

BOORTZ SAYS 'GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS' ARE PITIFUL. I SAY THAT'S DEBATABLE.

After watching the vacuous babble that passes for presidential debates, I am ready for a head-knocking, rip-snorting debate between two articulate participants with widely divergent views. How about Neal Boortz and Zachary Wansley?

Boortz is the popular nationally syndicated radio "Talkmaster." I have known him since he was a talk radio rookie in Atlanta, and I was a PR pup at Southern Bell. He is not going to appreciate my saying this because it could seriously damage his reputation, but he is one of the kindest, most decent people I know. A good man and a loyal friend.

However, I am weary of his constant criticism of "government schools," which the rest of us call "public schools." One of Boortz's mantras concerns the lack of economic education in "government schools." He says on his Web page, "If there was any decent economic education in our pitiful government schools we wouldn't be discussing this right now," meaning a John Kerry tax increase proposal.

Enter Zachary Wansley. Zachary is a senior at Chapel Hill High School in Douglas County, one of those "pitiful government schools." He is an honor student, president of the student body and captain of the cross-country team. Oh, did I mention that he is my grandson?

Among the subjects Zack is studying at Chapel Hill this year is Advanced Placement Economics. He and his classmates are discussing economic theories I had never heard of until I had moved way up the management pyramid at BellSouth. I suspect Zack's class discussions would give Neal Boortz a mild case of the head spins. Incidentally, Zack doesn't think Kerry's tax increase proposal makes sense either.

That leads to the proposed debate. Let's have Neal Boortz debate Zack Wansley on economic theory and any other subjects of their mutual choosing. I'll get a couple of teachers from the "pitiful government schools" to negotiate details of the debate for Zack. I suspect I won't have trouble finding volunteers. Boortz can select some of his staffers to represent his interests, if they aren't too busy shilling on the radio for every product this side of Preparation H.

The two groups can decide the location (any place that serves sweet tea), the moderator (anybody but Dan Rather, who is a certified nutcase), format, lighting, etc. Zack will let Boortz bring his intimidating personality to the debate if Boortz will allow Zack to bring the considerable gray matter between his ears and the impressive amount of knowledge he has acquired in his twelve years in "pitiful government schools."

Neither has a stellar reputation as a debater. While Boortz has squared off with Atlanta Journal-Constitution editor Cynthia Tucker over gun control, that had to be as intellectually challenging as quoting Shakespeare to a doorknob. On the other hand, Zack has had a few debates with his mama, and to my knowledge he has lost them all.

I have not yet broached the subject of a debate with Boortz. I did mention it to Zack and was pleased that he seems willing to participate. Zack is a quiet kid and not particularly comfortable in the spotlight, but I get the feeling that he, his parents, his teachers and most everybody else affiliated with public education in Georgia have had a belly full of Neal Boortz painting all "government schools" with the same tar brush and would like to have a go at him.

I would urge the Talkmaster to accept this opportunity rather than venture into Bartow County and challenge Zack's Uncle Ken, a hard-driving science teacher at Woodland High School. Ken has as much gray matter as Zack, but lacks his nephew's sweet disposition and is easily offended when people bash "government schools." Neal should think carefully about getting in Uncle Ken's face. He can get pretty cranky.

I propose selling tickets to the debate with half the proceeds going to publicize the good things happening in public education in Georgia and half going to bribe Preparation H to advertise on the Boortz show. With one more product to shill, maybe Boortz won't have as much time to disparage our "pitiful government schools."