposed charter school legislation was sabotaged in the House K-12 Education Subcommittee. As this month's newsletter explains, Education Commissioner Jane Walters had drafted legislation specifically designed to meet the stated concerns of the Tennessee Education Association, only to have them pack the hearing room to block the bill. This meeting took place in the middle of a school day in a city in which one out of four public school students fail to graduate high school, yet these educators had time to leave their schools and offices to block a reform effort that would have reached many at-risk children.

As I was driving back home to Memphis, the news broke of the Columbine massacre. Watching the reports on television that night, I couldn't help but notice the massive size of the high school. With 1,900 students, it's no wonder that cliques formed, and it's no wonder that the teachers couldn't address every students' needs. Yet right now, the city of Los Angeles is building a high school designed to serve 5,000 students!

Today's huge schools cannot possibly provide children with the individual attention they need in a society where traditional support systems have collapsed. Today's huge school districts with their centralized decision-making take authority out of the hands of teachers and parents, the very people close enough to our children to recognize potential problems.

Charter schools are a response to the monolithic public education system that has grown up in America over the past 50 years. The small size and focused mission of charter schools makes them the perfect antidote to the problems facing many public schools. Unfortunately, it appears that certain special interest groups within the system are more interested in preserving their monopoly on public funding than in reaching children.

And here's what's really disturbing: Tennessee ranks 44th in the nation in student achievement, yet no committee in our state legislature has ever heard full testimony on the subject of charter schools! That's right, no committee in either house of the General Assembly has ever heard testimony from a charter school operator, teacher, parent, or student from another state. No delegation has ever been sent to visit a charter school in operation. No study committee has ever conducted research and issued a report for legislators to examine. In other words, our General Assembly has turned down charter school legislation three years in a row without making any attempt to fully examine the issue!

Why? Because legislators get letters and phone calls from the well funded and well organized opponents of charter schools, but they don't hear from the single mother in the inner-city who would love to have a choice in where her children go to school.

That's where we come in. We seek to speak for the disenfranchised, the concerned parents who have been shut out from the process of deciding how their own children's education will be delivered. Our job is to let the people of Tennessee know that an alternative exists, one that increases accountability while giving parents and teachers a voice in the schools they pay for. But like anything else, letting people know about this exciting new idea requires financial resources.

And that's where you come in. We need your support if we are to overcome the forces organized against education reform in Tennessee. We are a not-for-profit organization that depends entirely on private donations for our support. Donations to our organization are tax-deductible under IRS guidelines. Even a small donation can make a big difference.

Won't you help us in this important effort? Please, fill out the pledge card below and send it in with your donation. A self-addressed return envelope has been provided for your convenience. The children of Tennessee will thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



Dale A. Berryhill  
Executive Director

P.S.—Also enclosed in this newsletter is a petition asking the Tennessee State Legislature to conduct a more thorough examination of the charter school concept next year. You can show your support for charter schools by signing and returning this petition.

**Yes! I want to help!**

Enclosed is my check for \$100  \$50  \$25  Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

I have also signed and enclosed the petition showing my support for charter schools.

# **WE DEMAND A COMPLETE AND OPEN HEARING ON CHARTER SCHOOLS IN TENNESSEE!**

## **A petition respectfully submitted to:**

- The Honorable John S. Wilder, Lt. Governor,
- The Honorable Jimmy Naifeh, Speaker of the House,
- The Honorable Andy Womack, Chairman, Senate Education Committee,
- The Honorable Gene Davidson, Chairman, House Education Committee,
- The Honorable Les Wunningham, Chairman, House K-12 Educ. Subcommittee,
- The members of the Senate and House Education Committees,
- And all other members of the 101st General Assembly.

## **Whereas,**

- Tennessee ranks 44th in the nation in public school student achievement, and
- Our state continues its low ranking despite a 55% increase in public education funding over the past six years, and
- There are school districts in our state in which one-fourth to one-third of all public school students fail to graduate high school, and
- Our state spends nearly five billion dollars each year on elementary and secondary education, then spends tens of millions more on remedial education in our public colleges and universities,

## **And, Whereas,**

- Thirty-six states and the District of Columbia have passed laws allowing the formation of charter schools, and
- Nearly a third of a million American schoolchildren are now being educated in charter schools, and
- The charter concept enjoys widespread, bipartisan support from such leaders as President Bill Clinton, Governor Don Sundquist, Congressman Harold Ford, Jr., and every leading presidential contender from both major parties, and
- Congress, in a bipartisan vote, has allocated \$100 million dollars in start-up funds to states with charter schools,

**Therefore, we are surprised and disappointed to learn that no committee in either house of the Tennessee State Legislature has ever taken the time to hear full testimony on this important issue! That's right:**

- No committee or subcommittee in either house has ever heard testimony from a charter school operator, teacher, parent, or student from another state, and
- No delegation has ever been sent to visit a charter school in operation, and
- No opportunity has ever been given for interested parties on both sides of the issue to present their case for or against charter schools, and
- No research has been conducted and no report issued for legislators to examine.

**Despite this complete lack of organized effort to examine, as a body, all aspects of this important issue, the Tennessee State Legislature has seen fit to kill charter school legislation for three years in a row. During those three years:**

- More than 40,000 children dropped out or were expelled from public schools in Tennessee, and
- More than 5,000 families abandoned the public school system for private or home schooling, and
- Tennessee passed up the opportunity to tap into hundreds of thousands of dollars of federal funds for charter schools.

**Now, we demand that a complete hearing on the charter school concept be conducted by the full Senate and House Education Committees in the 2000 Session of the 101st General Assembly.**

- We will not be satisfied with a "study committee" whose results can be easily ignored by legislators.
- We will not be satisfied with a subcommittee that has already rejected charter legislation three years in a row without fully examining the issue.
- We demand that the full Senate and House Education Committees hear complete testimony from a variety of sources on this important issue.

**We believe that a strong system of charter schools in Tennessee would help our state fulfill its obligation to provide the best possible educational experience to all children. We believe that charter schools can empower teachers, involve parents, and reach those children who are currently being lost in our education system. Therefore, we support the development of a strong charter school system in our state, and we demand that the charter concept be given a full and open hearing in the 2000 legislative session.**

[Sign and return in the enclosed envelope. Name and address are required for verification of Tennessee residency. All other information is optional. We will fill in your elected officials for you if left blank. If you know of others who may wish to sign this petition, simply photocopy this form.]

.....  
**We Demand a Complete Hearing on Charter Schools in Tennessee!**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Parent  Teacher  Student  Comments \_\_\_\_\_

My State Senator Is \_\_\_\_\_

My State Representative Is \_\_\_\_\_



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**In 1940, annual funding for public education totalled less than \$3 billion. Today, it is more than \$500 billion.**

## Public Education: Still Evolving

Defenders of the status quo in public education act as if America has always educated its children through the same centralized system that we have today. Nothing could be further from the truth. Consider:

- From the earliest colonies until after the formation of America, schools were established, funded, and governed by the communities they served. The first state board of education wasn't established until 1837, and New York did not establish state-funded public schools until 1849.

- The first major federal aid program for public education was not passed until 1965. There was no cabinet-level federal Department of Education until the 1970s.

- In 1940, there were 108,579 school districts in America. By 1960, that number had dropped by 68% to 34,678. Today there are only 13,526 school districts, a mere 12% of the number in 1940.

- Total expenditures for public education equalled less than \$3 billion in 1940. By 1960 the figure had risen to only \$19 billion. But over the following thirty-five years, total expenditures ballooned to \$504 billion.

In other words, public education in America began as a diversified, community-based system made up of small districts and small schools, and it maintained that basic structure until the middle of the 20th century.

Then, beginning in the 1960s, it made a dramatic shift to a consolidated, monolithic system with larger and larger districts and larger and larger schools, and with more and more guidelines being set by state and federal governments and by entrenched interests such as labor unions.

Has this change in design served the children of America well? On the contrary, the trend toward centralization of public education has been accompanied by a quantifiable drop in student achievement. In fact, America's steady decline in SAT scores began in 1965, the same year that the federal government got involved in public education.

Charter schools are a mechanism for decentralizing public education, returning decision-making authority to individual schools and the neighborhoods they serve. Only in this way can our public schools meet the needs of all children in today's society. ¶

**In March, the Hyde Family Foundations of Memphis sponsored a seminar attended by representatives of dozens of social service agencies. The seminar featured some of the top names in charter schools nationwide. The Charter School Resource Center hopes to repeat this event in other Tennessee cities.**



T. Willard Fair, head of the Urban League of Greater Miami and founder of the first charter school in Florida.



Milo Cutter, who in 1992 founded City Academy—America's first charter school—in a low-income neighborhood in St. Paul, Minnesota.



Kelly Garrett, founder of the first charter school in Texas and now a Tennessee resident, discusses charter schools with Jannie Foster of Project W.H.Y.

# More Than 30 Groups Ready to Start Charter Schools In Tennessee

## Almost All Wish to Serve At-Risk or Special Needs Children

More than 30 groups in Tennessee have demonstrated a serious interest in starting charter schools. Almost all of these groups are made up of certified teachers or established social service agencies, and almost all of them want to work with at-risk or special needs children.

Forexample, strong interest has been shown by Youth Villages, which has facilities in Nashville and Memphis for young people with emotional and behavioral disorders. Over in east Tennessee, the Lakeway Center in Morristown wants to start a charter schools for the developmentally disabled.

A group of teachers in Jackson want to start an elementary school with a project-based curriculum, while teachers in Knoxville want to open a middle school for ADD children. Teachers in Nashville want to open a high school focusing on international studies, while groups in Memphis, Knoxville, and Chattanooga are developing Afrocentric programs for kids in the inner cities.

These proposals demonstrate the diversity and innovation that is the hallmark of the charter concept. They also demonstrate that there is already a constituency for charter schools in our state. ¶



At the Tennessee Business Roundtable's Conference on Education Reform in Nashville, CSRC Executive Director Dale A. Berryhill was part of a panel that spoke on charter schools. Also on the program were former governors Ned McWherter (left) and Lamar Alexander, both of whom criticized the entrenched interests in public education for blocking significant education reforms during their terms in office.

## Charter Bill Dies (cont. from p. 1)

A complicating factor was the Governor's proposal for major tax reform, which sent the legislature into a month-long special session and created a huge backlog of other bills. When the special session failed to reach an agreement on tax reform, it left the state facing a potential budget deficit, which charter school opponents seized upon as an argument against trying any significant education reforms this year.

Because charter school proponents had accepted major compromises, the bill was a weak one, and its defeat is not a major tragedy. This is the first year that there has been any organized effort to educate the people of Tennessee about charter schools, and we have made amazing strides in a brief time. We feel confident that, given another year, we will see even better legislation passed, so we can begin the important work of building a strong charter school system in Tennessee. ¶

## CSRC of TN

**Dale A. Berryhill**  
Executive Director

**Dedrick Briggs**  
Assistant Director

**Vikki Laurie**  
Administrator

Opened May 1, 1998, the Charter School Resource Center of Tennessee is a non-partisan, non-profit, educational organization. Our goal is to assist the citizens of Tennessee in the building of a strong charter school system. We are supported solely by private contributions which are tax-deductible as provided by law.

Our mailing address is 6363 Poplar Avenue, Suite 410, Memphis, TN 38119, (901) 844-0046, fax (901) 844-0045.



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