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UNTIL 2:00 P.M., EDT

AUGUST 21, 1974

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I take special pleasure today in signing H.R. 69, an omnibus education bill.

As the first major legislation to become law during my administration, this bill symbolizes one of my greatest hopes for the future -- the hope that a new spirit of cooperation and compromise will prevail between the legislative and executive branches. Enactment of this bill was possible only because the two branches settled their policy differences in that spirit. If it continues, I am confident that we can make equally effective progress on other pressing issues.

While I would have preferred different provisions in some sections of this bill, the overall effect of H.R. 69 should be a significant step forward in our quest for more effective distribution of Federal education funds and for better administration of Federal education programs.

Federal funding will be improved through a new formula for distributing Federal assistance for training educationally deprived children. Under the old formula, assistance was directed to States and localities which needed help several years ago, but may no longer need it. Under the new formula, it will be directed to those areas where help is definitely needed today. This change should make the distribution of funds more effective and more equitable.

The Congress has also acted wisely to improve the administration of Federal programs by consolidating a number of categorical programs supporting libraries, educational innovation and other services. For the first time, State and local education officials will have an important degree of authority over Federal funds in these areas. I hope that this consolidation will become the trend of the future.

Another positive feature of this bill is that it provides for advanced funding of certain education programs. This provision should help to end much of the uncertainty that local school boards have had over the continuity and prospective funding levels of Federal education programs. In the near future, I will send to the Congress a supplementary appropriations request to carry out this advance funding provision.

I am also pleased that H.R. 69 provides new safeguards to protect the privacy of student records. Under these provisions, personal records will be protected from scrutiny by unauthorized individuals, and, if schools are asked by the Government or third parties to provide personal data in a way that would invade the student's privacy, the school may refuse the request. On the other hand, records will be made available upon request to parents and mature students. These provisions address the real problem of providing adequate safeguards for individual records while also maintaining our ability to insist on accountability for Federal funds and enforcement of equal education opportunity.

(MORE)

Much of the controversy over H.R. 69 has centered on its busing provisions. In general, I am opposed to the forced busing of school children because it does not lead to better education and it infringes upon traditional freedoms in America.

As enacted, H.R. 69 contains an ordered and reasoned approach to dealing with the remaining problems of segregation in our schools, but I regret that it lacks an effective provision for automatically re-evaluating existing court orders. This omission means that a different standard will be applied to those districts which are already being compelled to carry out extensive busing plans and those districts which will now work out desegregation plans under the more rational standards set forth in this bill. Double standards are unfair, and this one is no exception. I believe that all school districts, North and South, East and West, should be able to adopt reasonable and just plans for desegregation which will not result in children being bused from their neighborhoods.

Another troublesome feature of this bill would inject the Congress into the process of administering education laws. For instance, some administrative and regulatory decisions of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare would be subjected to various forms of Congressional review and possible veto. As a veteran of the Congress, I fully appreciate the frustrations that can result in dealing with the executive branch, but I am equally convinced that attempting to stretch the Constitutional role of the Congress is not the best remedy. The Congress can and should hold the executive branch to account for its performance, but for the Congress to attempt to administer Federal programs is questionable on practical as well as Constitutional grounds. I have asked the Attorney General for advice on these provisions.

Closely related to this issue is my concern about substantially increased Federal funding for education, especially at a time when excessive Federal spending is already fanning the flames of inflation. I hope the Congress will exercise restraint in appropriating funds under the authorizing legislation included in H.R. 69, and will carefully avoid increasing the budget.

In conclusion, I would re-emphasize that this bill shows us the way for further legislative and executive branch cooperation in the future. I congratulate all of those who participated in this endeavor. Today, and for generations to come, America will benefit from this law which expresses our national commitment to quality education for all of our children.

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