conservative candidates calling for more mandatory sentencing.

The truth about mandatory sentencing is it is crippling the criminal justice system but politicians too frequently ignore this truth. Conservative judges, prosecutors and police officials are leading voices among those calling for the end of mandatory sentencing because evidence proves these sentences are overcrowding prisons without cutting violent crime.

There is a lot of talk coming out of Congress about cracking down harder on criminals and not surprisingly, truth is a victim in this clamor by

cians.

According to a detailed study on the criminal justice system conducted a few years ago by the American Bar Association, "Constitutional restrictions . . . such as the exclusionary rule do not significantly handicap police and prosecutors in their efforts to arrest, prosecute, and obtain convictions of criminal defendants for most serious crimes."

Once again, politicians are lie-ing on the truth and the ultimate victims of these lies are law abiding citizens.

life sentences for non-violent (i.e. drug ) offenders (most of them in their teens and 20s), along with the horrendous expense of feeding and caring for them as they grow old and die in prison!

As a former prosecutor and deputy sheriff, I also understand the opposition to the ban on 184 (not just 19) types of semi-automatic rifles. Feinstein's "assault rifle" legislation covers large, heavy, hard-to-conceal weapons which are almost never used in crime. As FBI statistics show that handguns are the true "weapon of choice" among criminals, it is obvious that the "assault rifle" proposal is just smoke —

was the guy who outlawed firearms in Germany in 1938). Joseph Lenin confiscated firearms in Russia during the 1920's. Is it any wonder a recent *USA Today* survey showed that over 40 percent of Americans polled fear the government as a threat to their liberty? Those who support the "assault weapons" ban admit that it is just the first step in their quest for sweeping gun-control legislation. I agree with many other citizens — it is time to question their motives.

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*Guest Opinion*

# Quality of education is more vital than operator of system

**By Byron A. Ellis**

The Oct. 18 article in *The Tribune* entitled "Privatization of Public Schools Must Not Become a Reality," was intriguing. Author Conrad W. Worrill implicitly acknowledged a number of disturbing facts. He said, "Privatization of public elementary and secondary schools is a dangerous concept for the African-American community in terms of educational interests." He further advocated that "if you are an African-American public school principal, teacher, counselor, administrator or service personnel, you should strongly consider taking a firm position against privatization of public school systems." Mr. Worrill added that African Americans would be the first to suffer in terms of employment and contracts if the public educational system were dismantled.

What is tacitly revealed throughout the article is that opposition to privatization is not about education but rather the maintenance of the economic status quo of the existing public schools. That is, the argument is about preserving well-paid public school jobs at the expense of many public school pupils. This is further corroborated by Mr. Worrill's statements that the privatization idea is aimed at a white power economic takeover of public school systems throughout America that have become predominantly African American and Latino. And that ". . .in the inner cities, African Americans exert great influence in staffing, contract allocations, curriculum direction and budget development. In some cases, African Americans control the public school system."

Hopefully, students are receiving superior education in those cities where African Americans control the system. Are they?

The debate on education should not be centered around how related public school jobs are distributed, even though said distribution is important. In terms of education, it ought not to matter how Black pupils are educated, or by whom. What should matter is the quality and quantity of education that the students receive. Is it sufficient to prepare them for a decent job or for college? Obviously, if the current public education system was adequate, alternatives to public schools would not be under consideration.

Furthermore, the debate must not be about private vs. public schools. But rather superior vs. inferior. Inherently there is nothing wrong with public schools, or private, for that matter. The problem is not how tuition is paid for, which partially distinguishes private from public schools. Important are the quality of education, and safety, at all schools. If the output of a private school is poor, then it is no different than a public school with poor output. Neither is beneficial for the student or society.

However, a private school with poor output will not survive parental scrutiny and will either become competitive or cease to exist. Public schools with poor output, on the other hand, will continue to exist to the detriment of society. Hence, we need a mechanism to force improvement at inferior public schools.

Inferiority is directly related to the school's administrative personnel. It is generally the human factor that determines the success or failure of a given institution. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine anyone advocating the preservation of incompetency for the sake of saving jobs. And incompetency has nothing to do with race; it is based on individual behavior.

Inner-city parents deserve good schools. Unfortunately, under the current public school monopoly, disadvantaged parents are unable to choose superior schools for their offspring.

It is clear that if there is no substitute for a given product, in this case education, the supplier (school administrators) have no incentive to improve the product (i.e., modify their behavior). Therefore, if administrators cannot produce competent and high-caliber schools, then they should be redeployed to activities in which they can demonstrate competitive advantages, if any. In some cases, redeployment may not be possible or desirable. And if these administrators are Black, should it make a difference? NO!.

Lastly, for Mr. Worrill to dwell on the past glory of public schools and to state that attempts to abandon it is due to Black enrollment is to completely miss the boat. First, none of us can return to the past, and second, inner-city students are not being abandoned under educational choice. Rather, their educational opportunities will increase. They will not be limited to one school system.

It is not the past — it is the future performance of Blacks that is at stake. And the future performance of Blacks is directly related to the quality of education they presently receive. Therefore, it is urgent to establish a step change in the delivery of inner-city education; whether this improvement emanates from the current system or a new system is irrelevant. Further improvement of public schools does not necessarily imply displacement of existing school personnel.

**(Byron A. Ellis lives Maryland and contributes frequently to *The Tribune*.)**