

A Secretary of Education?

SO YOU want a Secretary of Education—someone to sit around the Cabinet table on an equal status with the Secretary of Defense (heaven forbid that education would ever get involved in such a political mess), the Secretary of Agriculture (there hasn't been one for decades who really knew what to do about agriculture), the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (isn't that a bungled job?), the Secretary of Transportation (we still don't have adequate modern, up-to-date public transportation), the Attorney General (and who wants a Mrs. Secretary to boot), the Secretary of State (another Vietnam or Middle East?), or (you can fill in others, past or present).

Why? I would like to read the reasons used for advocating such action by the quarter of a million people who, the NEA claims, have written to President Nixon on this point.

Although I recognize that a Department of Education would not, of course, be comparable to the ministries of education in such countries as France, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Japan, or many other countries of the world where centralized administration of education exists, nor even to the ministries of education in Great Britain, the USSR, or the German Federal Republic, it would still constitute the establishment of a national political agency that I think would be highly unsound and unwise. Following are, in my opinion, some of the likely results of such action.

- *Further erosion and subversion of state and local responsibility for public education in this country.* Everyone recognizes the supreme achievement and accomplishment of the American system of education. This system of education, unique at the time it was developed, evolved under a plan of state responsibility and state-local control of the schools. It is my contention that the elevation of the federal government's participation in schooling to the level of a Cabinet Department would inevitably contribute to greater federal domination of the schools of this nation on the part of Congress, the President, and the Secretary of Education. Otherwise why have such a Department? I want less dictation, direction, advice, and counsel from Washington politicians, bureaucrats, and members of the Congress.

I share the views of those who believe that big government, particularly a far-flung all-encompassing federal establishment, is more and more building a serious gulf between government and the people. The people are becoming less and less able to control, influence, or even participate in big government.

Thoughtful observers tell us that one way, if not the only one, to save urban schools from mediocrity, if not partial collapse, is to get the parents and other citizens of each school community or neighborhood involved up to their necks in the control and operation of the school.

Anything that increases the possibility of federal control, dictation, or even a voice

NO!

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in school policy making and planning erodes further local control and participation. Hence, in my mind, any such moves must be vigorously opposed before we accept even more completely the self-fulfilling prophecy of "you can't do anything about it anyway."

● *Increase in political considerations in determination of federal programs and policies.* Closely related to the previous objection is the great possibility that the establishment of a Department of Education would result in much greater consideration of the political implications and consequences of federal action in the area of education.

No one would of course deny that political considerations are at present important elements in determining federal legislation and politics, but my objection is based on the belief that the citizens of the nation and educators themselves want less political control of education by the federal government rather than a greater measure of such control.

The schools are political institutions, of course, being subject to public will and control, but we as a people have generally endeavored to keep *partisan* politics and political expediency out of the realm of public decision making in education. Public opinion, political practice, and laws endeavor to keep schools as free from partisan politics as possible. But it is my opinion that the raising of the U.S. Office of Education to a Cabinet Department would inevitably increase partisan considerations and political expediency in determining federal programs,

budgets, and policies with respect to the schools. Otherwise why have such a Department? This is the very reason many other nations have national ministries of education.

● *Education has already achieved a lofty status as a social service.* One of the principal arguments for the Cabinet position is that it would give education "visibility and prestige." Do these advocates think that education does not now have "visibility and prestige"? The NEA reports that the education enterprise in the United States at the present time represents an expenditure of over \$70 billion—and yet some say it needs greater prestige? If there is any one thing that the overwhelming majority of American citizens, including children from about three years of age up, are concerned about, discuss extensively, are informed about, take an active part in, and are involved in, it is education.

Schools now receive top consideration at every level of government—federal, state, and local. I believe that the establishment of a federal Department would not change education's prestige status one iota.

● *A federal Department of Education is not justified in terms of appropriate levels of federal participation in schooling.* If the control of education is in the hands of the state and of the local districts which the state has created, then, the role of the federal govern-

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ment should be a very minor one in the actual determination of the curriculum, programs of education, and the institutional structures of the schools. If this is true and if this is, as I fervently believe, the way it should continue to be in this country, there seems no need to create a Department of Education for this purpose in the federal government.

For those people who want to see much greater federal control of public education and much greater participation in program determination and policy making, obviously, the elevation of the U.S. Office of Education to a Cabinet Department would be an important step in achieving such ends. I wonder if those "quarter of a million" letter writers, reported by the NEA, used this as the principal argument for advocating a Secretary of Education?

I point out that the whole area of health, health care, health services, and research, an area in which the federal government also contributes large amounts of public funds and establishes and provides almost innumerable kinds of programs through federal aid and support as well as actual federal operation, does not have Department status. The medical and other health professions and all the agencies involved in health services and care also decry the failure of the present Administration to fund fully many of the programs authorized at the present time and rail against the inadequate appropriations for these services and agencies. Yet I am not aware of any move on the part of these professions and agencies to seek the establishment of a Department of Health in the President's Cabinet. They are just as concerned about federal control and federal domination of their programs as educators ought to be about federal control and domination of educational institutions.

● *Establishment of a federal Department of Education could lead to greater divisiveness, confusion, and duplication, and lack of coordination among federal programs.* On one hand President Nixon has strongly advocated the consolidation of government departments and agencies, resulting in even bigger departments with a broader and more comprehensive scope and coverage. He sees the need for greater consolidation and coordination rather than increased splintering of government activities into separate departments and agencies. Now the NEA is trying to move in the opposite direction. Why?

Moreover, if perchance a Department of Education were established by the President with approval of Congress, you can be sure that a number of other proposals would be vigorously advocated for the establishment of additional departments, particularly in areas concerned with children and youth, as recommended by the recent White House conference; welfare; and other fields of government activity. And if achieved, this would splinter federal activities of an educational nature even more.

Alternative Proposals

● *Much larger federal appropriations should be made for schools and educational institutions, but on a broad, revenue-sharing basis.* Of course, I strongly advocate great increases in federal appropriations for support of schools and educational institutions. I strongly agree that federal support to schools should increase from the present level of about 6 to 8 percent of current expenditures (considerably less than that if capital expenditures are included) to as much as 15 to 25 percent of current expenditures. I think increases to this level of support are almost inevitable—certainly if we are to maintain an outstanding educational system in this country.

My whole approach to federal support for education is one of gross grants for support of broad aspects of the educational programs, with the state and its sub-agencies, the local school districts, given almost complete

authority within the scope of the grants to determine the nature and character of programs to be established within the state. As I understand it, this is an essential aspect of the President's plans for revenue sharing. He would take the money already being appropriated and put it into somewhat broader categories, with the states being given a much larger responsibility for the actual determination of the programs; and it is hoped and expected that under a revenue-sharing plan the amount of the appropriations and scope of the program would also be expanded considerably.

Obviously, I am opposed to the senseless, inane, arbitrary, opinionated kind of dictation that now exists in many of our federal programs for the support of education. I think that practically all control over the nature and character of the programs themselves should be removed from the U.S. Office of Education and be vested in the states. Sure, Congress would specify the broad categories for which the aid is to be used, but program details would not be subject to the whims, dictates, or personal views of Washington-based bureaucrats.

● *Under the plan of revenue sharing, strong state departments of education and state policy-making committees are essential.* Obviously, the state department of education would administer the program of federal sup-

port, but I recommend that we establish a strong, prestigious state advisory committee, with sub-advisory committees for various areas of the programs reporting to it. Moreover, one of the important agencies of the state department of education would be the division of educational evaluation, which would be responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of all educational programs, but with particular reference to those programs receiving federal support.

● *The federal government should establish and fund adequately a National Institute of Education.* The plans for such an Institute have already been formulated and published. President Nixon, Commissioner Marland, and others are now strongly advocating the establishment of the Institute, and it is my hope that Congress would take such steps during the present fiscal year.

This Institute should be a quasi-independent agency much in line with the National Institutes of Health and be governed and administered by its own board, which would be appointed by the President but would largely be independent of the U.S. Office of Education.

The organized profession, particularly the NEA, in my opinion, should devote its energies and efforts to the establishment and funding of the Institute rather than fighting windmills, Don Quixote style. □

Action on Early Childhood Education

A task force report, *Early Childhood Development: Alternatives for Program Implementation in the States*, has just been published by the Education Commission of the States (300 Lincoln Tower, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, Colo. 80203).

The report concerns itself only glancingly with theoretical questions; rather, it asserts a powerful endorsement of the movement as a whole and then moves on to realistic consid-

erations of organizational patterns and costs. This booklet presents solid information about what is already in the works, and a surprising wealth of data about the relative costs of various programs.

The report is not dogmatic about any one style of program, but details several developing models. For any group interested in pushing for a comprehensive program, this would seem a valuable resource.—FTW

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