



January 16, 2008

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## GENERAL SESSION

October 24, 2007

**Program Topic: School Voucher Debate**

**Presented by: Utah Issues (Co-chairs: Suzanne Merrill, Karen Thorn)  
Education Committee (Co-chairs: Judy Keller, Joyce Hansen)**

**Moderator: Richard A. Evans**

**Speakers: *In Favor of Referendum 1:***

**Sen. Howard Stephenson (R) Dist. 11, Salt Lake County (Draper)  
Rep. Aaron Tilton (R) Dist. 65, Utah County (Springville)  
Rep. Bradley Daw (R) Dist. 60, Utah County (Orem)  
Sen. Curtis Bramble (R) Dist. 16, Utah County (Provo); Senate  
Floor Sponsor, HB 148**

***In Opposition to Referendum 1:***

**Rep. Kay McIff (R) Dist 70, parts of Sanpete, Sevier & Emery  
Counties  
Debbie Swenson – Nebo School Board  
Kim Campbell – UEA President  
Jay Blain – Pres., Granite Education Assoc.; teacher, Skyline  
High School**

The bill, HB 148 (Referendum 1), establishes a scholarship program for “qualifying school-age children who newly enroll in eligible private schools; and lower income school-age children who continue their enrollment in eligible private school.” It “provides for scholarships with that program of \$500 to \$3,000, depending on family size and income, increasing those scholarship amounts in future years; and allows school districts to retain some per-student funding for scholarship students who transfer to private schools.”

Opening the debate, those favoring Referendum 1 showed the video *Truth by Numbers*. Those opposed then presented *Vouchers – Will They Hurt Utah?* Opinions were then offered.

**Rep. McIff (anti-voucher)** said the pro-voucher Oreo model “assumes that every time one student leaves, we’ll save all this money. However, most of this [ignores] the school [expenses], school buses, utilities, maintenance – all the things that it costs to keep a school afloat. You don’t save that when a student leaves.”

**Sen. Bramble (pro-voucher)** cited \$1.4 billion as the “real costs for educating in the public educational system those who would [have qualified] for vouchers over the next 13 years. He explained voucher monies would be taken from the “general fund for scholarship payments” and concluded, “We can educate a certain population of kids whose parents don’t believe public education is a good fit. This provides a way out.”

Editing questions from the audience, Moderator **Richard Evans** asked for concordance that some “\$4 billion” is now spent on Utah’s public education, with voucher costs increasing from \$5.5 million in the first year to \$71 million in the 13<sup>th</sup> year. **Sen. Bramble** said the amount was “a fraction of one percent of the public education budget.”

The following issues were covered:

- 1) The pro-voucher stance in which parents have the choice to decide how and where their children are to be educated, and by whom.
- 2) The anti-voucher rebuttal, which questions the risks involved if all private teachers are not either “licensed or [accountable] to the rules of professional and ethical conduct,” and if students do not reach standards required for college placement.
- 3) The pro-voucher assertion that vouchers as a tool “would contribute more money to state education.”
- 4) The anti-voucher charge that “after five years, public school funding would be cut to reflect lost enrollment,” and eventually, teachers.
- 5) The pro-voucher reasoning about providing a private school for a child “who’s a square pet” trying to fit in a “round hole.”
- 6) The anti-voucher concern about the types of schools (private religious or “message schools”) that would be vying for public school money.

Moderator **Richard Evans** asked about the number of families who will participate in this program.

**Rep. Daw (pro-voucher)** replied new money in the general fund will go to students choosing private school. “Over time, you’ll have more kids in the system, more money coming in privately and that will increase the total amount of money, and have fewer students in the public system.”

**Sen. Stephenson (pro-voucher)** said “We’re now spending \$7,500 per student and we’ll give an average of \$2,000 for every switcher [to a private school, which will] leave about \$5,500 in the system. That could be used to reduce class sizes, to pay teachers more, and cover the growth without big tax increases.”

**Kim Campbell (anti-voucher)** refuted the idea that vouchers wouldn’t cost the school, saying “higher education is funded out of both the general fund and out of the uniform school fund.” She also questioned why the bill included a “hold harmless clause for five years.” [Some bills introduced by the legislature include a clause to appropriate money for school districts that may be harmed by the tuition tax credit or voucher bill.]

**Debbie Swenson (anti-voucher)** said, “If they know it’s going to bring a lot more money into the schools, why do they need to appropriate the money to help the ones who are going to be hurt”?

**Rep. Tilton (pro-voucher)** said the bill that was passed “this year” was the first one to have such a provision. He then defined similarities between the Charter School system and the ways vouchers work, saying, “ten to 15 years down the road, Charter Schools have become a vital part of what we do in our public school system.” He added, vouchers are “just an additional tool.”

In rebuttal, **Rep. McIff (anti-voucher)** made the following points: **1)** “If vouchers were all \$3,000, there’d be no money staying in the district; [and] if vouchers were all \$2,000 then \$1,000 of structural cost would stay in the district for five years. **2)** If one student was taken out of each classroom, the school would lose one teacher, “but all of the other [school] costs wouldn’t be altered at all. **3)** Private/public student switching the “voucher scenario” could create a \$43 million shortage.”

*Moderator **Richard Evans** asked if the voucher program offered a true choice of access for Utah families.*

**Kim Campbell (anti-voucher)** replied it is a problem, “since half of the counties do not have a private school,” and those that do are “restrictive in nature.” The average

tuition costs of \$80,000 per student “even with a voucher would restrict low and middle income students’ access to a private school.” To ensure student access, she asked if communities would be “better served by investing in those community schools that already exist.”

**Sen. Stephenson (pro-voucher)** said parents would also be putting money towards the tuition; said schools existed under the \$8,000 price tag, and scholarships were available.

**Debbie Swenson (anti-voucher)** countered such scholarships and systems-in-place exist to help cover the private school needs of poorer parents.

**Reporter: Eileen Hallet Stone**

Women’s State Legislative Council did not meet in November.  
On December 5, 2007 the annual WSLC Holiday Luncheon was held.

This Bulletin is a publication of the Women’s State Legislative Council of Utah, Inc.

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