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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE  
OF

FREDERICK B. DENT  
SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
CASPAR W. WEINBERGER  
SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,  
EDUCATION AND WELFARE

AND  
PETER J. BRENNAN  
SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING  
AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

THE BRIEFING ROOM

11:53 A.M. EST

MR. SPEAKES: Three members of the cabinet have just completed a one-hour meeting with the President. They are Secretary Frederick Dent of Commerce, Secretary Caspar Weinberger of HEW and Secretary Peter Brennan of the Labor Department.

I will give a brief explanation of the subject of the meeting. As you will recall, in the August 30 speech at Ohio State, the President directed these three members of the cabinet to prepare a study on how the world of education might be better attuned to the work-a-day life.

The three gentlemen whom we have with us today have just reported to the President with their tentative proposal.

I would like to say, before we start, if we could keep this rather brief, we could go ahead with Ron Nessen's briefing following this.

SECRETARY DENT: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, following the August 30 direction by the President, we organized nine task forces to explore this whole area. These task forces consulted 30 or 40 people in the private sector. A number of these organizations reviewed all the studies that have been made relating to education and work, headed towards, of course, career planning.

Our general conclusion was that this area is of great importance to the Nation and its future, that we find surprising consensus out in the country that something needs to be done in this area to decompartmentalize the 20 years or so concentrated on education and the subsequent part of life where one works prior to retirement and try to mesh these so there is a transition that is much smoother than at present.

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We find that many people coming out of high school or college spend almost three years churning in an occupation before they finally settle down to one they like. Our general conclusion as to a solution with respect to this matter is that all the Federal Government can and should do properly is to provide leadership, information, perhaps some research, that the ultimate solution must be local, tailored to the local needs, the local initiatives and the local capacity, and that, what we need to do is to encourage the development of dialogue at the local level between the educators, business, unions and worker groups, professional groups, trying to open up and inculcate into the learning process a work experience for those who are coming through and also considerably more economic education than we find at present.

Only 39 percent of American schools provide any kind of economic education. One in six students take it. Those who take it devote 1 percent of their time to it, so there is a great lack of knowledge.

The President was interested in our finding that the Joint Council on Economic Education seems to be the one that is in the lead. This combines educators, labor organizations and business organizations. They are working, in the vast majority of States, on this effort.

The general consensus of our recommendation concerning leadership was that the President continue providing leadership which was initiated in his August 30 speech, following it up to a point, a Cabinet committee on work and education which would review Government policies, coordinate and see that within the present structure we are working towards the long-term goal which he has established.

Then, they also consider a Council on Education and Work, which would bring in distinguished leaders in education, in labor, in business and the professions to provide the type of analysis of potential solutions to be communicated to local communities and then to communicate these to provide the type of Federal leadership which will result in a solution.

I would like to call on Secretary Weinberger to discuss some of the programs that were involved in the recommendation.

Q Can you say whether the President accepted the recommendation before the meeting?

SECRETARY DENT: The President was interested enough to ask for an option paper to be provided him so that as he prepares his domestic program for the State of the Union Address and the balance of his Administration that he would have this before him. He was also interested enough in

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suggesting that perhaps we brief the Press on what we had passed on to him.

SECRETARY WEINBERGER: Ladies and gentlemen, I would just say very briefly that the President obviously is very interested in this because it was he who proposed it.

I think one of the things he has been mainly concerned with is the isolation of the three worlds of business, labor and education, the fact that we spend about the first 20 years of our lives as Americans in school and the next 40 years on some kind of a job. But that first 20 years is not really based on or designed to get us prepared for or started in the kind of work that most people eventually start doing and that there is a lot of time lost and that there is much too long a delay with people getting started on various career ladders as a result.

So, what he is most anxious to do is to merge these worlds together and kind of break down the barriers that now exist between the educational specialists who run schools and the corporations and unions who are concerned with jobs in the real world.

What we are going to try to do is utilize some of our existing programs, to direct them more toward producing some research and development into the competency-based education, a form of education in which we try to develop particular skills and work toward credentials rather than diplomas as degrees of skill and proficiency are obtained in specific kinds of work and, also, to combine some real work experience with schools.

This is not just to say when you finish school for the day you can go down and get a job in a gas station, but to have the work be an integral part of the school, leading towards part of the degree and the credentialing and the diploma and to be tied-in directly by coordinated work with the educators and with the people in the unions and businesses.

All of this work experience will be a meaningful and real part of the educational experience. Also, we will work toward assisting schools through various research and development and dissemination of that research and development in actual job finding, assisting students not only to get jobs as part of the work experience, but as they complete their schooling.

The other thing the President expressed a particular interest in was in having the new National Institute of Education devote a part of its time and resources to work in this field so that their work will be very practically oriented and so that they will be able to assist us and assist local schools in demonstrating, through research and their own work, in how bringing a closer relationship between the worlds of work and education can be accomplished.

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We will be directing the National Institute with this in mind, and we will be helping to choose its new Director with this very specifically in mind, because this is something the President emphasized that he is particularly interested in.

Now, maybe Peter Brennan will talk about some of the things we are already actually doing.

SECRETARY BRENNAN: I think, in our report to the President, one of the things he was impressed with was that three departments worked so closely and so many people in our staffs put a lot of time in going over the present programs and some of the programs we think should be instituted.

Of course, in the Department of Labor, we have many programs at the present time. In fact, in our Manpower Program, 60 percent of the money that is spent is helping youth, 22 years of age and under. We discussed with the President, of course, the programs that we have now helping the 14 or 15 year old youth in the high school with after-school jobs and working with the local groups, such as the unions, the business organizations and the communities.

We find that this is really a local problem. It has to be handled on a local level, working with the schools, with business, with labor. The Department of Labor, right after the President made his speech in Ohio, on August 30, put out a program that cost some \$3.5 million dealing with 10 universities in 10 different States to make a study of what the projections would be for job opportunities in the future.

We have a book out now, a pamphlet, that has been distributed -- I think some 100,000 copies already -- to guidance counsellors and schools throughout the country to help the young people who are going on from high school to college to know what the opportunities are in the future in the professions as well as in the skilled crafts.

We think this will be most helpful in accomplishing what the President wants to accomplish, which is to build that bridge between school and the work world.

The proposals we also made to the President today, and which he will take under consideration, will be one in which most of it will be done within the framework already set up, the main thing being that we are not talking about a lot of new money. We are talking about trying to work within the budgets provided, and we feel it can be done.

We will be working with the labor organizations locally, as well as the business organizations, and the three departments, of course, will continue to work together on this program. We want to make it clear that the programs we are working on now and will be expanding on in no way will interfere with the jobs of heads of families and those who are the main bread winners in the family.

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We are much aware, of course, of the unemployment situation. We are all concerned with that, especially we in the Labor Department, because we have the responsibilities of trying to do something about getting people back on the job and having the job opportunities. So, we are concerned with protecting the employment and employment opportunities for the fathers and mothers, as well as for the young people, and we feel that today the proposal we made to the President is a good start in trying to accomplish what the President wants to accomplish, using the resources we presently have and, perhaps, using more of the agencies that have been involved, but could be involved more.

We feel we can be successful in building this bridge and also helping these young people to be encouraged for their future to get to know something more about the economics involved and also help the business community that will need their services when they are ready to go into the work world full time.

Perhaps there might be some questions.

Q Are you talking about improving the vocational education system in this country or making liberal arts schools into vocational schools?

SECRETARY BRENNAN: Maybe you better let the fellow that handles the educational department handle that. I don't think we are trying to do either one.

SECRETARY WEINBERGER: No, Peter, we are not. What we are essentially trying to do is to make sure the schools are not just isolated institutions that are not helping to prepare students for the things they will be doing, the great bulk of them will be doing, during the rest of their lives.

We are trying to break down this isolation that has existed that the President noted. We certainly have no plan whatever to eliminate or reduce the amount of time in school that is spent on the humanities and on the basic courses of education that have been developed over the years.

But we do think that you can't run a school in complete isolation to the kinds of things that most of the graduates will be most concerned with during the rest of their lives. So, essentially, what we are trying to do is to bring into the school curriculum some active contact with and part of the world of work, and that, I think, does need to be done. It can be done without weakening the curriculum that is based on humanities, mathematics, reading and things of that kind.

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Q Could you please give us an example of the academic isolation you are referring to? Is it in the universities?

SECRETARY WEINBERGER: No, high schools primarily where you have the schools run by people frequently who have not had experience in the world of business or in the world of labor and where your school curriculum does not fit the graduate for any specific kind of work or career or job simply because there hasn't been any feeling that it was necessary for a school to do that.

What we would like to do is to have both some competency-based education, education based on trying to improve competency in particular fields, and proficiency in particular areas of employment and at the same time have work experience be not a haphazard part of education, but a planned and integrated part of education.

Q Have any other countries done this in a way that might be a model or at least a suggested course for us?

SECRETARY WEINBERGER: I don't think that we could say we have any existing models from other countries. We have various individual courses. We have a lot of good useful experience to draw on in this country, but it is not really very widespread, and it is more or less on a haphazard basis.

Peter has indicated two or three areas in the discussion with the President this morning where labor counsels work with the school systems, and those will be good models to draw on.

Q Specifically, hasn't the Soviet Union been doing this for some time?

SECRETARY WEINBERGER: Not to my knowledge, no. I had some experience in some discussions with their educational people when I was there last year on our health ministry visits. But I don't think they have been doing anything along the line we are talking about now.

Q Mr. Weinberger, what about the Chinese example? That is probably the most structured school system in the world for integrating work and learning experience in turning out so-called practically educated people.

SECRETARY WEINBERGER: We aren't trying to turn out just practically educated people. We don't want to abandon the real virtues and benefits in our school system.

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We want to broaden it to include a recognition of the fact that graduates from our high schools and colleges will be spending the great bulk of their lives in work and jobs, and we want to make sure that the school system is not completely isolated from that other world and to bridge the two together.

But we are not talking about one large vocational educational plan.

SECRETARY BRENNAN: We are not trying to regiment the kids, either, as to what they are going to do. That is a big difference, too.

SECRETARY DENT: I think the important thing is that within the present structure to add an element of relevancy, not vocation, not necessarily technical skills, but relevancy.

Q But you are saying no budget, no changing of the liberal arts curriculum and orientation, no bothering of jobs presently existing. When the President first spoke at Ohio State, it sounded rather impressive and far-reaching with long-range ramifications for our educational system. Now it is a couple of pamphlets, so far as it has been described so far.

SECRETARY WEINBERGER: We have rather completely failed if that is the impression you have obtained from this briefing we gave the President. We have rather completely failed if that is the impression you have from this because in the first place, you are the first man to mention budgets. Nobody else has mentioned budgets up to this point.

In the second place, the pamphlets, I think, will be very useful and will be a part of it, but we are planning ultimately, because we recognize, as Secretary Dent said, schooling at the high school level basically is a local responsibility and a matter that is under basic local control, that what we can best do as a Federal Government is to encourage and try to improve the opportunities and the knowledge that school systems have for bringing these two worlds together.

We do think you can work out on a much more coordinated national basis an opportunity for students to be in school and at the same time to have useful and valuable work experiences that can help them in their seeking, obtaining, holding and advancing in jobs after they graduate.

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That kind of national effort I think can best be done by the coordinated work of these three departments, which have made an excellent start, as Secretary Brennan said already, and by directing some existing programs toward this.

You don't need new money or new staffs or new agencies. What you really need mostly is to have an awareness of the importance and the priorities the President attaches to this and then, as I mention, direct things such as the NIE toward carrying out this new activity.

I think that can be done with much more effect than has been done in the past.

Q Mr. Secretary, while we have the opportunity, can you bring us up to date on the coal miners strike, specifically how long do you think the Government can tolerate a coal miners strike and the economy can tolerate a strike before you will need to take some type of action under Taft-Hartley?

SECRETARY BRENNAN: I don't think it would be proper for me to discuss the details of the strike at this time because the vote is being taken on the contract proposal and we are hoping it will pass and we will have some good results within the next day or so.

If that happens, the strike would then be over and we could get everybody back under voluntary conditions and would be much more successful than us talking about any action that we would plan to take at the present time.

So, up until now we have taken a hands-off attitude. I think it is moving along because of that. We are hoping the results that will be in in the next couple of days will be successful in getting the people back to work under their own conditions.

Q I have one question, while we have these three together. There are indications that the President is getting advice that he should get his own Cabinet. We have three members here of the former Nixon Cabinet standing at the microphone.

I would like a very brief report from each of you on whether or not you are planning to step aside anytime soon.

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SECRETARY BRENNAN: Speaking for myself, no, that is at the pleasure of the President. If the President requests that we step aside, naturally that is the way it will be. The President hasn't asked me to step aside, so I will continue to do my job until that time comes about, if it does.

We have to serve the people. As far as being appointed by Nixon, we have all been involved, as I said before, even President Ford was nominated by President Nixon. If we are going to go by the premise to get rid of everybody that was appointed by Nixon, it gets a little silly. (Laughter)

Q Just a minute. We have two others.

SECRETARY WEINBERGER: I think Secretary Brennan made a fine statement, and I endorse it entirely.

Q Don't you have a personal statement to make on that?

SECRETARY WEINBERGER: No, I have no personal statement to make because what I am saying is essentially what Secretary Brennan has said. I think he has made a very good statement, and I think if you want definitive, authoritative answers to this question, you should ask the President.

Q Has the President asked for any resignations?

SECRETARY WEINBERGER: No, he has not.

SECRETARY DENT: A Cabinet officer serves at the pleasure of the President, and our purpose is to serve not only the President of the United States, but 213 million Americans, and as long as the President is satisfied, I intend to continue serving the people.

THE PRESS: Thank you, gentlemen.

END (AT 12:13 P.M. EST)