

The original documents are located in Box 39, folder “Reagan - Issues - Busing” of the Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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REAGAN ON BUSING

From Sacramento Press Club speech
June 2

Reagan called on Congress to outlaw "forced busing" and said he favors freedom of choice in educational matters for parents and school children. He also blamed the federal government for "glaring educational deficiencies" he said afflict modern school systems and said busing of school children to achieve racial balance had "perverted" the original school desegregation decision of the Supreme Court. He called for experiments with voucher systems as an alternative both to busing and to bureaucratic control of education.

"Parents I have met all across the land are troubled, as I am by the implications which glaring educational deficiencies have for the future welfare, prosperity and happiness of the American people, and on the ability of the United States to maintain its leadership role in the free world."

"People wonder why Johnny can't read or Mary can't add and why the schools, instead of trying to build and strengthen character and standards and self discipline and respect for American traditions, appear instead to be engaged in a campaign to dismantle them."

He said that HEW

"has injected itself increasingly into the local schools, interfering in their conduct, prodding, harassing, molding them according to bureaucratic ideas of what schools should be like in an age of group dynamism."

"Federal control of education has become a reality. If I am elected President it would be my intention to issue strict instructions to the Department of HEW and other federal departments to get off the back of state and local school systems, to leave the setting of policies and the administration of school affairs to local boards of education."

Reagan spoke approvingly of the separation of church and state in public schools. In his campaign speeches, particularly in the South, Reagan often has been critical of the Supreme Court decision banning prayers in public schools, saying:

"Maybe if we get government out of the classroom we can get God back in."



He has often called busing "a social experiment that has failed."

When asked about this contradiction, Reagan said it was not a contradiction at all. He said that the nonsectarian prayers outlawed by the court "did not represent a clear and present danger to the nation", and instead were a reversal of traditional practice and in effect "an affirmative action" on behalf of atheism.

He has sometimes said he will support a constitutional amendment if that is the only way that busing can be stopped. He emphasized that he would first seek legislation aimed at banning busing when the sole purpose was to achieve racial balance.

The amendment says:

"No state nor the Federal Government shall refuse admission to a public institution to any person, otherwise qualified, solely on account of race, color, ethnic origin, sex, or creed."

Instead of busing Reagan favors a voucher system under which government does not give aid directly to schools but gives parents vouchers they use to enroll children in schools of their choice. The schools then collect aid on the basis of the number of vouchers received.

"The federal government might, through vouchers or tax credits, aid students to enroll in schools of their choice."

"There need be little, if any connection between the federal department and educational institution and thus no possibility of control. Indirect aid would enhance the ability of parents with limited means to enroll their children at a school which they regard as best for their children."

"While racial segregation simply has no place in American public schools, neither has forced busing. It has wrought too much damage already."

"Is it only coincidence that achievement levels in the public schools were falling - as measured by test scores - exactly in the years when compulsory busing was fanning controversy in so many communities, cities and districts throughout the land?" "If I am elected President, it would be my intention to issue strict instructions to the Department of HEW and to other federal departments to get off the back of state and local school systems, to leave the setting of policies and the administration of school affairs to local boards of education."



The nation's school systems, he says, are spending more tax dollars and teaching less than ever before.

"If money alone could improve education, the skills and knowledge of the students throughout America should, by now, have reached dizzying genius-like heights."

The opposite has occurred, Reagan said.



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