

*CNN Crossfire with Roman Alexander moderated by John S. ... & Mike Kinsley*

Crossfire on GI Bill for children, 6/25/92

CLIP FROM GEORGE BUSH: For too long we've shielded schools from competition, allowed our schools a damaging monopoly power over our children. This monopoly turns students into statistics; it turns parents into pawns and it is time we began thinking of a system of public education in which many providers offer a marketplace of opportunity.

SEC'Y ALEXANDER (excerpts): \$1000 the average tuition for Catholic elementary schools; \$1400 the average tuition for all Catholic schools; average tuition for all private schools about \$2100. [can go to a public school and the \$1000 goes with you; go to a Catholic school and pay the whole tuition] "or perhaps you can inspire somebody to create a different kind of school, perhaps like the kindergarten in the bank in St. Paul or the Saturn school."

KINSLEY: [Wants to talk about how few children this \$500 million will help.]

ALEXANDER: [Easily deflects this by talking about pilot programs and demonstration programs and wanting to see how something works out before jumping into it with billions of dollars.] "\$30 to \$35 billion and it probably would be the best money this ... has ever spent." Sees the money coming not just from the fed gov't but doesn't talk about the mechanism. "Let's try to do for elementary schools what the GI Bill did for colleges." State, local, private money.

AL: [Favors public school choice but not as a way of improving schools, but of allowing parents to go elsewhere when they don't approve of what's going on in their local school.] Is asked by someone by, when a rich person can take their child and pick a school, poor people should not be able to do the same thing. Al says to forget this because the schools rich people take their kids to are not Catholic schools; they are schools that charge high tuition.

[QUESTION: WHERE DID BUSH GO TO SCHOOL? DOES IT TAKE DAY STUDENTS? HOW MUCH DOES IT COST? WHAT IS THE COST OF THE AVERAGE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL?] These schools are not going to take [poor] kids; these schools are not going to take kids who have problems with truancy, problems with learning, who are handicapped kids.

ALEXANDER: ...good private schools that a lot of folks want to send their kids to, where they would love to go if they had that \$1000.

AL: Those private schools are going to select the kids that they want and they will kick out the kids who do not conform to their rules, their regulations and their way of doing things. [stuff about competition and how public schools are forced to take every kid and educate him; how can they compete with schools that can pick their kids and kick out ones that ...] What kind of competition is that? You've got a heavily regulated ...on one side and on the other side..[lots of shouting here. The equivalent of players mixing it up in a hockey game. Al coming out the other side talking about parents who are really interested in their kids education saying the hell with it and pulling their kids out of

public school.

\* I'd like to see this \$500 million go to setting up schools for kids who are disrupting the education of other kids. By the way, this is another example of "read my lips." George Bush ran on a platform of opposition to spending public monies for private and parochial schools. [Dissent]

ALEXANDER: [about competition] In this proposal anti-discrimination provisions about race, disabilities, gender. Says public schools kick out kids every year by the millions. Suspensions.... People use Pell Grants at Harvard. "We have spent a half century giving college students consumer power at the college of their choice. Mayor of Milwaukee says that this proposal will hurt public schools just about as much as the GI Bill has hurt the public universities.

KINSLEY tries to come back to competition and picking and kicking kids. ALEXANDER says the public schools pick too--magnet schools for the arts, etc. Bronx Science. AL says there is some public school in that district that will take every single child.

ALEXANDER: [Back to the siren song]. This will provide more choices. This means that a single mother can take that \$1000 and leave her son at the same public school or another public school or the Catholic school down the street [this is a formula--"down the street"] or she can use half the money for afternoon or Saturday or summer academic programs--she'll have many more choices than she has today and it means that most of the money, Al, will go to public schools. The teachers and principals of those schools will have the flexibility to spend the money to help those children.

ALEXANDER: [asked whether it's true what Al Shanker says--that private schools don't educate any better than public schools. "Is he right or is he wrong?"] Well, I don't know why he spends so much time on it. To me it doesn't make much difference. I think parents don't look at things that way. I think they look at this school vs that school. Maybe two public schools or a public school and a private school. I wouldn't want to generalize about it because I think it's off the point. I think the point is that almost all schools need to be better [confusion here] because in almost none of them are children really...[more shouting]

AL: I think it's very much on the point. [Talks about the Education Summit and goals and first in the world]. Public schools not doing well in terms of what our international competitors are doing. The private schools, in spite of the fact that they've got select youngsters who are almost all in academic programs who are likely to be under pressure from parents to work harder because parents putting own money down--those kids not doing any better. So instead of developing a plan that will get all our kids from where they are to where they should be, we're about to have kids moved back and forth from two ineffective school systems--ridiculous.

ALEXANDER: I'm not going to let you get away with that, quite, Al. Most of the Catholic schools in the big cities--and two-thirds of our private schools are Catholic schools--have the same sort of kids that public

schools have and many of them parents prefer them.

AL: But the kids aren't learning a heck of a lot more than they are in public school. NAEP figures, etc. even with elite schools put in there, etc. Math scores, 5 percent...

ALEXANDER: Al, we agree. We agree that kids in private and public schools are not learning nearly what they should. We've got to change the system and one way of changing it is to give parents a chance to say you've labelled my kid learning disabled; I'm going to take him away to another school--maybe a public school--where they think he can learn.

AL: Great systems around the world; not one of them where competition between public and private schools. [Someone mentions competition between public and private colleges in U.S. Best in the world.] No entry standards in 95 percent of colleges and that's why kids don't work in high school. [Someone--Sununu--talking about how U.S. college grads the best students in the world. Says they make up in college what they didn't get in K-12.] Al calls this nonsense. Cites NAEP. Our higher ed system is in just as great a crisis as our elementary and secondary system. [lots of shouting. Someone asks why Al is so afraid of competition. He goes over the competition point again.]

ALEXANDER: [Brings up how much less the average per pupil is in a private school than in a public. Another element in competition. Public schools at a huge advantage here.]

AL: [Brings up the various ways in which private schools subsidized so that tuition can be low: textbooks, transportation, tax exemptions] A lot of private schools a lot more expensive.

ALEX: No, they're not. [Talks about Catholic schools in Philadelphia with tuition of \$750; In Milwaukee they offered to pay the tuition of poor kids who would go to Catholic schools and 4600 families picked up applications in one day.[mayhem] The public schools are going to get on their toes and the President wants to give public school teachers \$1000 for every middle and low income child in their school.

AL: Are you going to give this to parents who already have their kids in nonpublic schools?

ALEX: That's right! We are!

AL: You're taking parents who can already afford to send their kids to private schools and you're going to give them \$1000 to help them in something they're already doing. And that's a sensible expenditure of public money!

ALEX: [Al always around with hand out for more money and here they are offering to up the ed money spent in Milwaukee from \$35 million to \$100 million and why isn't Al excited?] We say, let the parents choose the schools and you're saying no because a few parents might choose private schools.

AL: Giving private schools the opportunity to choose the students they want.

KINSLEY: Program essentially bribery. ALEX: No more than the GI Bill bribery. Nobody said you can't go to Notre Dame or Berea or Howard.  
[more shouting]

KINSLEY: Where does all the money go in public ed. Not into teachers' salaries.

AL: Lots of rules and regulations. Federal, state; parent says child has a right to be educated in special ed class; a whole bunch of court proceedings. [Agreement the undesirability of this.]

KINSLEY: [Brings up the fragmentation issue. Public schools as place where we all come together.]

ALEX: We can still do this. [Gives a few beside-the-point examples] People live in communities but the idea of America is that we all come together. [Kinsley pushes a little.] Well, there are anti-discrimination provisions in the GI Bill for kids. But basically we need to give families and communities a chance to create the best schools. AND that means giving low and middle income families the same choices of all schools that wealthy families have.

[they are trying to sell this as a modified public school choice. BS but also a good ploy because we can't very well say, "no, no. People are going to send their kids to private schools, not public ones."]