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Angelo Ochoa: A trial separation is better for the kids

ANGELO OCHOA Guest columnist

May 24, 2024



Campus aide Anissa Price, center, welcomes students to the first day of school at Bell's Hill Elementary School for the 2019-20 school year.

Rod Aydelotte, Tribune-Herald file photo

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In September of 1960, Sen. John F. Kennedy received an invitation to address the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. As a Catholic candidate, the fear back then was that Kennedy would not be able to remain independent of church control should he be elected president.

Facing a difficult audience, **the lines Kennedy delivered** over 60 years ago are ones that we can all still take a lesson from today.

“So it is apparently necessary for me to state once again not what kind of church I believe in — for that should be important only to me — but what kind of America I believe in.

“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute. Where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no

Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote. Where

no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference; and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.



Angelo Ochoa

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“I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials.”

I was raised in the Catholic Church and to this day my faith remains very important to who I am as a person. I remain grateful for the long hours my parents had to work to be able to afford to send me to Catholic school. I am grateful for the education I received there and for the lifelong friends I made there. However, like Kennedy, I agree that no church or church school should be granted any public funds or political preference and that no religious body should seek to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials.

It's not difficult to understand why private schools are so eager to see a voucher law passed. Would you turn down free money if someone was offering it to you with no strings attached? For me, the difficulty is getting past the fact that private schools aren't held accountable to the state the way that public schools are. They aren't required to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities like public schools are, and being accredited by the state is not a requirement for private schools like it is for public schools; it is merely a recommendation. Not to mention that private schools are not required to meet the same state testing standards as public schools. Chances are if you come across a school that is doing all these things, it's probably a public school.



On a recent visit to Washington, D.C., my family and I were able to walk through the National Archives to see those documents containing the foundational principles on which we have built this country. Principles that we are so quick to reference when we feel like our freedoms are being threatened, or for some, as a way to justify poor decisions.

I would ask us to consider one thing: After months and months of debate, before those 39 men signed their names to the bottom of the Bill of Rights, the members of the first Congress agreed on what they believed was most important to them. They agreed that Congress should make no law “respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” In one of their first legislative acts, they wanted all future generations to understand the need for a separation between church and state.

If Texas lawmakers defended the First Amendment with as much enthusiasm as they did the Second, school districts across the state would not be in crisis mode right now. Despite the inflationary price increase of everything (except the Costco hot dog) over the last few years, Texas lawmakers have not approved a single increase to the basic allotment since 2019. This gives them the upper hand, because all they have to do is nothing — just wait it out while more and more programs are cut from our public schools due to a lack of funding.

I think that this is what people find the most frustrating: that lawmakers can claim on camera how important the life of a child is, but when the time comes to feed them, provide them with affordable health care or educate them, they can never seem to remember where they left their wallet.

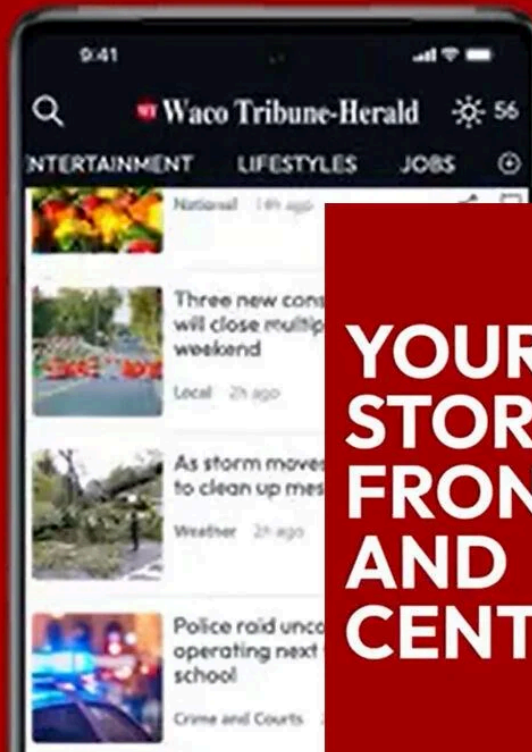
Lastly, to those parents who have children in private schools who ask why their tax dollars should go to fund public education, I can only remind them that a portion of our tax dollars are also directed towards FEMA, the police and fire departments, local libraries, and paving county roads that we may never drive on. We can't all agree on how our tax dollars get allocated, but we shouldn't hesitate when it comes to funding public education, because what we can all agree on is that a well-educated society benefits all of us.

If you do have kids in private schools and would like to know where your tax dollars are going, I would invite you to reach out to one of the principals at any of Waco ISD's campuses. Take a tour. You might be surprised to see what incredible work they are doing there. You might be surprised to see how diverse each campus is. You might also be surprised to see how challenging the curriculum is and how many opportunities are being made available to our students.

Opportunities that I never had as a private school kid.

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Waco ISD at-large school board member Angelo Ochoa is a local investment advisor with Disciplined Investors LLC.