quality, that they choose schools based on other factors, but that's not what the parents say.''

[From the Wall Street Journal, Sept. 18, 1997]

CLEVELAND SHATTERS MYTHS ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE

(By Jay P. Greene, William G. Howell and Paul E. Peterson)

As delays in repairs keep the doors to Washington D.C.'s public schools closed, Congress is debating whether to approve the District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act, which could help restructure this dreary, patronage-ridden system and give at least a couple of thousand poor students a chance to attend the private school of their choice. True to his teacher-union allies. President Clinton remains adamantly opposed to giving poor children the same chance at a private education that his daughter, Chelsea, had.

In deciding whether to challenge the president, Congress would do well to consider what's been happening in Cleveland, site of the first-state-funded program to give low-income students a choice of both religious and secular schools. Of more than 6,200 applicants, pupils entering grades K–3 last year, nearly 2,000 received scholarships to attend one of 55 schools. The scholarships cover up to 90% of a school's tuition, to a maximum of $2,250, little more than a third the per-pupil cost of Cleveland public schools.

This past summer we surveyed more than 2,000 parents, both scholarship recipients and those who applied but did not participate in the program. We found that parents to scholarship recipients new to choice schools were much more satisfied with every aspect of their school than parents of children still in public school. Sixty-three percent of choice parents report being ''very satisfied'' with the ''academic quality'' of their school, as compared with less than 30% of public school parents. Nearly 60% were ''very satisfied'' with school safety, as compared with just over a quarter of those in public school. With respect to school discipline, 55% of new choice parents, but only 23% of public-school parents, were very satisfied.

The differences in satisfaction rates were equally large when parents were asked about the school's individual attention to their child, parental involvement, class size and school facilities. The most extreme differences in satisfaction pertained to teaching moral values: 71% of choice parents were ''very satisfied,'' but only 25% of those in public schools were.

Our other findings provide powerful answers to many of the arguments raised by voucher opponents:

Parents, especially poor parents, are not competent to evaluate their child's educational experience. But test scores from two of the newly established choice schools justify parental enthusiasm. Choice students attending these schools, approximately 25% of the total coming from public schools, gained, on average, five percentile points in reading and 15 points in mathematics during the course of the school year.

Choice schools don't retain their students. In fact, even though low-income, inner-city families are a highly mobile population, only 7% of all scholarship recipients reported that they did not attend the same school for the entire year. Among recipients new to choice schools the percentage was 10%. The comparable percentages for central-city public schools is twice as large.

Private schools expel students who cannot keep up. But only 0.4% of the parents of scholarship students new to school choice report this as a reason they changed schools this fall.

Poor families pick their children's schools on the basis of sports, friends, religion or location, not academic quality. Yet 85% of scholarship recipients from public schools listed ''academic quality'' as a ''very important reason'' for their application to the program. Second in importance was the ''greater safety'' to be found at a choice school, a reason given by 79% of the recipients. ''Location'' was ranked third. ''Religion'' was ranked fourth, said to be very important by 37%. Friends were said to be very important by less than 20%.

Private schools engage in ''creaming,'' admitting only the best, easiest-to-educate students. But most applicants found schools willing to accept them, even though a lawsuit filed by the American Federation of Teachers prevented the program from operating until two weeks before school started. When those who were offered but did not accept a scholarship were asked why, inability to secure admission to their desired private school was only the fourth most frequently given reason, mentioned by just 21% of the parents remaining in public schools. Transportation problems, financial considerations and admission to a desired public school were all mentioned more frequently. (Cleveland has magnet schools that may have opened their doors to some scholarship applicants.)

The data from Cleveland have some limitations, because the program was not set up as a randomized experiment. Yet the comparisons between scholarship recipients new to choice schools and those remaining in public schools are meaningful. That's because, with respect to most of their demographic characteristics—such as mother's education, mother's employment, and family size—the families of scholarship recipients did not differ from those remaining in public schools. In fact, the voucher recipients actually had lower incomes than the group to which they were compared.

Cleveland's success at school choice should not remain an exception to public schools' monopoly on education. If members of Congress care at all about the education of poor children living in the inner-city, they should approve the voucher legislation for Washington now before them.

NATIONAL PARK FEE EQUITY ACT

HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR.

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 18, 1997

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, today I introduced the National Park Fee Equity Act. This legislation will allow those national parks which cannot charge an entrance fee to keep all other fees which are collected for activities within that park.

There are units of the park system which cannot collect fees because when these parks were created deed restricts were placed on the land donated to the Federal Government.

Last Congress, this body recognized the need to keep more of the money in the parks rather than sending it back to Washington. This was accomplished when we created the Fee Demonstration Program.

This program allows parks to keep 80 percent of the user fees, above what was taken in during 1994, in the park where they are collected. Unfortunately, there are some parks which cannot charge entrance fees.

The fact that these parks cannot charge an entrance fee hampers their ability to collect funds for park improvements. Therefore, I think it is only fair that all other fees collected in these parks remain there to help protect and improve them.

One such park, the Great Smoky Mountains, is the most visited park in the United States. However, since it cannot charge an entrance fee, it does not get to keep as much money as other parks do for improvements to campgrounds, trails, buildings, and other facilities there.

I believe that we need to do everything we can to help our Nation's parks. Currently, the National Park System has a maintenance and construction backlog estimated to be between 4 and 6 billion dollars. The bill I have introduced is a step toward addressing this problem.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very modest proposal in terms of the Federal budget. However, this money will go a long way in helping us preserve these parks for enjoyment of future generations. I urge my colleagues to support the National Park Fee Equity Act.

POW–MIA COMMEMORATION DAY

HON. VIC FAZIO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 18, 1997

Mr. FAZIO. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, our Nation will commemorate the thousands of American men and women who were lost in action or who experienced the brutality of being a prisoner of war. For every war that America has engaged in since its formation 221 years ago, these men and women fought to protect America's democratic principles and to ensure that future generations could enjoy these freedoms.

Our country joins the American families around the world whose sons and daughters, fathers, mothers, and spouses were lost in action or suffered brutality as a prisoner of war in mourning and bittersweet celebration. We grieve for the soldiers whose lives were lost. Our only consolation is that their families finally find a level of peace by knowing the fate of their loved ones. America can join them in putting closure to the restless years of uncertainty regarding the destiny of these men and women. Together we can find comfort in each other and begin to heal our painful wounds.

Today, Americans around the world also join in rejoicing for those courageous men and women who have returned to us alive and are reunited with their families. We welcome them warmly. Although there are no words that can adequately express our deepest and sincerest gratitude, please know that your sacrifices and those of your families were not in vain. To these soldiers, we thank you. Your years of physical torture, hunger, psychological abuse, and forced labor will never be forgotten. America will never allow it to be forgotten.

America continues to wait apprehensively for the soldiers whose fate is still unknown. We pray together that soon we will learn more on the status of these men and women. Please be assured that America will not rest until all of her sons and daughters are returned to her soil. We anxiously await news of them and hope for their safe return with open hearts and open doors.