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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
BOARD BRIEFING

ROOM 450
OLD EXECUTIVE OFFICE BUILDING

10:55 A.M. EDT

President Harris, Commissioner Bell, Frank Zarb, members of the NEA, and guests:

It is a great privilege and a pleasure for me to have an opportunity to say a few words following the comments of John Dunlop and Frank Zarb.

In preparation for my comments this morning, I did a bit of reviewing of the history of the NEA, and it was amazing to me that I found that the NEA has been a very powerful influence for a long, long time in the history of the United States, over 118 years.

The material that I saw indicated that it was organized back in 1859, and I think that it is quite interesting to note that President Buchanan, in 1859, as I recall, had the total membership of the NEA over in the East Room, and according to the statisticians, there were some 55 members.

Obviously, you have grown substantially. As I understand, you have better than one million seven hundred thousand members at the present time. And, as a result of this tremendous growth in membership, the NEA has a direct contact with some 45 million people throughout our fifty States.

I congratulate the NEA on this fine record, not only of growth, but constructive influence with the younger people over a good many years.

This morning, I would like to take a very few minutes to indicate some of the steps that we are taking, not only to expand the dialogue with educators and educational institutions, but to point out some of the things that we are trying to do under the current circumstances.

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Over the nine months that I have been President, I have met with a number of groups of educators, and I have had the opportunity of meeting with educators individually as a part of other groups, and I can assure you that Secretary Weinberger, Assistant Secretary Trotter, and Commissioner Bell will continue their efforts, and I will be delighted to do so myself.

I am very proud of the fact that the first piece of legislation that I signed upon becoming President was the Education Amendment Acts of 1974. This legislation should strengthen our educational system in many, many ways, and it certainly is a commitment to our continued efforts of excellence in education.

I personally would like to see class room teachers have a larger voice in Federal policy making. I would like to see more teachers serving in national advisory councils and commissions, and I will instruct the Commissioner of Education to obtain nominees from your organizations for such appointments.

If I might interject a personal comment here, I have found that there is a tendency, not just in education but in other areas, to have a repetition of individuals who serve on one commission or another be reappointed or appointed to other groups.

Out of 213 million Americans, we must have a lot of talent that can be drawn upon and used in a wide variety of ways, and instead of having the same names and the same faces, I think we can broaden this effort and draw on this great reservoir that does exist in all fifty States.

I know that Commissioner Bell in this particular case has discussed the situation with you and although I cannot pinpoint at this very moment any particular openings, I can assure you that we will make an honest effort and we will get some results.

You, I think, know even better than I that there is a great deal of work to be done in the field of education. With declining school enrollments for the past three years, and the projected declines that we see ahead, it will be vitally important for us to turn our best attention to what might be done to provide employment opportunities for teachers.

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In addition, I have supported the bilingual education program and the education of the handicapped program. These are two areas where I think we have to put some special emphasis. Additionally, 25 percent of the revenue sharing funds, according to the statisticians, have been sent to State and local governments and have gone to education either directly or indirectly.

We are also, in this Administration, putting together our proposals for a new vocational education bill that should strengthen that aspect of our total education system. We have been emphasizing the need to build a stronger working relationship between education on the one hand, and the world of work on the other.

One of the first speeches I made on becoming President was at Ohio State University -- and whenever anybody from Michigan says that they think of some of those whippings we have taken (Laughter) -- but anyhow, that particular theme, or thrust, is something that I think we have to emphasize, and we will.

I was pleased to see a new career education law that was passed with the support of this Administration and with the funding of this Administration. Now, you have heard from both John Dunlop and Frank Zarb in their particular fields. Of course, we do have other problems that are of a serious nature -- inflation, the recession -- but I am confident, and there are some bright clouds beginning to appear, that we can get our economy moving, and once that is done, I hope to take some new and major initiatives in education at the Federal level.

For instance, one of the great needs in this country today is to have parents who understand how to help their own children grow and mature and develop to the fullest potential. The Administration is already supporting some pilot projects to develop and test curriculum materials for teaching high school youngsters how to foster intellectual growth and moral development in preschool children, of course, anticipating the day when they, themselves, will become parents.

Such materials are also being developed for parents of young children. A TV pilot program will soon be developed to foster such skills in the parents of young children. As courses in more effective parenting become widespread this will, of course, mean more teaching jobs.

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I am as concerned as you are that we strengthen our education system through a balanced program of local, State and Federal funding. I was pleased to see the emphasis in the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act on Federal assistance to strengthen State school finance and State equalization programs.

I understand that Commissioner Bell is now preparing the guidelines and the standards for the implementation of this program. The new law touches the impact aid formula as well as providing another section to encourage and to support studies of school finance formulas in all 50 States.

In the budget, which I submitted to the Congress for fiscal year 1976 for elementary and secondary education purposes, we recommended a 50 percent increase over a budget that was submitted in 1969. I know there are people in this group -- and perhaps others -- who do not think that is enough but I think it is helpful to put some of these figures in perspective as we try to find a proper way to adequately fund at the Federal level the contribution of the Federal Government to education.

Let me assure you -- and I have told your President -- that I and my Administration want to work with NEA. Your advice, your assistance, will be welcome.

I have been around this town long enough to know that you cannot always agree, but I think a dialogue is helpful. The door will be open, not only to Commissioner Bell and his associates, but will be open as far as the White House is concerned.

We want to establish closer ties between NEA and my Administration. And if we do have this dialogue, this understanding, I think we can strengthen education in all 50 States.

Thank you very kindly.

END

(AT 11:05 A.M. EDT)