



Gov. Thompson & the Wisconsin Role in the School Choice Movement May 23rd Tommy@30 Public Policy Symposium

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(Madison, WI)—The school choice movement in Wisconsin continues to garner national attention, some 27 years after the inception of Milwaukee-based first private-school voucher program in 1990. The 30th Anniversary of the first inauguration of Governor Tommy G. Thompson, serves as a reminder of his role as a central figure in the school choice movement.

Next week Tuesday, beginning at 9:00 on May 23rd, on May 23rd, the State Capitol's Joint Committee on Finance Hearing Room (Room 412 East) will feature [Tommy@30: A Public Policy Symposium](#). The limited seating event and will be both free and open to public, with advanced registration highly-recommended. Advanced registration can be found by clicking here, "[Tommy@30: A Public Policy Symposium](#)," or visiting, "[Tommyat30.com](#)."

On May 23rd, "*Wisconsin's Role in the School Choice Movement*," by Drs. John F. Witte & Patrick J. Wolf will be released at www.tommyat30.com in conjunction with the public policy symposium. Drs. Witte & Wolf conversation at the forum will center around the following introduction contained within their academic study:

As is apparent, voucher programs have come a long way in Wisconsin since the fledgling program enacted in 1990. In all dimensions there has been expansion. The number of distinct programs has increased from 1 to 4. The number of participating students has grown 1000 percent (341 to 33,781); the number of schools by 3000 percent (7 to 209); the voucher value is over 3 times the original amount; and family income limits in the two urban programs have grown from 175 percent of poverty to 300 percent, to now include families of four with incomes less than \$73,401. Almost \$250 million in education spending is channeled through the various voucher programs in Wisconsin. Is it money well spent? We address that question next.

Adding to the academic study, Steve Walter's historical perspective, "*Empowering Parents: How School Choice Began in Wisconsin*" adds key insights from surprising foes, including former Speaker and Democrat opponent to Thompson in 1990, Tom Loftus:

In a recent interview, Loftus said he wanted some version of choice to become law. But he also had a bottom line: "No religious schools...." Why? "I didn't believe that was constitutional. I also believed it was wrong."

"(initially)Choice was about MPS, and the hope that there would be something that would bring people together – especially inside the black community. Tommy was very sincere about this...He had no desire to commit mischief, to hurt Democratic legislators or the Legislature."

Walters will be moderating the Tommy@30 School Choice panel featuring Drs. Witte & Wolf and other potential guests.

The Tommy@30: A Public Policy Symposium will focus on key policy innovations in the following areas: welfare reform, school choice, the economy and job creation. In each of these three key policy areas, presenters have produced two published works: an academic analysis of the impact of key policy initiatives and, a journalistic-styled historical perspective on the development of these innovations. In addition, Craig Gilbert of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel will provide insight into Governor Thompson's electoral legacy.

The year-long Tommy@30 project was launched by alumni and colleagues of Gov. Thompson, and will feature several high-profile events throughout the year. This effort is chaired by Governor Thompson's closest advisor, former Secretary of Administration James R. Klauser. Many other Thompson administration alumni are also donating their time and talents to the project. Generous support from foundations, individuals and corporations are helping offset the costs associated with the academic papers, journalistic histories and a documentary. The Executive Director of the Tommy@30 project is former State Representative Michelle Litjens.

