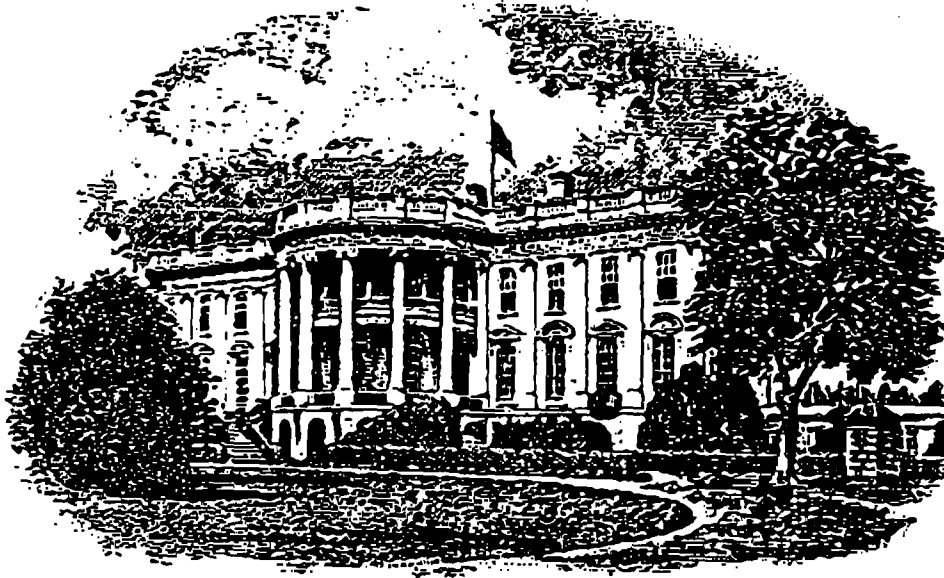


The White House
Office of Presidential Letters and Messages



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No. of pages (including cover): 3 Date: 3.7.97

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Comments: Per Your REQUEST: PAB CHASE
CORRESPONDENCE RE: VOUCHERS

Leanne

February 24, 1997

Mr. Bob Chase
President
National Education Association
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036-3290

Dear Bob:

Thank you for writing to me about private school vouchers. I understand the importance of this issue to the members of the National Education Association, and I appreciate your taking the time to outline your concerns.

As you know, in December of last year, I made clear my continued opposition to federally funded tuition vouchers for private elementary and secondary schools. I also oppose state-funded and locally funded vouchers, which take money away from public schools.

Those who support vouchers see them as a solution to the challenges facing our education system, particularly in our urban areas, but I believe that they are wrong. Vouchers would divert critical dollars from neighborhood public schools that are already short on resources in order to send a few selected students to private schools -- schools that are not publicly accountable. In addition, voucher proposals may distract long-term attention from the hard work of reform needed to change failing schools into good schools and good schools into outstanding schools.

As you know, however, under the tenth amendment, states and localities have the right to establish and fund their own, constitutionally valid voucher programs. It is not appropriate for the federal government to erect legal barriers that prevent them from doing so.

2

I believe that we should move beyond this divisive debate and work together to ensure that every student, no matter where he or she lives, can attend a public school that is safe and academically challenging. This means higher expectations for all of our students. It means that teachers and principals must be accountable for student performance, and that states and communities should have the ability to intervene effectively in failing schools. And it means that we must build strong partnerships among schools, families, and communities that make education everybody's top priority.

I look forward to working with you and your members in the weeks and months ahead, as we seek to give every child the education needed to make the most of their abilities and to become a productive member of our society.

Sincerely,