

APRIL 9, 2003

**SCHAKOWSKY: EDUCATION SECRETARY RODERICK PAIGE HAS LOST CREDIBILITY**

**CALLS FOR HIS RESIGNATION FOLLOWING COMMENTS URGING TEACHING OF CHRISTIAN VALUES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Education Secretary Roderick Paige has lost credibility. Following his deeply troubling comments in Baptist Press proclaiming the importance of teaching Christian values in public schools, it is evident that Secretary Paige cannot be an unbiased advocate for all public school students.

I am not concerned with Secretary Paige's personal religious beliefs. Many of us were raised in religious traditions and with faith-based values that have led many of us to serve in this body - the desire to help out those in need, to care for our neighbors, and to be good members of the global community.

Secretary Paige's views, however, are offensive because they reflect on how he will undertake his Constitutional responsibility: to provide the best educational opportunities for all students in the United States. Our nation was built on the idea of separation of church and state. Article I of our great Constitution requires that there be no established religion. This was not an afterthought by the founding fathers - it was clearly and forcefully stated at the very outset. By expressing his preference for parochial education and criticizing public schools for not teaching religious values, Secretary Paige violated that founding principle.

Secretary Paige has forcefully described his preference for schools that have "a strong appreciation for the values of the Christian community." He has described Christian schools and universities as having a "strong value system" that is "not the case in a public school where there are so many different kids with different kinds of values." How then can the parents of children in public schools - which educate 90 percent of all children in our country - believe that Secretary Paige's bias against public education will not be reflected in his policies? How can they be assured that he will not direct funds and resources to the parochial schools to which he would prefer to send his children and away from the public schools that educate the vast majority of American children?

Clearly, Secretary Paige is refusing to embrace the diversity reflected in our public schools. In a nation that is increasingly diverse, equating good values with Christian values is disrespectful to all non-Christian believers and to all non-believers. Personal faith must never be allowed to dictate government policy.

Through his statements, Secretary Paige has shown that he cannot be relied upon to fulfill his responsibilities. He should resign voluntarily. If not, President Bush should

**demand his resignation.**