

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 27, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
(Atlantic City, New Jersey)

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
NEW JERSEY SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
STATE MEETING

HADDON HALL HOTEL

12:28 P.M. EDT

Mr. Schwartz, Senator Cliff Case, distinguished members and guests of the New Jersey School Board Association:

First, let me express my deep gratitude and appreciation for Cliff Case, a long and close friend of mine, for joining me here on this occasion. I had hoped to bring a longstanding friend of education with me this morning. She was on the plane, but didn't feel -- we have been working her pretty hard -- that she could get here, but I am sure many of you know former Congresswoman Edith Green of Oregon. She wanted me to express to all of you her best wishes to you and to the educational system in this great State of New Jersey.

It is a great privilege and pleasure to join you, the largest school board association in the whole United States, as you consider some of the very serious challenges that face you in your responsibilities. Our nation has, as I understand it, about 105,000 school board members, the largest group of elected officials in this whole country.

You are, because of your responsibilities, a tremendous, creative force in our society, and I congratulate you. You serve without pay, but you carry tremendous responsibilities for the betterment of America. I think you do a great job. Congratulations.

You and all the school board members represent really the essence of democracy. For young Americans, you represent the first contact that they have with formal Government. School board members elected or chosen under the system in each community responsible for the education of young people within that community are fundamental and unique to our country's system of education. The local control that you represent is not only an American tradition; it makes awfully good sense.

MORE

Educational problems, as well as educational priorities, are different not only between States but within individual States.

Firsthand experience gives you the special sensitivity to understand the concerns of the people that you represent and to respond to them in an affirmative way.

You may remember how I dealt with a recent Federal ruling that would have prohibited father and son, mother and daughter school events. Let me assure you I will stay on guard against such unwarranted Federal intrusion into community affairs.

I am a firm believer--and have been all of my political life--in local control of community schools. The course of American education must be chartered in our nation's community, not in Washington, D.C.

In the past decade America has responded to the problems of education with a wide variety of Federal programs designed to meet special and specific needs through assistance to State and local school agencies. Each new program was aimed at educational problems of particular segments of our population.

As a result, the proliferation of narrow, categorical programs has caused confusion, duplication as well as waste. Local citizens and administrators are buried under an avalanche of forms, applications and reports generated by no less than 110 separate and frequently overlapping Federal aid to education programs.

I think it is unbelievable -- and I certainly understand those hard working administrators -- but it must seem to them as if the explosion of knowledge is only exceeded by the explosion of paperwork. (Laughter)

As President, the first piece of major legislation that I signed shortly over two years ago was the Omnibus Education Act. It improved the distribution of Federal education funds. It unclogged the administration of Federal education programs.

Earlier this month I was very pleased to sign the Education Amendments of 1976. These amendments will make it possible for State and local school officials to participate more actively in the planning of Federally supported education programs, especially in the field of vocational education.

MORE

These have been moves in the right direction, but in a major proposal I sent to the Congress in March of 1976, I urged the further consolidation of Federal education programs in the interest of service to local schools, effective administration, as well as economy.

Under this proposal -- and it was encouraging that most State school administrators with whom I talked personally strongly favored it and many local school officials with whom I met and discussed it with personally favored it -- it would have consolidated 24 categorical grants into a single block grant.

The States, the communities -- not some well-intentioned but not locally-oriented bureaucrat in Washington -- would decide how this money would best help their schools. That is what we really want -- the money to go to your school districts directly with a minimum of red tape as far as Washington D.C. is concerned.

This proposal, which I have tried to describe in very general terms, recognizes and enhances the important role of school board members like yourself. Within certain very broad guidelines, each State would establish its own plan for spending Federal education funds. It would be required to take your views into account in establishing the structures and the procedures for drawing up that plan. Furthermore, each State plan for spending Federal funds would have to provide that at least 75 percent of the funds supplied are passed through to local education agencies.

Since I made this block grant proposal, some positive suggestions have come forward from the working people in the educational system of this country that I think will improve it, and I firmly suggest to you that in January of this year we will submit it again with those improvements, and I hope the Congress responds.

But whatever the final form -- and I am sure with the reaction from the educational organizations and educational leaders -- I am certain that it will be a great improvement in the delivery of Federal aid to education and to community control of community schools.

So, I urge the kind of cooperation that I know I can get, the Congress can get, so that we can all work together because each and every one of us is totally dedicated to a better and better educational opportunity for all of our children.

MORE

In spite of my conviction that Federal spending must be held in check -- and I hold that very deeply -- I have, because of my strong personal dedication to American schools, urged that Federal education actually be increased. My block grant program, which I described just a moment ago, did call for increased spending in each of the three fiscal years after its enactment.

But, let me point out another area of deep mutual concern. At Ohio State University two years ago -- and every time somebody from Michigan mentions Ohio State we have to be a little careful (Laughter) -- he urged that the transition from the world of education to the world of work, a crucial juncture in the life of every single individual, and to be explored.

I said at that time, at a commencement address at Columbus, that the nation needs new ways to bring the world of work and the world of institutions of education together. The United States Office of Education and the Departments of Commerce and Labor, private industry and private business, have responded to my challenge in a very encouraging way.

In the past two years, scores of programs have been developed to help high school students prepare for very worthwhile occupations while completing their education. These developments are new, they are exciting, they are inviting, and they are a fine, fine example of how Government as a helpful servant rather than a meddling master in the area of education can be constructive.

This is the sort of cooperative new effort that is needed across the whole education spectrum. School board members, parents, teachers, religious leaders, Government officials, businessmen -- we all have to work together to meet the educational challenges of America's third century.

We had a wonderful celebration on July 4, and a new spirit seemed to be generated or exposed in America on that great day. I hope and trust -- and I firmly believe -- that that spirit will continue in our third century to give to all of us and those that follow not only the vision of what we want -- freedom, liberty, responsibility -- but will give us the opportunity to make that dream a reality.

As I close, I pledge my cooperation and my continuing effort on behalf of American education. With your support, I will keep working to untie the red tape that binds you, to continue our American tradition of local education control, to see that Americans are well-educated and that America is well-prepared for this exciting future that I foresee.

It has been a pleasure and a very high honor to have the opportunity of joining you this morning, and I thank you very, very much.