

Catholic officials laud Bush education plan

By Ines Pinto Alicea
Catholic News Service
WASHINGTON (CNS) — Catholic officials praised President George Bush's new education plan, but some expressed concern about where the money will come from to pay for his proposed "revolution" in the U.S. educational system.

"This plan shows that education has been raised to a higher place in the national agenda," said Sister Catherine McNamee, president of the National Catholic Educational Association and a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

Bush has asked for \$200 million to encourage school districts to offer parents more choices in selecting schools for their children. The U.S. Department of Education also will spend \$30 million to fund demonstration projects in educational choice.

"It is a very encouraging step in the right direction," said Mercy Sister Lourdes Sheehan, secretary of the U.S. bishops' Department of Education. "We will be watching very carefully to see that the money for his plan does not come out of established programs. We want to make sure that our Catholic school students continue to receive the services they have been receiving."

Catholic educators also said they anticipate the plan's coming under fire from groups advocating the complete separation of church and state. Bush's plan calls for giving parents choice in education whether in public, private or religious schools.

The supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus called the president's choice plan "a ray of hope" for private school parents.

"More and more today such parents are forced to bear severe financial burdens in exercising their constitutionally guaranteed right to send their children to the schools of their choice," said Supreme Knight Virgil C. Dechant.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State, on the other hand, charged that "choice" in education is a misleading term.

"Parochial and other private schools take only the students they want to take," said the organization's executive director, Robert L. Maddox. "Only they have any

'choice' when it comes to admissions. "It is bad enough that President Bush wants to use tax dollars to pay for religious schools," Maddox added. "But he compounds the mistake by using federal funds to pressure school districts across the country into doing so."

But Catholic educators said choice plans would weather court tests if states decided to give parents vouchers or tax credits to use at the schools of their choice.

"The United States Supreme Court determined (in *Mueller vs. Allen* in 1983) that a tax deduction for educational expenses available to all parents is constitutional," said Sister Sheehan. "The aid is to parents, who then decide where to apply the assistance."

The president's initiative — entitled the "America 2000 Education Strategy" — is built around six national goals designed to increase adult literacy and the high school graduation rate; to improve overall student competency; and to make U.S. students first in the world in math and science.

It calls for top-to-bottom school reforms, including a voluntary nationwide exam system; federal school aid tied to academic results; and \$550 million in start-up funds for a "new generation of schools."

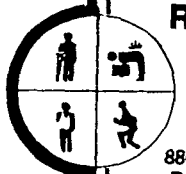
"I'm here to say America will move forward," Bush said after announcing the plan April 18. "Our challenge amounts to nothing less than a revolution in American education, a battle for our future."

Addendum

The religious of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns were not included in our Vocation Directory in last week's issue. For information on vocations, write or call:

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Kurds

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said, "given the alternative."

After growing pressure at home and abroad, President George Bush sent U.S. troops into northern Iraq to set up protected camps for Kurdish refugees. Some 400 Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit crossed into Iraq from Turkey April 20 to secure the refugee zone, and began work the next day on the first of six proposed camps.

The U.S. military personnel were to be joined by forces from France, Britain and other Western nations.

In its editorial, *L'Osservatore Romano* said that the "martyred Kurdish people cannot and must not be forgotten."

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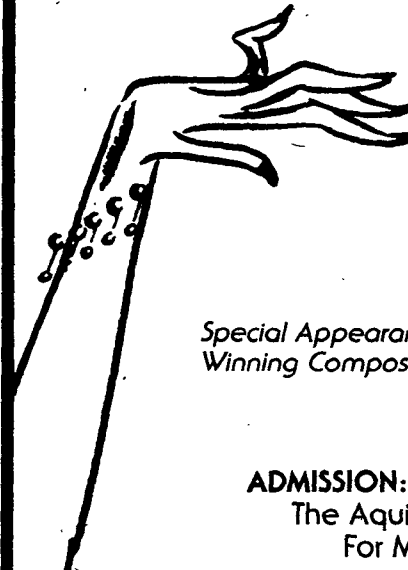
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