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IMPLEMENTATION OF WOLMAN

LEON HEBERT

I want to join Ed Leadem in congratulating Dave Young for his excellent work. Without his leadership and without his efforts we would not be telling you about what happened in New Jersey and what happened in Louisiana. Certainly, this whole conference should applaud the efforts of that one man who has fought a tremendous battle in Ohio. Now, what I have been asked to tell you about by Tom Rayer (I was substituted for Tom at the last moment) is the benefit we have received from *Wolman*. Tom is the representative of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, along with Charlie Denechaud. He had a case in Lake Charles today that had to be argued in the Court of Appeals, so he called me at the last minute. Frankly, I had no idea that I would be talking to you today, but he gave me enough information that I can say that I am at least half prepared.

Last August our legislature met in an extraordinary session, and the appropriation bill which was introduced contained an appropriation contingent upon the existence of a surplus certified to by the Commissioner of Administration of \$1,176,000 for continuing education programs for teachers in state-approved elementary and secondary schools to be allocated and expended in accordance with programs established by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. These funds are for tuition and are paid only to the public colleges. Thus, teachers can attend and take courses in their own fields, enhancing their educational qualifications, without the payment of any enrollment charges.

Then, there was a figure of \$7,000,000 in that budget, also contingent upon the existence of a surplus certified to by the Commissioner of Administration, for the reimbursement of parents of students in state-approved elementary and secondary schools who were not transported to schools as provided by House Bill 4 in the 1977 extraordinary session. So we have, then, another source of funds which would directly flow from the *Wolman* case, which Dave so skillfully handled. Then, there was a third figure in that budget which was not dependent upon the existence of a surplus: a \$4,800,000 appropriation for additional textbooks, library and school supplies, that we actually received some benefits from.

Now, going back to the transportation allowance, the legislature provides that each parent is entitled to reimbursement for transportation costs when that transportation is not furnished by the public, when the child lives more than a mile from the school, up to \$100 a year, with a maximum of \$200 per family. It is going to do a lot of good for us. I would be remiss if I did not tell you that the efforts in getting these appropriations

were brought about by three persons. In my judgment, Emile Comar and Kirby Ducote of the Louisiana Catholic Conference have skillfully worked with the Louisiana Legislature and can feel the pulse of that body better than the average group of lobbyists, because there were times when I thought they had no chance of coming up with things that they came up with.

The other person who deserves an awful lot of credit for his help is Brother Felician Fourrier, who has been associated with the Catholic Education Association. Fortunately, the governor of Louisiana named Brother Felician as a member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, where he has been able, in the public spotlight, to express fairly the demands of the Catholic schools without offending anybody. Brother Felician is so sound in his approach to the thing that I think he has been one of the best salesmen we in Louisiana have had. Anyway, I mention that because the transportation is reimbursable, but the Commissioner of Education was dragging his feet in providing the necessary affidavit, which must be filed to get the reimbursement, and must be filed by June 20 of this year to be eligible for the reimbursement provided by these bills. Brother Felician prepared the form and got it approved. Thus, he has made it possible to obtain reimbursement before the June 20 deadline.

Now, there is one other little hitch in it—the question of the availability of a surplus to fund these two items. This was resolved by the governor by placing them in the budget for fiscal 1979. So all of the sums will be available for reimbursement for transportation and for the usage of the teacher education program. It is in that budget. It is up to the Conference and up to those of us who work with the Church in Louisiana to see that they are not eliminated from the budget during the upcoming session. So that is basically what we have here flowing from *Wolman*. No arguments of any substantial nature were given in opposition to these grants which are available to nonpublic schools. We stay as far away from the use of Catholic schools as possible by using the term “nonpublic schools.”

But out of the transportation item, approximately \$4,000,000 will benefit the Catholic children who attend those schools. You can readily see that whatever relief you give to the overburdened parents who are supporting two forms of education, the public school system and the Catholic system, is welcome to those persons who receive that aid.

Let me just say that, as far as the general attitude is concerned, things have softened a bit in Louisiana, and I do not see the traditional fight springing up, Dave, that we have had from POAU and others in all of our previous battles, but you never can tell, and you must be alert at all times to meet the challenge that they send forth. Thank you, Dave, for giving us a basis on which we can receive these.