

● From the Executive Secretary

MY AIRBORNE CIVICS TEACHER

CONVERSATIONS during air flights are usually unproductive, but one recent discussion deserves mention. My seat companion was a member of a state legislature; he had been a speaker of a state house for almost twenty years, and was recognized for his support to schools. He said that in all those years, he had never been invited to a public school to speak, nor had he ever been asked by a school administrator to participate in discussions or deliberations.

He had never been asked by a school board what his ideas were on education and had never had the opportunity to participate directly in a school district's educational matters. This was true despite the fact that he had been chairman of the Education Committee of the House for many years.

Schools are twenty years behind the times, he declared, in their recognition of the political nature of education, of political consequences and needs, and of the real political structure and operation of government. Citizenship education too often stresses a sterile process which never really occurs and which misses the persons and the dynamics of political activity.

He was concerned that school people generally seem unaware of the state contribution to education. Country-over the average is about 40 percent and is a substantial portion of revenues received in any school system. This percentage and this fact are usually lost upon teachers and teacher organizations who are very aware of the federal and the local tax situations, but are much less aware of the state action in connection with educational resources.

A Personal Approach

My airborne civics teacher suggested that it would be a good procedure for teacher, supervisory or administrative groups to ask state and federal legislators in their district to visit their system and to talk face to face about educational problems at the state or national level. Too often, he said, the chief responses are from those with special interests who make it a point to write letters, to invite in political persons as speakers, and who support particular politicians who have made certain advantages available to their particular programs. This is a political reality, he said, and it is part of the lesson that we have not learned very well in the public schools.

There was no bitterness in his remarks, but he did feel that school people are long overdue in being aggressive about insisting on educational standards, educational salaries and the best, rather than the most easily-financed, education. He felt that one good feature of the new concern for federal legislation would be that educators would become more sophisticated in their knowledge of political proceedings as they relate to education. He was not recommending more pressure groups; he was speaking of the human and personal approach to legislative activity. His remarks belong in the ASCD literature on strategy for curriculum and educational change.

—LESLIE J. BISHOP, *Executive Secretary, ASCD*

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