

[33] Friedman Conversation 12-16-05

\*\*\*\*\*

From: Milton Friedman  
To: Gordon Brown  
Sent: Friday, December 16, 2005 1:53 PM  
Subject: Re: Postscript—Recommendation

Dear Claudia and Gordon:

Obviously I have no objection whatsoever to your copyrighting what you put on your web page. I have no special desires with respect to it.

On your postscript, I feel that we are at the beginning of another year of conversation to straighten that one out.

Let me make just two points.

First, vouchers are not a free market remedy. They are a means for reducing the harm that is produced by our present governmental monopoly of schooling. A truly free market reform in schooling would be the elimination of any government intervention whatsoever, neither running schools nor financing schooling. Parents would be responsible for seeing that their children are schooled or private charity would fill in where parents do not perform that function. Under a voucher system the government is the funder. The point is that by funding the customer as it were rather than the producer it gives a greater play to competition and thereby allows the free market to reduce the harm that was being done.

Second, about schooling and belief in individualism: The key point here is that a socialist schooling system, which is what we have now, is going to instill socialist values. A quasi free-market school system, which is what vouchers might achieve, would reflect market values. The more general point is that individuals in any kind of system tend to reflect the values that are built into that system.

A third unrelated point: your statement proceeds as if my basic activity and claim to fame was promoting the free market. That is not the case. I am primarily a scientist, an economist, whose major activity has been to try to understand how the economic system works. A byproduct of that has been a concern with how it could work under alternative arrangements, but that is strictly a byproduct, not the primary function, and such celebrity as I have achieved has been largely by my work in positive economics, not in normative economics.

More generally, free markets are a means not an end. The end is to provide each individual with the maximum opportunity to satisfy his value and his beliefs and to

achieve the productivity of which he is capable. Unfortunately, there are not enough hours in the day for us to carry this discussion to a real conclusion.

Cordially yours,

Milton Friedman  
Senior Research Fellow  
Hoover Institution  
434 Galvez Mall  
Stanford, CA 94305-6010