

FEDERAL AID and the GENERAL WELFARE

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LOCAL control of education goes back long before the passage of the tenth amendment to the Constitution. We fought the Revolution against the unjust laws of a central power. We fought against the dominance of the church allied with that central power because that church controlled the universities and the university-feeding grammar schools in England. This background largely explains the separation of church and state by the first amendment to the Constitution and the implied decentralization of educational authority by the tenth amendment.

Through the long wrangling over the framing of the Constitution, Benjamin Franklin reportedly said that the sun was either a setting or a rising sun, depending on the willingness of his countrymen to compromise their differences. Insofar as education was concerned, with little or no precedent for universal compulsory education anywhere in the world, proponents of a strong central government were content that the federal government should be charged with "the general welfare" and

the states' righters were satisfied that education should be their local concern.

We are very familiar with the tenth amendment and the subsequent control and financing of public education by the states (which incidentally was delayed a good 150 years after the Constitutional Convention). But we have not always put into proper perspective the federal government's concern about education as an aspect of "the general welfare."

The Northwest Ordinance of 1785 required that a section of land be carved out of each township for the support of education. The Ordinance of 1787 declared that "religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." In making these grants, Congress did not define the kind of education to be provided or attempt to influence the use to which the states put their land grants for education (the management of the grants was often wasteful and sometimes fraudulent).

Since then, in terms of the general

welfare, the federal government has aided education in specific instances for several large purposes—first, for specialized trained manpower as the need arose and the states lacked the facilities for meeting these needs unaided. Examples include agricultural and technical know-how through the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 and the Hatch Act of 1887; vocational skills through the Smith-Lever, the Smith-Hughes, and the George-Barden Acts; and scientific manpower through the National Science Foundation of 1950 and the National Defense Education Act of 1958.

Second, the federal government aided the collection of educational information so that Congress and the people would know the condition of education in the country. This purpose lay behind the establishment of the Bureau, Department, and later the Office of Education (here is a precedent for national assessment).

Third, aid has come for research and development, a relatively recent purpose which arose as a national concern in response to the social and technological revolution of our time. The principal example is the Cooperative Education Research Program which began with a million dollar appropriation in 1956 and has this year reached the figure of 117 million dollars.

Fourth, the federal government has aided the exchange of teachers and education abroad, another fairly recent concern that properly belongs in the realm of international relations and has so far been divided between the Department of State and the U.S. Office of Education. The Fulbright Act and

the Fulbright-Hays Act are recent examples, with the pending International Education Act as a significant addition with appropriations of \$10 million requested for 1967, \$40 million for 1968, and \$90 million for 1969.

General Aid to Education

To these four purposes has been added a significant fifth—that of general aid to education on a broad front. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 is the prime example and it has come after many unsuccessful attempts. These unsuccessful attempts began with the Hoar Bill of 1870, the Perce Bill of 1872, and the Burnside Bill from 1918 to 1920, the Brand-Nye Bill of 1929, and similar numerous attempts up to 1965.

The point to remember is that each attempt at a general federal aid to education bill followed a major social and economic crisis in America, each followed the startling disclosure of illiteracy and mental and physical defects, each followed the shock of finding a shortage of technically trained manpower. There were some limited successes. The baby boom of the 1950's and the suburban dispersal of populations resulted in the school construction bills. The Russian Sputnik of 1957 resulted in the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Higher education has been more easily aided because the race issue is less critical on this level, because the students are more nearly on the same socioeconomic level, because the religious issue is more manageable, and most important because its skilled manpower output is more clearly seen as a proper national concern.

Here we have touched on the motive

force behind federal aid to education and here we gain insight into why the first real general aid to education bill was passed, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The national interest required it. In terms of the mobility of the American people, the uneven financial ability of the states to provide sufficiently for education, the glaring weaknesses of poor city and rural slum schools, the limited tax resources of the states compared with the superior federal tax collection base—for these and many allied reasons the national interest has required a general aid to education bill for some time.

The Great Society's Quest for Quality

Why then was the dam of opposition broken in 1965 and not before? Why has the wall been breached at this juncture of history?

The answer to this question goes far toward explaining why this period is a turning point in the history of education in the United States. This nation is now on a quest for higher quality in education. Local control and local finance, under general state sovereignty, will remain in American education. But federal funds will henceforth be general and permanent in terms of the general welfare, to equalize educational opportunity, and to raise the quality of the schools' product to a minimum national standard.

I see a nationwide educational policy developing for the future, with the states combined in cooperative strength through the newly formed Interstate Compact on Education (seven representatives from member states—and they will all join soon—will meet regu-

larly to identify and help solve their educational problems) and with regional weaknesses uncovered and attacked through the national assessment movement. The dynamism which has brought this about is the burden of the conclusion of this paper.

In 1964, when Lyndon Baines Johnson, one of this country's most education-minded presidents, held office as the result of a terrible act of violence, waves of idealism washed over the American people. President Johnson was a president in search of a program that would rank with Wilson's New Freedom, Roosevelt's New Deal, Truman's Square Deal, and Kennedy's New Frontier. President Johnson raised to capital letters a phrase he had used a few times, the concept of the Great Society. He said:

We are going to assemble the best minds of this country to work on the whole spectrum of ills facing this nation. We are going to set up task forces on Transportation, Natural Resources, Education, Housing, Urban Affairs, Air Pollution, Civil Rights—fourteen problem areas in all. . . . We will assemble the facts, propose solutions, lay out alternatives, weed out the weak ones, and so shape legislative programs as to remove those bottlenecks which hampered previous Congressional acceptance. We will know precisely why and where previous bills went wrong and we will avoid those pitfalls.

Thus was conceived the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, carefully planned by President John W. Gardner of the Carnegie Corporation of New York (now Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare), the then U.S. Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel, Presidential Assistant Douglass Cater, and others, including President

Johnson himself. They skirted the religious issue by earmarking funds for school districts having low income families. They provided books and audio-visual equipment on the theory that to do so was no different than permitting every pupil free access to library resources. They provided supplementary enrichment centers to serve deprived children. They established regional education experiment centers to encourage innovations that would break through hidebound curriculum programs.

Most important, they allowed the states to be the intermediary in requesting, approving and disbursing funds to their localities. Even more important, for the first time they set aside funds to strengthen state departments of education to better administer federal funds for local needs. And in a master stroke of strategy, they tied in education with civil rights and the war on poverty, making up an interrelated and cumulative package.

This then is in part the grand design of the Great Society, with education as the archstone in the rebuilding of American society. Despite the war costs in Vietnam, federal aid to education is here to stay. The trend is irreversible. Federal concern in terms of the general welfare will continue to shape a leveling up of quality programs in American education. National assessment, the ills it uncovers, the resulting improved curriculum designs, the increasing use of technological devices to speed up

learning, the improved quality of teacher preparation and their greater professionalization—all these point to a groping toward a national policy direction in American education.

The states will continue to reign supreme; first, because they bear the largest cost of education (some 90 percent as against some 10 percent from federal sources); second, because they are joining forces and will gather mutual strength through the Interstate Compact on Education; and third, because of historical precedent and their intimate administrative ties with local educational needs. The states will continue to be the senior partner in financing and controlling education. But the federal government will be an important junior partner, injecting financial adrenalin to bolster needed quality programs and to tone up a *nation-wide* school system.

I have little fear of undue federal control and I see merit in a controlled federal influence in raising minimum national standards. The federal government is the legal servant of the people that is and ought to be subject to an accounting and to change when found wanting. The high quality of education which the people have set as a prime priority has been the dream of every thoughtful parent, every wise citizen, and every good teacher. It was also Thomas Jefferson's dream when he wrote that a nation which expects to be ignorant and free expects that which never was and never will be. ☞



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