

A P P E N D I X 4

Talking About Vouchers

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Surprising Sources*

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By Parents of Voucher Students

“I was asking questions—too many questions—as a mother. They told me not to worry about it. But my purpose is not to just house children so she could make money.” *Kimberly Marvin, wife of Bethel Metropolitan pastor Joaquin Marvin, on the management company that runs Bethel Metropolitan Christian School in St. Petersburg, Fla. After removing their children from the school housed in their church, Mrs. Marvin was fired as headmistress and Rev. Marvin was fired as dean. They both had complained about lack of textbooks and special education services. (“Parents Rue Their School Choice,” St. Petersburg Times, Oct. 3, 2001.)*

“He doesn’t bring homework home; they don’t have speech therapy at the school.” *Lesley Wise, mother of a seventh-grader who left the Bethel Metropolitan Christian School in St. Petersburg, Fla., and returned to a public school. (“Parents Rue Their School Choice,” St. Petersburg Times, Oct. 3, 2001.)*

“When they were losing the teachers, they had the students teaching themselves.” *LaRuth Jackson, who withdrew her first-grade son from the Islamic Academy School of Arts and Sciences in Cleveland and returned him to public school, where he had to repeat first grade. The tax-funded voucher school operated for two years with unlicensed teachers, including a convicted murderer. (“Cleveland Citizens Issue Stern Warning on Vouchers,” American Federation of Teachers news report, January 31, 2002, panel discussion in Washington, D.C.)*

“After two or three days she came home crying. When I woke her up for school the next day, she cried and said she didn’t want to go. I already received a new application [for the voucher program] for next year. For now, I’m going to throw it in the wastebasket.” *Maysoon Zaghari, an immigrant who removed her 7-year-old daughter, Walaa, from a Cleveland voucher school and enrolled her in a nearby public school. The Zaghari family is Muslim and the voucher school is Catholic. Walaa said the school forced her to participate in their religious exercises even though it conflicts with her personal religion. The school told Walaa’s father that it was against school policy to excuse students from religion and if the family objected they could remove Walaa from the school. The few Muslim schools that accept vouchers were full or too far from the Zaghari family home. (“Cleveland Families Disagree on Value of School Vouchers,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Feb. 17, 2002; “School Vouchers: Court Showdown,” Columbus [Ohio] Dispatch, Feb. 17, 2002.)*

“I’m extremely dissatisfied with the academic performance of the school, administrator changed ... without notification to parents, spanking of children, poor quality atmosphere, transferring child back to public school, ... lack of cooperation from school administration,

in regards to curriculum and after school activities—never met registration promises.” *Parent responding to survey by official evaluation team for Milwaukee voucher program; referring to Juanita Virgil Academy, which went bankrupt and closed mid-school year. From John F. Witte, The Market Approach to Education: An Analysis of America’s First Voucher Program, 2000.*)

By Private School Officials

“It’s wrong what they’re doing. They had no intention of delivering what they promised. It’s people taking advantage of the poor. All I know is the money wasn’t going into the classroom.” *DiAnne Taylor, former principal of Bellview Junction, a Pensacola, Fla., voucher school, speaking about a management company that operated up to six voucher schools and faced many complaints. (“Voucher Complaints Chase Pair,” St. Petersburg Times, April 7, 2002; “A Voucher Marketplace,” St. Petersburg Times, April 14, 2002.)*

“If what they’re doing isn’t illegal, it should be. I quit my job for this. Children’s lives are more important than money.” *Ed Anderson, former director of the AJC 2000 Management Company, which operated up to six voucher schools in Florida. He requested an investigation by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and sent the department documents outlining claims that the voucher schools charged false tuition amounts and that children did not receive special education services. Note: As of early 2003, no charges had been filed against the management company. (“Voucher Complaints Chase Pair,” St. Petersburg Times, April 7, 2002; “Pensacola Voucher School Workers Fired Amid Spending Questions,” Associated Press, March 15, 2002.)*

“I fear that some are jumping on the bandwagon and figuring on making some easy money.” *Mary Herscher, head of the private DePaul School for Dyslexia in Clearwater, Fla., on the dangers posed by the lack of oversight in the state’s voucher program for students with disabilities. (“An Educational Fraud,” St. Petersburg Times, Oct. 11, 2001.)*

By Voucher Proponents

“If you hand a middle-class child a voucher and say go anywhere you want to go, that child probably goes out and gets in the SUV and Mama takes them to whatever school he or she wants to attend. You hand that same child in an underprivileged neighborhood a voucher and say go anywhere you want to go and the first question is going to be, ‘How am I going to get there?’” *Then-Acting Lieutenant Governor of Texas and current state Senator Bill Ratliff, a previous sponsor of voucher legislation. (The Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Jan. 31, 2001.)*

“Ninety percent of kids go to public schools and will continue to do so even if this was adopted. It does nothing to improve those schools.” *Then-Michigan Gov. John Engler on his state’s school voucher ballot initiative, Proposal 1. The proposal lost 69 percent to 31 percent in November, 2000. Engler opposed the proposal, though generally supports vouchers. (Michigan Association of School Administrators, Fortnighter, Jan. 28, 2000.)*

“The people have spoken, and I think it would be better now to explore other ways to improve the educational system. The mistake the voucher people made was to say the whole system is bad. I’m a product of the public schools and so are my three children. We should start by getting rid of the red tape for the 70 percent of schools that are doing fine, then

target more resources to the others and find good principals to run them.” *Then-Michigan Lieutenant Governor Dick Posthumus, who endorsed his state’s 2000 school voucher ballot initiative, Proposal 1, which was defeated 69 percent to 31 percent. (The Detroit News, Aug. 1, 2001)*

By Wisconsin State Rep. Annette “Polly” Williams

Williams was author of the legislation that created the Milwaukee voucher program. Former Education Secretary William Bennett called her the “Rosa Parks of school choice.”

“The conservatives made me their poster girl as long as it appeared I was supporting their cause. And now I am the odd person out. They want the religious schools to be tax-supported. Blacks and poor are being used to help legitimize them as the power group.” (USA TODAY, *Jan. 5, 1999.*)

“We wanted parental choice. They’re talking about school choice. And when you’re talking about school choice, you’re not talking about parents selecting schools, you’re talking about schools selecting parents.” (The Florida Times-Union, *March 21, 1999.*)

“There are members of the choice movement who are about destroying the public schools, who don’t care one bit about poor black children in the inner city.” (The Florida Times-Union, *March 21, 1999.*)

“The Catholic archdiocese wanted to change the rules that [vouchers] have been operating under for eight years.” (National Catholic Reporter, *March 26, 1999. Williams unsuccessfully tried to pass legislation in the mid-1990s to increase oversight of voucher schools. Her comment above referred to the removal of some state and federal civil rights laws from the program’s administrative rules.*)

“They find ways of rejecting students. They admit them, then they reject them. They take public dollars, but they don’t want to give up their [rules].” (Sun-Sentinel, *May 9, 1999. The article notes that Williams’ office receives frequent complaints from African-American parents who say their children, especially boys, are asked to leave private schools for disciplinary reasons.*)

“This is why most black groups like the NAACP are against vouchers, because without the income cap, choice just becomes a free-market program that keeps richer families happy and Catholic and Lutheran schools solvent with state money without any commitment to improve public schools. Too many people in the voucher crowd exploit low-income black children, saying we are creating vouchers for them when what they really have in mind is bringing in a Trojan horse. They can say what they want, but I’ve never seen a situation where low-income people, when they have to compete in education with people with far more resources, come out equal.” (The Boston Globe, *Oct. 28, 1998. A few months before this interview with Williams, Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist recommended a “universal” voucher program, meaning expanding it to all families. Norquist frequently touts the Milwaukee voucher program and has appeared in a TV commercial about it for the Black Alliance for Educational Options. He also appeared in a TV campaign commercial advocating a voucher proposal that Michigan voters ultimately rejected in November 2000.*)

“It’s not about empowering school buildings. It’s not about empowering school administrations. But over the years, that’s what we see.” (Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, *June 16, 2001*.)

“The discussion now is not on the merits of the program. It has nothing to do with what’s good for the children. It has to do with political power.” (Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, *June 16, 2001*)

By Private and Religious School Leaders

“As a general rule, we are opposed to public funds for private education because those funds come with strings attached.” *Jim Farthing, spokesman for the Christian Home Educators Confederation of Kansas.* (Topeka Capital Journal, *Jan. 25, 2001*.)

“I have not yet seen a single local or state voucher plan in which I would recommend independent school participation, because of the governmental intrusion into the schools’ admission policy and judgment of applicants. ... Are independent school administrators, teachers, and trustees learning that they always take a chance in accepting any form of government aid because once education laws are passed, controlling regulations inevitably follow?” *Peter D. Relic, then-president of the National Association of Independent Schools.* (Independent School, *Spring 2001*)

On the Lack of Taxpayer Accountability with Voucher Programs

“We don’t ask for an accounting of how the money was spent.” *Joanne Carrin, spokeswoman for Florida Department of Education, on financial oversight of the state’s voucher program.* (The Ledger, *Oct. 29, 2001*)

“As a citizen, I’d be irate if the state didn’t regulate these schools at all. It is bad government policy. I expect the government to oversee things it funds.” *Charles McKinstry, superintendent of education for Seventh Day Adventists in Southern California.* (The [Calif.] Press-Enterprise, *Nov. 3, 2000*.)

By Voucher Advocates on Voucher Programs Targeted to Low-Income Students

“A program for the poor will be a poor program.” *Economist Milton Friedman, the father of the voucher idea, on the current trend of promoting targeted voucher programs instead of universal ones. Ironically, Friedman’s foundation has contributed financially to the Black Alliance for Educational Options, which promotes vouchers only for low-income students.* (Education Week, *Dec. 12, 2001*.)

On Voucher Research

“For me as a researcher, that is outrageous. This is a critical public policy issue and for that data not to be available is ridiculous.” *Dr. John F. Witte, professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Wisconsin’s official evaluator of the Milwaukee voucher program from 1990 to 1995. All evaluations and testing in Milwaukee’s voucher schools ceased in 1995, when state lawmakers expanded the program to include religious schools.* (The Florida Times-Union, *March 21, 1999*.)

On the “Competition Effect” of Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits

“Viewing tuition tax credits as providing competition for public schools is like putting a 100-pound weight on one runner in a race and calling it competition. Public schools have had a much heavier burden put on them.” *Utah State Representative David N. Cox, a Republican, on a state legislative proposal to authorize tuition tax credits. (The Deseret News, Nov. 8, 2001.)*

By Republicans on the Political Wisdom of Promoting Vouchers¹

“They want their kids out of the portables. They know that takes money. We found in our poll that a lot of the messages Republicans love to use don’t work with suburban voters: school choice, for example. A lot of suburbanites are happy with public schools and don’t want a voucher system. They want public schools improved.” *Chris Vance, Washington state Republican chairman, on a Republican Party poll exploring suburban voters’ opinions. Vance commissioned the poll after noticing a trend of Democratic candidates beginning to win in traditionally Republican districts. (The Columbian, Jan. 13, 2002.)*

“I never understood the voucher thing. We pay high property taxes for good public schools.” *Pat Luther, wife of the Plainsboro, N.J., Republican chairman, following the overwhelming defeat of Republican gubernatorial candidate Bret Schundler, one of the nation’s most avid pro-voucher politicians. (New York Times, Nov. 7, 2001.)*

Voucher Proponents on the Selectivity of Voucher Schools

“Numerous scholarship [voucher] recipients were discouraged from taking their scholarships to private schools with the full knowledge that none of the existing private schools will be able to handle a seriously handicapped child.” *David Brennan, one-time operator of two private schools that received taxpayer dollars through the Cleveland voucher program, in a memo to the office of then-Ohio Gov. George Voinovich on Sept. 27, 1996. Brennan played a crucial role in the formation of the Cleveland voucher program. (Akron Beacon Journal, Dec. 14, 1999.)*

Voices from Milwaukee

“If we have 165 schools in the district and lost all the kids from one school, that’s not a problem. What we do is lose a little bit everywhere instead of being able to lose it in such a way that we can consolidate in a particular building. We don’t heat the building 2 degrees less because a few kids went to a choice program.” *Then-Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Spence Korte in response to voucher advocates’ claims that vouchers save public schools money. (USA TODAY, Oct. 23, 2000.)*

“If society wants to make a conscious decision that the role of the public schools will be to take care of all the kids that no one else wants, then let’s say that. Let’s not back into it because of a political agenda.” *Then-Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Spence Korte on claims that voucher schools may accept, but not retain, some students with vouchers and that hundreds of students later return to the public schools. (Boston Globe, Feb. 26, 2001.)*

Endnote

¹ Typically, most political support for vouchers comes from Republican lawmakers, though many individual Republican lawmakers do oppose such programs.