

FOR RELEASE AT 2:15 P. M., EST
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1976

FEBRUARY 16, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED TO THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

THE SHERATON PARK HOTEL

It is an honor for me to be re-inducted into the National Honor Society, which I was privileged to join in 1930. On this plaque, I see the honor society's requirements: service, scholarship, leadership, character. As a high school student, I was proud to be thought worthy of those words. I am just as proud to be thought worthy of them today. Thank you very much. Let me also thank you for your invitation to be a part of this program. The agenda for this convention shows that your profession is in a time of great change, and that you are addressing yourself to that change.

Yet in some ways your job has not changed at all since the early days of our Nation's educational system. You still give guidance to the schools which guide our children. You are still the executors of our past, and the trustees of our future.

In this Bicentennial year it is fitting that we should consider where we have been, and at where we are going. I would like to share with you my vision of education, and of its role in our Nation's progress. In our first century as a Nation, America developed political institutions responsive to the people. Unity grew from diversity. And education for the people was a crucial part of the founding father's vision. They knew that ignorance and freedom could not coexist. A system of general instruction for all citizens, both rich and poor, was the earliest of Thomas Jefferson's public concerns. He led an unsuccessful effort to have the Virginia Assembly support a system of free public schools.

By the time the Constitution was drafted, however, our founding fathers clearly saw education as a State responsibility. Little more than a century later, every State had a tax-supported public school system, free and accessible to every child. In our second century America's schools and colleges faced great challenges and withstood enormous pressures. They educated millions of immigrant children who spoke no English when they came to our shores.

(MORE)

They met the changing academic and career needs of students as the Nation grew more urbanized and industrialized. American schools contributed greatly to our unprecedented economic growth, and to the widespread sharing of our economic gains.

Now we are entering our third century. I see this as a century devoted to the fulfillment of the individual citizen.* In this century education will not only prepare young men and women to earn a living, it will also prepare them to live a richer life. It will equip them to make their own decisions, rather than permit their futures to be decided for them. It will enrich our children's lives, and it will also enrich our life as a nation.

Throughout our history, the Federal government has recognized the value of education, and has helped our schools and colleges. Since Abraham Lincoln signed the act creating land-grant colleges, Federal encouragement and assistance to education has been an essential part of the American system. To abandon it now would be to ignore the past, and to threaten the future.

But we must make Federal aid more effective than it has been.

In the past decade, as educational problems of national scope have been identified, we have responded with a variety of new Federal programs to meet those needs through assistance to State and local educational agencies. Each of these programs was initiated to meet the goal of improved educational opportunities for a particular segment of our population.

But the result of adding program on top of program has been a maze of complex and often confusing Federal guidelines and requirements. At Federal, State and local levels we have unwittingly created a heavy burden of varying regulations, differing standards, and overlapping responsibilities. Too often we ask whether Federal forms have been properly filled out and not whether children have been properly educated.

As President, the first major piece of legislation I signed, 18 months ago, was an omnibus education bill. It improved the distribution of Federal education funds and the administration of Federal education programs.

Soon I will be sending to the Congress my proposals to continue this improvement. The thrust of these proposals will be to consolidate Federal aid and to give State and local authorities greater flexibility in its use.

I make this proposal to untie the red tape that binds you. I want to free you to meet the challenges of our third century, our century of individual fulfillment.

(MORE)

Our law and custom place the major responsibility for elementary and secondary public education on our State and local governments. And the record convinces me that decisions about education made on those levels are wiser and more responsive to community needs than the edicts of the Federal bureaucracy.

The Federal Government--while providing 7 percent of elementary and secondary educational funding--should not usurp the State and local role. But by consolidating into block grants more than a score of existing programs, we can do a lot better job with our Federal dollars. At the same time, my proposal would preserve the appropriate national concern for quality education, and concentrate available funds on the needs of the handicapped and the educationally deprived.

Let me add, that if we can achieve the kind of consolidation which will lead to a more productive use of Federal dollars, then even within the tight budget constraints we face we can plan to increase allocations to elementary and secondary education. The budget projections we will submit with our consolidation proposals will reflect increases for each of the next three fiscal years.

As we look ahead, we can see our educational system adapting to meet changing needs. This has already proved to be one of its great virtues. In the 1950's, for example, America awakened to the urgent need for improved science and mathematics instruction in our Nation's schools. Our advances in technology over the last two decades show that we met this challenge.

Today we are faced with another urgent problem in our Nation's development. It is apparent that many citizens are uninformed, or worse, unconcerned about the workings of their government and the execution of their laws. Young people in particular appear cynical and alienated from our government and legal system.

Too many Americans see the law as a threat, rather than as a protection. Too few have been taught to understand the way laws are created and administered--and peacefully changed. In one poll of Federal workers, more than two-thirds refused to sign an excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. Almost half did not recognize the phrase, "We hold these truths to be self-evident."

These are alarming trends for any Nation to face. They are especially disturbing to us now, as we speak of rededicating ourselves to the enlightened spirit of our country's founders. This is a new challenge to education. This is a new challenge to you.

If we find this trend distressing, can we in all honesty say we find it surprising? Our Nation has undergone severe shocks in the last quarter-century. Our children face a world at once richer and more threatening than had ever been imagined.

(MORE)

Our children are less naive, I think, than previous generations of young people. I know my children have different views about a lot of things than I did at their age. Yet our classes in government and in so-called "civics" tend to continue along outmoded lines.

In 1971 the American Political Science Association reported that these courses presented a "naive, romanticized approach." The American Bar Association found civics students to be widely alienated by platitudes and chauvinism, and the methods of learning by rote.

As Emerson said, the secret of education lies in respecting the pupil. This is just as true for teaching them social values as for teaching them anything else. We cannot perpetuate our value system merely by telling our children it is good. We can only assure its future by educating our children to admire its strengths, correct its faults, and to participate effectively as citizens. Only then will they understand why our social values are worth preserving, even though much in our society has changed. Only then will they understand why we still "hold these truths to be self-evident."

The growing movement to supply such education gives us reason to be encouraged. Yet most of the work in this field clearly remains before us. We must find new ways to teach students about the institutions of law and government which will affect their lives so much. We can perform no finer services for the individual student, and for American society, than to provide them with this understanding.

One problem is that in this field, as in others, we do not yet really know how to measure the quality of education. Many of the standards we had relied on have failed us. We thought we could measure quality by the student-teacher ratio. Yet some studies suggest that class size within a wide range may have no effect on student achievement.

We thought we could buy quick miracles in education by spending more money. But the Coleman Report on Equality of Educational Opportunity, and subsequent research, have cast serious doubt on that idea. It would be easier if we could measure educational quality in dollars and cents, but we cannot.

Education relies on people: On the teachers who work in the schools, and on the administrators who direct them. The clear and constant measure of educational quality is the degree of your commitment and the leadership you provide. You deserve the thanks and even more important the support of all parents and all Americans.

I understand the theme of this convention is the "cornerstone for tomorrow." For millions of young Americans the cornerstone of their tomorrow will be you. I have faith that you will do the job for them, and for those who follow.

###