

Educators pleased by meeting with Bush

By Liz Schevtchuk
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Catholic educators conferred June 9 with President Bush, and afterward said they were pleased about the "first step" toward more federal backing for educational choice.

But they also said they foresee considerable work ahead.

The educators met briefly with Bush after more than an hour of discussions with various members of the White House staff, including Chief of Staff John H. Sununu.

"Our main agenda item was to impress upon the president and White House staff — especially the president — the need for true parental choice in education," said Sister Catherine T. McNamee, president of the National Catholic Educational Association. Although Bush has expressed his desire to be the "education president" and encouraged educational choice, she said, "we want to be sure that it is a real choice," one that includes non-public schools. "We believe today we have made

Cardinal repeals rule on parish speakers

By Tracy Early
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York has apologized for an archdiocesan policy that kept a state assemblyman from speaking in his own parish because of his votes for Medicaid funding of abortion.

The cardinal made the apology in a column in *Catholic New York*, archdiocesan newspaper.

He also commended the assemblyman, John C. Dearie of St. Raymond's Parish in the Bronx, N.Y., for declaring recently that he had been wrong and would now vote against abortion funding. Dearie did not return a call requesting comment.

Cardinal O'Connor said he had been "struggling" for two years to modify the policy on speakers that caused Dearie to get "caught in an eggbeater."

Then-vicar general, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph T. O'Keefe, now bishop of Syracuse, issued a directive to parishes in August 1986, telling pastors they should exercise "great care and prudence" in deciding on speakers at events such as Communion breakfasts and graduations.

"It is not only inappropriate, it is unacceptable and inconsistent with diocesan policy to invite the individuals to speak at such events whose public position is contrary to and in opposition to the clear, unambiguous teaching of the Church," Bishop O'Keefe wrote.

A month later Cardinal O'Connor defended the directive as "common sense"

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an important first step," she added.

She and Father Thomas G. Gallagher, education secretary at the U.S. Catholic Conference, said options for assistance recommended by Catholic educators included tuition tax credits, help for carrying out programs for remedial education and for handicapped students, and assistance in removal of asbestos from Catholic schools.

"It wouldn't necessarily have to be tuition tax credits," she said. "We said today we were not promoting any particular legislation or form." Father Gallagher said the meeting participants included school officials from the Archdioceses of Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Newark, N.J., Philadelphia and St. Louis; and the Dioceses of Brooklyn, N.Y., Cleveland, Ohio, and Pittsburgh.

"It was a good meeting," the priest said. "By and large I think it was a good beginning."

Catholic leaders sought the session after Bush, in an informal discussion with students in late March, created confusion about his position on tuition tax credits.

On that occasion, Bush suggested that he had been "intrigued" by the concept of tuition tax credits but that budget constraints prevailed and he did not think parents of

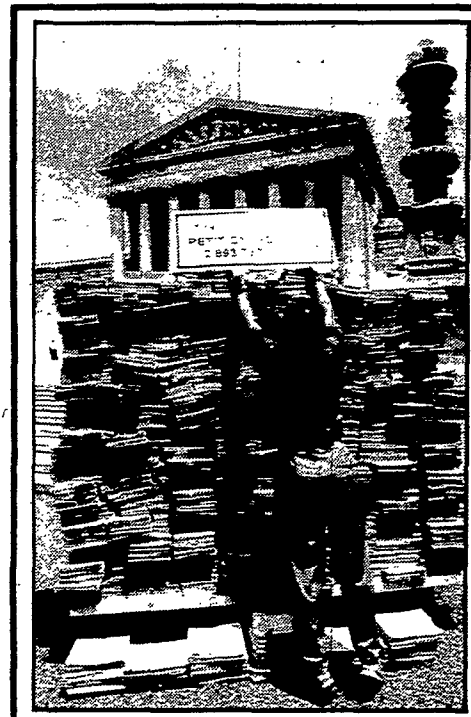
private school students "should get a tax break" for paying both private school tuition and for public schools through their taxes.

In Bush's remarks to the Catholic educators, "he himself said he probably answered that question poorly," Father Gallagher said.

"We did hear the president commit himself to parental choice in education," Father Gallagher said. Furthermore, when one educator cited tuition tax credits as one option for furthering educational choice, "he (Bush) said 'I'm in favor of that,'" Father Gallagher added.

"We did suggest it would be a very meaningful symbol for the administration to take some step" as soon as possible, such as potential initiatives for handicapped students, meeting other educational needs, or including non-public educators in federal educational policy consultations, Sister McNamee said. "We want him to be the 'education president' of all kinds of schools. We need some symbols that we're being heard."

"His staff indicated that this would be the first" of various meetings, said Sister McNamee. "We're waiting to see what the follow-up will be."



AP/Wide World Photos
ADDRESSING THE COURT — Wayne Dillard of Lindale, Texas, adds a message to a stack of petitions in front of the U.S. Supreme Court Building. The court is expected to issue a decision on abortion in the near future.



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