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HEADLINE: VOUCHERS A REALITY IN WISCONSIN

BODY:

Business leaders nationwide are embracing Wisconsin's unprecedented initiative that will force public schools to compete with private schools for tax dollars. A school voucher bill for low-income children in Milwaukee attracted national attention when it was passed over the opposition of liberal legislators. The legislation was signed into law by Governor Tommy Thompson last month. Observers are intrigued that the bill was designed by Representative Annette "Polly" Williams, Jesse Jackson's state chairman in 1984 and 1988. Williams, herself an ex-welfare recipient, demanded that her low-income constituents be given the same opportunity as more affluent Americans to choose the schools their children attend. This September, 1,000 poor Milwaukee families will receive vouchers for \$ 2,500 to use in any private non-sectarian school in the city. The amount of the voucher will be subtracted from the local public school's state allocation.

Representative Williams describes her bill as a way to empower poor families by allowing them to make choices. She scorns her liberal colleagues who worried that poor people are unable to make choices for themselves. "Low-income black families know that the only way out is education . . . They [bureaucrats] honestly believe that poor families can't make decisions." She also has some advice for the education establishment which fears that her voucher plan will harm the city's public schools: "If you all are worried about your jobs, try doing them better." (The American Legislative Exchange Council in Washington, D.C., can provide model legislation based on the Wisconsin plan. Call (202) 547-4646.)