

# A Secretary of Education?

# YES!

HELEN P. BAIN\*

**T**HE men who sit around the President's Cabinet table represent huge national constituencies, such as labor, agriculture, and the military. The tragedy is that the vast health, education, and welfare constituencies are presently represented by a single Cabinet officer whose priority concerns virtually exclude education. This is most unfortunate because education is the nation's second largest enterprise, involving pupils, teachers, supervisors, administrators, and ancillary personnel, who comprise more than one-third of the entire U.S. population.

The National Education Association and many other educational organizations are concerned that education is buried in the administrative and bureaucratic structure of government. The interests of education are buried in the sense that authorizing and appropriations acts are given little concern by the Administration and its budgetary arm. Thus far, Nixon Administration requests for education have averaged less than half of the money authorized for educational programs.

Furthermore, the present Administration has placed military and industrial interests high above the needs of the public schools. In the annual competition for federal dollars, education always comes up the

loser. Two successive vetoes of education appropriations above Administration requests clearly indicate where Mr. Nixon and his advisers stand on national priorities.

In addition to the problems generated by the Administration's attitudes, educational issues are being smothered under concern for health and welfare. For this reason, educators have pressed for the separation of education from the HEW complex.

We need a full-time Secretary of Education who can devote *all* his enthusiasm to this very important job, and separate himself from the problems of health and welfare. In this way, the resources of our federal government could, in a reasoned manner, be brought to bear on the needs of our schools. Certainly, we need all the attention and resources and support we can muster, from all sources, to change and to improve the public education system. Only so can it match up to the tremendous changes that our highly technological society, our shrinking world, and our exploding population are making mandatory.

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## Removing E from HEW

● Our demand for taking the E out of HEW is simply to give education more of the status it needs to get the help it needs. We are not in any way downgrading health and welfare concerns. On the contrary, we are very much aware that a child's health, and the health and economic and social well-being of his family and community, have a very direct bearing on the education of that child. Separating education will result in a *strengthening* of both health and welfare administration. HEW is entirely too immense and complex for *any* one Secretary to manage and represent adequately.

*The Wall Street Journal* recently published an article about HEW Secretary Elliot Richardson. It ended with a list of problems confronting him in HEW: "Reforming the present bankrupt welfare system; controlling inflationary health care costs; providing higher quality, more convenient medical care; and solving the deepening financial crises of American schools and colleges."

"Any one of these tasks," *The Wall Street Journal* concluded, "would test an HEW Secretary severely. Mr. Richardson's greatest problem is that he must confront all of them at the same time."

This mushrooming of social needs is the key to the whole problem. When President Eisenhower created HEW in 1953, neither health, nor education, nor welfare, was at anything like its present dimensions. The grouping together of these areas then was logical enough. Now, the situation is very different. In fiscal 1953 and 1954, the total HEW expenditures were under \$2 billion. By fiscal 1969, HEW expenditures were \$46 billion, *more than 23 times as much as 1953-54.*

● A second reason for a separate Department of Education is the need to consolidate the government's education activities and give them some unified direction, with greater impact for the separate parts.

More than 40 different federal departments and agencies outside of the U.S. Office of Education are directly involved in educa-

tion in more than 200 separate programs. Certainly these 200 educational activities, which represent nearly two-thirds of all government education and training programs, need at the very least some strong coordination with the main, ongoing thrust of educational policy and some evaluation in terms of professional educational standards. If we are to have a responsible new commitment or investment in education, the first step is to get a sound systematic program, not a fragmented one. Such a program will require Department status instead of Office status.

● A third reason follows from the second. There are experiments and programs on educational matters funded through government agencies other than HEW that are quite clearly wastes of money and energy because they are neither sound nor related to practical educational goals. Teachers or other educators are seldom asked for advice. A Cabinet Department could eliminate such waste and duplication.

● Fourth, a Secretary of Education, meeting with other Cabinet officers and as a power in his own right, would introduce educational considerations and concepts into other areas of government. It is quite clear that the impact of education is felt, or should be felt, in virtually every human activity we have, if we are to solve our problems in human terms, for the long run.

● Fifth, in line with the coordination and control which a separate Department would provide, there is an advantage to Congress, that of giving the legislators an overview of all educational spending by pulling together the pieces. In other words, it would provide for *accountability* as well as responsibility.

● A sixth reason stems from the financial crisis in education, and touches the other side of the congressional involvement. Local and even state fundings are drying up: the local community pays 52.7 percent and the states pay 40.7 percent, while the federal share of the elementary and secondary school funding is only 6.9 percent. NEA and other educational organizations are committed to

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the proposition that the full federal share should be one-third of the cost of public education. However, getting this kind of money from Congress is impossible if education does not have a highly potent voice in budgeting—that is, a separate, full-time, Cabinet-level Secretary of Education.

What the schools do will shape society for generations. Unless the molding of youth is to be left to the casual, if constant, use of mass media such as television, then the schools will have to do the job. This is too important for the present second-level status of the U.S. Office of Education and its Commissioner, who (in the protocol of government) cannot even make a direct phone call to the Secretary of Labor or any other Cabinet officer whose job touches on education!

I know of no other country in the world that does not have a top-level minister of education. You may draw what significance you will from that, but the problems I have outlined lead me to one conclusion: We need a Secretary of Education as much as anyone else does. This will ensure that the federal government's share is more than the small fraction of the cost of public education which it is now paying. By the time this nation is 200 years old, its federal government must be both willing and mature enough to pay for one-third of the cost of public schools. This will create a more just and equitable access to education.

Through positive political action, I am convinced that we will have a Secretary of Education before we reach our 200th birthday in 1976. □

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