

# Political Power and the Schools— at the State Level

DAN KUBIAK \*

**M**ANY people recognize that in this decade we must devote our greatest energies to securing the decisive shift of resources—human and natural—from pursuits which cripple or destroy man's capacity for life, liberty, and happiness to those which enhance these qualities. Too often in the political arena, however, such recognition is not accompanied by the realization that this task will require difficult and courageous political judgments, for in America the summation of our problems can be resolved into the "Double-E" category—Education and Economics.

For years there has been a dreary pageantry between each state and the federal government in the education arena. Each year the federal government has sent the individual states a long list of demands explaining what it wants. Each year the states explain to the federal government why certain priorities cannot be met. And so it has gone—here in Texas and around the nation—a kind of charade.

This year things are different. The local governments of Texas and around the nation looked around—and found themselves increasingly with virtually identical problems: a rising demand to revitalize the education system and insufficient money to meet that increasing demand. The burden of local costs without local revenues is now part of every region.

Just to fulfill this great nation's existing education commitments to its citizens may require placing additional burdens on the American people. It will require further re-

distribution and redirection of our human energies. It will require elimination of obsolete federal education programs and subsidies that have long since lost their original purpose and the redirection of funds to be used by the individual states as they deem necessary. In the next decade it will require restructuring of our instruments of government and education, with a greater priority placed at the state and local level.

It is to the legislatures of the various states that the American people must increasingly look for leadership in determining state priorities and committing the resources—human and financial—to meet our urgent educational and economic needs.

Improving education and making it freely available to *all* our people is the surest way to break the cycles of poverty, crime, welfare, and blighted opportunity that prevent us from fulfilling our national destiny. Education must never be starved of funds or sacrificed for less essential needs. It must receive our continuing attention, commitment, and support.

## Pressures in Education

In education, the most critical of all local functions, the cost pressures have become intolerable. There is not a single locality in Texas that has escaped the disastrous squeeze between local demand and

\* Dan Kubiak, Texas State Representative, District 27—Falls, Milam, and Robertson Counties, House of Representatives, State of Texas

local capacity to generate revenue. Already local property taxes are so high that numerous school districts in Texas have turned down school budgets—triple the number of rejections of just one year ago.

What does all of this mean to a legislator in Texas? It means that local government—which is charged with primary responsibility for bettering the lives of the citizenry—can no longer operate as a neglected step-child of state government. It means, at long last, that localities must join together to get the help they need. And when we say “help” we do not mean a handout of something that originally belonged to someone else. State aid, I often think, is the wrong word because it denotes a handout. After all, our people support the state. We ask only to keep a fair share of our own money at home—money that is generated by our own people to handle *our* educational costs.

This means standing together to ask for a phased state takeover of the costs of education, using the government with the broadest, most elastic revenue source to help localities meet school needs and offer the best possible education available. It means a state assumption of the local contribution of educational costs to relieve intolerable pressure on local property ad valorem taxes. The state can help us best, not with promises and rhetoric and another layer of bureaucracy, but with the resources to let us solve our own educational problems.

### **Comprehensive Planning Needed**

In this state and many other states throughout the nation, a more comprehensive educational planning program is needed. Duplication and unwarranted waste of much-needed tax dollars cannot be tolerated in an era when knowledge astounds even the most learned scholar. A meaningful curriculum with diminution of outdated and outmoded techniques is essential. Legislators must be responsive, not to change for change's sake, but to change to better utilize the efficiency and technology of business in administering the affairs of our leaders of tomorrow.

Politicians must set politics aside and

must meet the challenges imposed on America's greatest commodity—our youth.

The improvement of vocational education and the creation of public kindergartens, combined with the recurring problems of improving the general quality of education, are realistic problems that must be solved.

Concerning education in the early childhood years, we in state government must realize that a child's character and ability to learn are determined to a large degree before he is six years old and he must be reached in those early years. This is where education can make its greatest impact.

Goals for states throughout America should include state kindergartens, complete establishment of occupational vocational programs in all high schools, a four-quarter school program, a program to curb dropout rates, and an enrichment program for gifted students by the late 1970's.

In higher education, the states must be prepared to meet the growth in enrollment which, according to all information available, will double in the year 1980. Legislators must make certain that young people are being educated for a “real role” in society.

Legislators, administrators, teachers, and young people must learn and utilize the rudiments of political endeavor, but must learn to utilize these for the betterment of mankind and America. To learn the rudiments of political endeavor only to use these for selfish purposes cannot and should not be tolerated in this great country.

Legislators must face the challenges of education, its necessities and needs, with resources and educational programs to help each state solve its problems. For education is not to pour in, but to draw out; its end is not to fill up, but to set free a flowing fountain of life.

The progressive democratic invitation to each individual to achieve the best that is in him requires that we provide each youngster with the particular kind of education which will benefit him. That is the only sense in which equality of opportunity can mean anything. The good society is not one that ignores individual differences, but one that deals with them wisely and humanely. □

Copyright © 1970 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.