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## Milton Friedman urges adoption

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AUSTIN — One of the nation's most respected economists urged Texas lawmakers Tuesday to launch a new school voucher program that would allow low-income students to transfer to private schools at state expense.

Nobel laureate economist Milton Friedman told the House Public Education Committee that it should approve a Republican-backed plan to offer state-funded school vouchers in 11 of the state's largest school districts, including Dallas and Fort Worth.

"The quality of schools has been going down even though the costs have been going up," said Dr. Friedman, a longtime supporter of greater school choice.

"Those who have suffered the most have unquestionably been low-income families in ghettos and other low-income areas of our country. Right now they have no choice, and there is no reason for teachers and administrators to pay much attention to them.

"We need to find a way to give parents some control."

Dr. Friedman said such control could come through legislation filed by Rep. Kent Grusendorf, R-Arlington, that would create a pilot voucher program for low-income students in 11 school districts that have enrollments of at least 40,000 and a majority of students eligible for free and reduced price meals.

Under the "Education Freedom" program, students who transfer to an eligible private school would have tuition paid by the state. The private school would receive about 90 percent of the school's annual cost per student, while the public school would retain 10 percent.

Those students would be test-

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## Respected economist advocates voucher plan

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ed annually to assure accountability.

Teacher groups, school boards and the Texas PTA have united in their opposition to the measure, contending it would drain badly needed funding from public schools. They also point to the massive revenue shortfall facing the state, saying Texas cannot afford a school voucher program.

Dr. Friedman argued that such opposition is based on a faulty premise. "The money for education should go with the child, not the school," he said.

"You get at the root of the problem through competition," he said, noting that where voucher programs exist — such as Milwaukee and in Ohio — public school performance has improved.

During a public hearing on Mr. Grusendorf's bill Tuesday,

the Public Education Committee heard from scores of witnesses who alternately praised and condemned the idea.

"At a time when the budget crisis has prompted legislators to withhold textbooks and threaten to cut education spending by \$2.8 billion, it is reckless in the extreme to take money out of our neighborhood public schools to subsidize private schools," said Samantha Smoot of the Texas Freedom Network.

But the Texas Public Policy Foundation said the time to try school vouchers is long overdue.

"Texas has improved public schools dramatically over the past two decades, but some children are still left behind," said Chris Patterson of the foundation. "The voucher program proposed today offers new hope to those children."

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