



JACK KEMP

April 14, 1998

Mr. Robert Chase
National Education Association
1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Bob:

Thank you for your letter and your concerns about the Alexis deTocqueville Institute, of which Senator Lieberman and I are honorary chairs. While Joe Lieberman and I do not speak for deTocqueville, I'm sure you can appreciate the fact that the deTocqueville Institute is not anti-public education, nor is it anti-teachers, nor is it, in the highest sense of the word anti-NEA. Yes, we seem to disagree about school reform and even about some of the basic principles, but, please be assured of my esteem for you and the teaching profession in general (which, incidentally, includes members of my own family), and of my inherent belief in the right of working men and women to organize and bargain collectively.

Believe it or not Bob, I was president of a "union," the AFL Football Players Union circa 1964-1968, and very proud of it. I believe strongly in the basic right of workers to organize in free and voluntary associations, i.e. unions.

First let me say that our difference in vision, which I only propose to sketch out here, is nearly captured by your letter to me. On page one you state you assume I subscribe to the idea "that there should be a panoply of teachers unions - the more the better." You say you would welcome my explanation.

I do believe a diversity of unions, including both the NEA and AFT, but also including alternatives with different philosophies of education, politics, and operation, would be healthy. Americans generally assume choice to be good. We like choice in newspapers, political parties, breakfast cereals, banks. This point comes up every time there's a large corporate merger. You yourself praise the virtues of choice in discussing magnet schools, charter schools, and alternative schools. The lack of these in 1959, you say, meant "there were fewer choices for students and parents."

For these very reasons, I strongly supported public funds for magnet schools, open enrollment and greater choice in education my entire political career. But if choice is good

for parents and students, it is equally good for teachers, and I place an equal amount of faith in the ability of teachers to intelligently choose between alternative unions and associations.

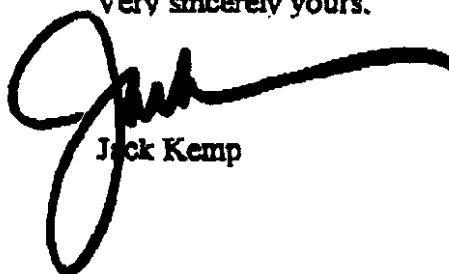
Similarly, I believe choice should be allowed across the school system in general. I believe parents are competent to make choices for and direct their children's education – better qualified, in fact, than any conceivable combination of federal, state, and local officials could possibly be. I believe this would enhance, not detract from public education in America.

That is in part the “explanation” of my views on education and education unions. As to the rest of Senator Kasten’s letter – the claims regarding salaries and staffs – I cannot say I support those statements, but whatever differences you may have can be addressed by you and my good friend Bob Kasten.

Finally, I am most willing and in fact eager to meet with you. Perhaps you would be interested in joining me to discuss our differences in further depth. Wouldn't it be great to have a genuine debate about the future of education in America? I invite you to join me in that discussion around the country, in any appropriate media. We would both agree, I suspect, that whatever the outcome, the process would be a healthy thing for the country, educational institutions and even our teachers unions.

Be assured, I will be happy to discuss this with you at your earliest convenience.

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jack Kemp", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jack Kemp