



## **Imagine a Kentucky with leaders like this**

By Jim Waters

Effective leaders find a way to get the job done — no matter what.

Take Speaker of the House Jim Weiers of Arizona.

Opponents of his state's school-voucher program for disabled and foster children succeeded in stopping funding for the program earlier this year. So Weiers decided to help hundreds of parents left twisting in the wind by the very political representatives who are supposed to represent their interests.

He let nothing stop him, including an appeals court ruling that the two-year-old voucher program is unconstitutional — simply because it allows parents to send their children to parochial schools.

Neither was he deterred by Gov. Janet Napolitano and her anti-school choice minions in the Legislature, who conspired to pull funding for the program. The decision to pull state funding for the program was made behind closed doors during the waning hours of this year's legislative session.

Less than 24 hours after the scurrilous action by politicians doing Napolitano's bidding, the Arizona Supreme Court ruled that funding for the program could continue until legal action ended. However, since legislators removed money for vouchers from the budget, the court's decision didn't help. Hundreds of Arizona families — who for two years enrolled learning-disabled children in private schools using vouchers — now didn't have the money to do that.

But great challenges present opportunities for grand leadership.

Even most supporters of Arizona's school-choice programs, including parents who previously received vouchers, had given up that a resolution could be found so that children who had been in private schools for the past two years would not lose out on the progress they had made.

Not Weiers. He displayed courage and determination.

When his underhanded colleagues lifted money for vouchers from the budget, Weiers offered to transfer \$5 million to the state's education department from contingency funds he built up as House Speaker. That money was available because of Weiers' frugal spending in recent years through taxpayer-friendly decisions, including cutting unnecessary travel by House leaders.

And when a legal ruling required a vote by the Legislature to use that \$5 million, Weiers remained steadfast. He asked Napolitano to call a special session. No surprise here: She refused.

But the dogged Weiers found a partner in Tom Horne, Arizona's superintendent of public instruction. Horne, who put the needs of Arizona's learning-disabled children above protecting the bureaucracy, helped Weiers find leftover money in the state's public-school budget.

The additional funding came as a result of a lower-than-expected enrollment in the state's public schools, which meant that some of the monies appropriated by the Legislature for education were returned to state coffers. Does anyone know when that might happen in Kentucky?

Weiers and Horne got approval to use that money to revive the voucher program for families with foster children and special-needs students. As a result, public schools were fully funded and these students continue to receive the education and services they need.

When everyone said, "It can't be done," Weiers and Horne found a way to do it – despite a lack of support and, in some cases, downright opposition even from some fellow Republicans in the Arizona Legislature. These leaders understand, as Winston Churchill stated: "Leadership means not having to be completely in harmony with everyone else."

Leaders understand that doing the right thing sometimes rubs the defenders of failure and the status quo the wrong way.

Imagine – or dream, because that's all it would be right now – if Kentucky had a House speaker and education commissioner who worked together to help provide more, and better, choices for our state's neediest children.

Yet, it doesn't take dreamers to make Kentucky more educated, more prosperous and more free.

It takes leaders – people who know that "can't" isn't the only option available.

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