

TUITION TAX CREDITS

In the coming days, the subject of tax credit for private school tuition will be decided in Congress.

That is a subject on which most of the organized Jewish community is agreed, locally and nationally, but on which there is a fairly strong minority Jewish opinion.

The matter is now in the U.S. Senate, in the form of S 528, an administration proposal which has already passed the Senate Finance Committee. It may now be offered as an amendment to revenue legislation. If it passes the Senate, it will go to the House. Simply, it provides for a tax deduction (in the neighborhood of 500 dollars, a neighborhood which could change) for tuition paid to private religious or non-religious schools.

The Jewish population of San Francisco, Marin and the Peninsula has consistently registered its opposition to the use of government funds for private schools. In 1975, 84 per cent said they were opposed; in 1979, 89 per cent; and in 1981, 86 per cent, not significant differences. In 1981, when a more specific question was asked about tuition tax credits for religious day schools, the Jews in this area were opposed by a smaller but still substantial two-to-one margin.

Most of the local Jewish organizations, through the JCRC, and most of the national Jewish organizations, through the NJCRAC, have expressed their strong opposition to tuition tax credits. The exceptions are the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, which supports tuition tax credits; and Hadassah, which at last reading had not reached a position on the subject. The NJCRAC reflected the majority organizational position in its 1983-84 program planning guide with this note:

"The right of parents to send their children to private schools is inviolable. The maintenance of a Jewish religious educational system for interested families is a basic responsibility of Jewish communities. However, those communities should themselves support such systems, to the extent necessary, and not attempt to entangle themselves with government funds -- an entanglement which is hazardous to the integrity of the Jewish schools themselves; and is a hazard to the kind of society in which such private religious schools can flourish."

Proponents say that it is time for there to be competition to the public schools, which are not doing such a great job. Opponents say that tuition tax credits will cause a further deterioration in the public schools -- drawing off not only finances, but the more motivated students. We would encourage, they say, the kind of two-level society which will divide America in the future.

Certainly the Jewish community has a great stake in the nature of America's educational system. The tuition tax credit proposal is, as they say, a crossroads for the future of that system. The Jewish organizations have expressed themselves. If you have an opinion, as an individual citizen, you should express yourself to your Senators and Congressman within the next few days.