

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
EDWARD AGUIRRE  
AT THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY  
OF EDWARD AGUIRRE AS  
U.S. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

THE ROSE GARDEN

2:32 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Justice Stewart, Dr. Aguirre  
and Mrs. Aguirre:

I am highly honored and consider it a great personal privilege to have the opportunity of participating in this ceremony where Dr. Aguirre will become the Commissioner of Education. Dr. Aguirre brings a very useful background to this very important job and responsibility in the Federal Government.

As an expert on manpower programs, he understands the relationship between education and jobs for our youth. As a distinguished member of the Hispanic community, he is sensitive to the very special educational needs of America's minorities. As an able administrator, and especially as a former classroom teacher, he is well qualified to advise me on Federal programs and policies for education. In particular, he will help us identify and answer the concerns of America's teachers.

Dr. Aguirre believes, as I do, that teachers are the single most important valuable resource of our educational system. Dr. Aguirre believes, as I do, that by helping teachers we are helping insure the success of America's educational system. Our efforts in education are aimed not only at providing high quality education but at making that education equally available to all of our nation's students.

As head of the Office of Education, Dr. Aguirre will continue our policy of focusing Federal aid on those students who need this kind of education the most -- the handicapped, the educationally disadvantaged and children with a limited English-speaking capability.

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Dr. Aguirre and I will also continue my Administration's important effort to make Federal aid to education more effective than it has been in the past. Too often the result of Federal programs has been to reduce local control over education while creating a heavy burden of varying regulations, differing standards and overlapping responsibilities.

Too often we ask whether forms have been properly filled out, not whether children have been properly educated.

Earlier this year I proposed a block grant program designed to cut red tape and to give State and local authorities and teachers greater flexibility in utilizing Federal aid. I have emphasized recently my hope that America's third century will be known as the century of the individual.

Next to the family, the best place to start cultivating individuality is in the classroom, by individualizing instruction. Declining enrollments, for example, can be viewed as an opportunity to reduce class size.

Our founding fathers realized an educated citizenry is crucial to a free society. Ignorance and freedom cannot co-exist. This gives America's teachers a special responsibility and it gives America's Government a special responsibility to hear their concerns.

We want to know and act upon the needs of America's teachers. With Dr. Aguirre's help, we will continue this effort. Only by being sensitive to teachers can we achieve the educational excellence that is crucial to our nation's future.

Now I will ask Associate Justice Potter Stewart to administer the oath of office.

(Associate Justice Stewart administered the oath of office.)

MR. AGUIRRE: Mr. President, Mr. Justice Stewart, Secretary Lynch, honored guests:

A well-informed, well-read, well-grounded citizenry is vital to a democracy. Yet, basic skill development in reading and mathematics appears to be falling behind in some areas of our country. Post-secondary entrance examinations often betray severe learning problems in the lower grade levels.

Employers complain that many young workers cannot write or spell. Our great nation is weakened by tolerating such conditions. We must, therefore, build an alliance to wage war against the ignorance that denies our people their rightful opportunity at work, at play and at meeting their responsibilities to self, to family and to country.

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With the Federal Government as a willing partner, such an alliance will be based on the people, on the teachers, the students, the parents and the other citizens of this country whose tax dollars are the main support of the structure of American education. It will include the traditional establishment which depends on the people for that support, State and local school agencies, colleges and universities, private and church-related schools and professional organization.

I join with you, Mr. President, in your effort to cut red tape and to give State and local people greater flexibility in the use of Federal aid. The influence of the United States Office of Education can be used to convene all those who might help make every school a quality school, accessible to every young American, no matter his or her language, human condition or socio-economic level and no matter his or her level of aspiration.

In such an alliance, I view service as a priority of the Federal Government, and I view my role as that of one entrusted with an opportunity to help provide such service in partnership with teachers, parents, students, interested citizens, institutions and public servants at all levels of Government.

Thomas Jefferson waged a war of eternal hostility against any form of tyranny over the mind of man. I consider educational deprivation the cruelest form of tyranny and I call for all of us to unite in a practical, achievable effort to overcome such tyranny.

Thank you very much.

END

(AT 2:42 P.M. EDT)