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school. So all of that money could go to the public schools if the public schools can attract the children, or the families would have the absolute choice to take the money, tell private schools to meet the needs of children.

I think I'll stop there because I think the parents here and the teachers and the

school principals and school leaders are the ones who know how this works, and I'd rather hear from them.

Note: The President spoke at 9:20 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin.

Remarks Announcing Proposed Legislation To Establish a "GI Bill" for Children

June 25, 1992

Welcome, all. Hey, we're glad you guys are here. Welcome, welcome, and please be seated. All you kids, welcome to the South Lawn of the White House. And to the Vice President and Mrs. Quayle and Secretary Alexander, a warm welcome. A particularly warm welcome to the Members of Congress, both House and Senate, that are with us today. Welcome to all of you, our very special guests, on this special occasion.

I have just come from a working session in the White House, working with some of the great experts on school choice. The parents, I think, made the most significant contribution to our working session because their dreams for their kids are the same dreams that all of us have. They want their kids to have a first-class education. They know from practical experience that a good education is absolutely essential to making a good living and to making a good life.

So let me just share a little from that meeting. Janette Williams told me about her son, Javon. The Williamses are here with us somewhere here today—whoops, here she is over here. Her kid starred on "60 Minutes," and that says something about the guy, if you go on that program and come off in one piece. *[Laughter]* He must be doing real well. But here's what she said, and this is serious. She said, "At his old school that was crowded, he used to get so bored that he would walk out. And thanks to the choice program in Milwaukee, he's at a new school. He's not doing those things anymore. He's doing his homework; he's even helping clean up the classroom

after school. They took the energy and turned it around."

Now, the Governor here, Tommy Thompson, the Governor of Wisconsin, is here with us today. I'm sorry that Polly Williams, who's been at the forefront of the school choice movement, couldn't be here, but she's at home looking after her mother. I would salute her values. But we miss her very, very much. Together, Polly and Tommy Thompson, the Governor, have taken the lead in helping parents like Janette Williams realize her dreams for her son Javon, creating scholarships for 1,000 Milwaukee children from low-income families so that they can attend private schools. Now, theirs is a bold experiment, to give low-income families more of the same choices of schools already available to wealthier families.

Mike Joyce of the Bradley Foundation was also in our meeting. And Bradley recently joined with other foundations and Milwaukee businesses to raise \$3 million so that Milwaukee's low-income families will be able to choose their family's schools, including the religious schools. Mike told us this morning that parents picked up every one of the 4,500 scholarship applications the day after the scholarships were announced, 4,500, that fast. And don't let anybody tell you that the people of Milwaukee don't care about their kids' education.

No one should underestimate what's at stake here. A revolution is underway in Milwaukee and across this country, a revolution to make American schools the best in

the world. I salute our Secretary of Education who is helping lead that revolution, Lamar Alexander.

Together with the Nation's Governors, we've set six ambitious national education goals. And I might say that this wasn't a partisan move; Democrats and Republicans alike of the Governors coming together to set six ambitious national education goals. In 44 States and 1,400 communities, we've already launched America 2000 to meet these goals.

Even earlier still, in January 1989, just before I was sworn in as President, we helped organize the White House Conference on Choice in Education. We believed then and we believe today a few fundamental truths. We believe that parents are their children's first teachers. Parents, not bureaucrats, know what's best for their kids.

At this point I would like to salute one of the two in purple, Barbara Bush—[*laughter*—for her pointing this out to parents, that it's what they do, what happens in their home. Barbara's done a lot of that here and around the country. I might say that Marilyn Quayle's taking that same message of parental involvement all across our country, and we're very grateful to her.

So, it is our belief then that parents, not the Government, should choose their children's schools. So today I am proposing that we take another giant step forward in this revolution. I am sending to Congress legislation that would authorize an ambitious demonstration program, half a billion new Federal dollars to help communities all across America give \$1,000 scholarships to children of middle- and low-income families so they can choose which schools their kids will attend.

This revolution is in the greatest American tradition. We've done it before, and it's worked. Forty-eight years ago this very week, President Roosevelt signed the GI bill, creating scholarships that veterans could use at any college, any college of their choice. The GI bill created opportunity for Americans who never would have had it, and in doing so it helped create the best system of colleges and universities in the world.

Now we can do that again, this time by

helping State and local governments—and we're delighted the Mayor of Milwaukee is with us here today—this time by helping State and local governments create the best elementary and secondary schools in the world. The "GI bill" for children will help. It'll provide that help to these families. These dollars to spend at the schools of their choice will become the muscle that parents need to create the best schools for their kids.

Let me say to those who will attack our school choice initiative on the ground that it permits Government money to go to religious schools, you're wrong. I believe those critics are wrong. This is aid to the families, not aid to institutions. And again, if you set the clock back to the creation of that original GI bill, no one told the GI's that they couldn't go to S.M.U. or Notre Dame or Yeshiva or Howard. I haven't heard Members of Congress suggest that students stop using Pell grants and guaranteed student loans at Baptist colleges or Presbyterian seminaries. I don't hear an outcry because poor children at Catholic schools get their lunch paid for by Federal taxpayers. In the same way, parents must be free to use this money at the school they believe will best teach their child, whether the school is public, private, or religious. Let me try to be clear on this point: Accepting students with vouchers does not mean a school must sacrifice school prayer.

And let me say this to those who stand against extending school choice to low- and middle-income families: I simply do not buy the idea that someone cannot make a good decision just because that person is poor. We heard the same argument when we proposed child care vouchers for low-income families or when we proposed help for public housing tenants to own their own homes. So it's my belief that we ought to let families own their own home and choose their own schools regardless of their income level and give them help. Give them a shot at the American dream, if you will.

Finally, to those who claim that school choice will hurt the public schools, let me underscore this point: All of this new money can go to public schools if that's where the child chooses to go, where the family chooses to have the kid go. That de-

cision will be in the hands of families, where it belongs.

There are several points to make about money. First, I want to make it clear that we're not talking here about a new Federal entitlement program. The Federal Government cannot afford one more entitlement, even for education. I've said many times that money alone isn't the answer. The United States already spends more per student for schools than any country in the world except Switzerland. I don't have to tell you where we stand in the international rankings of educational performance at the level we're talking about here today. Our universities and colleges are respected and have achieved the highest levels of achievement. But that, unfortunately, is not true as we talk about K through 12. So we need a revolution in American education, not more money to do it the same old way.

Investment in our schools will remain a primarily State and local responsibility. But Federal support for State and local scholarships can be a catalyst. For schools that attract choice students, it will give teachers and principals a welcome source of new funds. For our children, choice can help open up opportunities, create genuine change in our schools.

For too long, we've shielded schools from competition, allowed our schools a damaging monopoly power over our children. This monopoly turns students into statistics and turns parents into pawns. It is time we began thinking of a system of public education in which many providers offer a marketplace of opportunities, opportunities that give all of our children choices and access to the best education in the world. And so it is our firm belief, it is our firm belief that this "GI bill" for children will move America inevitably in that direction.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "Revolutions do not go backward." Milwaukee is not the only place in America that our revolution is underway. Last year in Indianapolis, Pat Rooney and the Educational CHOICE Charitable Trust began to offer tuition vouchers to Indianapolis students. I understand a bus-load of parents and students drove all night to be here today. If you're still awake, welcome, a special welcome to

all of you. In San Antonio, the CEO Foundation has earmarked \$1.5 million in vouchers for children in their community. California: Joe Alibrandi and thousands of supporters are pushing for a ballot initiative to provide voucher scholarships for every school-age child in the State. Overall in 1991, 10 States approved some form of new choice legislation, and 37 States had choice legislation pending in one form or another.

I've been told that there may just be a few folks here from Pennsylvania. [Applause] We're outnumbered. Well, it may take a few tries, but I never underestimate the persistence of parents: The children of Pennsylvania will have school choice.

From California to East Harlem, from coast to coast, the leaders of the school choice movement are sparking a revolution in American education. They're the true heroes of this education reform, and some of them are here with us today. They aren't afraid to stand up to the status quo, to say loud and clear that when it comes to educating our kids, business-as-usual simply isn't good enough. Let there be no mistake: Barbara and I and the Vice President and Marilyn, and certainly our Secretary, are very proud to stand with you.

You see, this revolution will succeed. It will succeed because it draws its strength from the very heart of the American creed. We have no truth more enduring than the idea that every American should have the opportunity for a first-class education. We have no principles more important than freedom, opportunity, and choice.

So thank you very, very much. And look at it this way, you're doing the Lord's work for our Nation's future, and you're doing it for the young people of this country. We are grateful to all of you. And may God bless the United States. And now I will sign this legislation.

Note: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Polly Williams, Wisconsin State legislator.