

THE LISTENING POST

Education's Concern in Federal Legislation

WHEN HOUSE AND SENATE committees were conducting hearings during last April on federal aid to education measures, Walter Lippmann observed that "the condition of our public schools in many parts of the country is deplorable, indeed a national disgrace and a national danger, and the need for federal aid is absolute and compelling."

Additional evidence which underscores Mr. Lippmann's statement that "the need for federal aid is absolute and compelling" was released to the press and radio at a news conference held at NEA headquarters in Washington February 13. At that time results of an inventory of public school expenditures in the United States during 1946-47 were reported which show that the pressure of increased enrollments and the doubling of school construction costs are presenting to many school districts in most states "almost insuperable financial problems."

The inventory, conducted by the Institute of Administrative Research of Teachers College, Columbia University, under the direction of John K. Norton and Paul R. Mort, used a scientific sampling technique to obtain a valid picture of school expenditures for each state and for the nation as a whole.

"The inventory of the 1940 public school expenditures," Mr. Norton told the news conference, "revealed that thousands of public school systems had too little money to buy an acceptable amount and quality of schooling for all children." In reply to the query, "Did school expenditures increase enough from 1940 to 1947 to permit school boards to hold their own in buying schooling for children?" Mr. Norton said the results of the current study proved that the answer is "no."

As supporting evidence, he pointed to the following findings from the study:

1. In the United States as a whole, and in more than three-fourths of the states, school boards had less purchasing power

per pupil in 1947 than they had in 1940.

2. While per pupil expenditures, on the average, increased sixty-six percent from 1940 to 1947, indexes of economic change show that they should have gone up eighty-six percent to hold their own in the economic market.

3. The low expenditure school systems of 1940 are still operating at poverty levels of support although they made relatively large percentage increases per pupil. A larger percent increase of very little is still very little. Meanwhile the high expenditure districts have not been able in 1947 to purchase the first-rate education they were able to afford in 1940.

4. Enormous inequalities in expenditure per pupil continue to exist both within individual states and among the states. Millions of children in 1947 were in school systems with such meager funds that their schooling was both brief and inferior.

The survey findings have been published by the NEA in two booklets: "Federal Aid—Imperative!" and "Still Unfinished—Our Educational Obligation to America's Children."

President Truman brought the need for federal aid before Congress three times in January. He urged Congress to "take prompt action to provide grants from the federal government to the states for elementary and secondary education" in his state-of-the-union and budget messages, and again in his economic report.

Whether the \$300,000,000 he included in the national budget for this purpose during the ensuing year will be approved depends only in part upon the immediate outcome of the battle of the budget which has been and continues to be strenuously waged in Washington. A joint Senate-House committee of 102 members, headed by a "core" group of ten Senators and ten Representatives, has been primarily concerned with the amount of budgeted items already authorized in existing stat-

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utes. Federal aid to education has not yet been authorized. Along with other subjects in this category it must be advanced for special consideration later in the session. Funds authorized in bills enacted hereafter will be in addition to 1947 expenditures recommended by the committee of 102.

S. 472 and H.R. 2953 are the bi-partisan federal aid bills now before Congress. Hearings on S. 472 have been concluded; the bill has been recommended for passage by the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare; and it is now on the Senate calendar for consideration. Hearings on H.R. 2953 have been concluded and the measure has been favorably recommended to the House Committee on Education and Labor.

President Truman also told Congress that "the government's programs for health, education, and security are of such great importance to our democracy that we should now establish an executive department for their administration." S. 140 (Taft-Fulbright bill) which would create a Department of Health, Education, and Security, with the present Federal Security Administration bureaus now handling these activities grouped into three divisions, each headed by an under secretary, was reported favorably by the Senate Committee on Expenditures in Executive Departments and is now pending on the Senate calendar.

The President's budget includes \$65,000,000 for the Department of Agriculture for the school lunch program for the fiscal year 1949. The same amount was appropriated a year ago, but had to be supplemented by a deficiency appropriation of \$6,000,000.

It is feared that many schools, faced with rising food costs, may find it impossible to continue the program during the present year.—Roy K. Wilson, assistant director, Press and Radio Relations, NEA, for the ASCD Legislative Committee.

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