

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 29, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY  
(Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

---

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE  
WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

MECCA AUDITORIUM

9:10 A.M. CDT

Thank you very, very much, Paul duVair. It is wonderful to be back in Wisconsin to see some of my old and very dear friends, Congressman Bob Kasten, former Governor Warren Knowles, and an old friend of mine in my political party, Ody Fish.

But it is a very special privilege and pleasure for me, if I might have the dispensation, to introduce to all of you a very dear friend of mine who is also a great and longstanding friend and supporter of education. I take the pleasure of introducing her because she served as a Member of the House of Representatives with me for 19 years. She was on the other side of the aisle. She was a very formidable person in debate. I always did better when she was on my side.

But let me assure you there was never a more knowledgeable, more dedicated person in the field of education than the former Democratic Member of the House of Representatives, Edith Green.

Naturally, I am very pleased and proud that she, having retired voluntarily from the Congress two years ago, is now serving as a valuable contributor to my campaign. But I think it is interesting to note that she served on the House Committee on Education and Labor and was Chairman of the Subcommittee on Post Secondary Education. And it is also of some consequence to note that she received both the Oregon and the NEA Citizens Award. So, you know Edith is real quality.

But I am honored to appear before the Wisconsin Education Association Council, a distinguished group of professional teachers, to discuss a subject of vital importance to all of us and to the Nation -- America's schools.

We in America have from our very earliest days developed an educational system as significant and as revolutionary as our political structure. Educational opportunity for all citizens was a crucial part of the vision which our Nation's founders had. They knew that ignorance and freedom could not co-exist.

MORE

Education is now the Nation's number one business. Today, 60 million Americans attend school, 10 million in post-secondary education and 50 million in elementary and secondary schools. Over 2-1/2 million Americans are school teachers and school administrators.

More money is spent on education in America than any other single governmental endeavor. In all, America is making a huge investment in quality education and American taxpayers expect a substantial return for their investment.

My Administration shares their expectation and their concern in America's continuing and striving to be the world's finest. No other sphere of activity is so closely bound to the lives of all Americans. The strength of our political system is dependent on educated sovereign people.

Early generations of Americans looked upon education as a cherished privilege, a stepping stone to a successful and a happy life. Our schools, our colleges educated millions of immigrant children who spoke no English when they arrived on our shores. These people and their descendants valued education above all.

To them, self-discipline was both essential and natural. If self-discipline was missing, then imposed discipline in the home and the school was accepted as reasonable and proper.

Today, these attitudes have eroded. Education, particularly in America's urban centers, has been inundated by a barrage of social problems. Schools are facing a litany of ills -- drugs, disruption, violence that victimizes both teachers and students, increased racial tensions, and the excessive demands for schools to be all things to all people.

In the midst of all of this, it is not surprising that education and our children suffer. Headlines, if not personal family experiences, tell us that crime in the schools is a very serious problem. The National Education Association reports that over the past few years there has been a dramatic increase in school crime and school violence.

Some of today's parents say teachers must understand our children better. I say it is hard for a teacher to understand a student who is threatening him or her with a knife. No teacher should be subject to physical or verbal assault by students. Nor should any teacher be fearful of physical abuse by undisciplined students -- and I add this with emphasis -- nor by the undisciplined parents of those students.

MORE

We can, and I honestly think that we must, keep the school rooms of America places to learn, to uplift, to move forward. If our schools fail, we fail; and if they succeed, we succeed.

The heart of America's education system, the key to success or failure for the millions of students sitting in classrooms, is not buildings or dollars spent. The key is the classroom teacher. All of us as individuals and collectively as a Nation owe much, a very great deal, to our teachers during our lifetime.

Who among us does not recall the impact made on his or her life by that very special teacher? I could recite a number in my own lifetime who have contributed very significantly to whatever circumstances or success that I have had, and I value their contributions very deeply.

Our teachers, our schools have made it possible for the United States to lead the world in science and technology, in medicine, in agricultural production, and in space exploration. With all of the problems, our teachers still have given us the best educated youngsters in the world today, and I congratulate all of you for that accomplishment.

But how can we help our teachers meet the awesome demands of the future? How can we channel more of the \$130 billion now spent on education each year into classrooms to benefit our children and avoid the bureaucratic snarls that somehow seem to plague too many school systems?

In the past decade America has responded to problems of education with a variety of Federal programs designed to meet 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 reached a point, really a crescendo, where it is causing confusion, duplication, and I think unnecessary waste.

MORE

Local citizens and administrators are buried under an avalanche of paperwork, generated by no less than 110 separate and frequently overlapping Federal aid to education programs, and we have got to do something about it.

My Administration will not try to out-promise or out-bid the opposition. You know that every new program has its price and every politician who promises new programs has an obligation to say how much it will cost and who will pay for it. You are too sophisticated, too experienced, too knowledgeable to simply throw your weight to the highest bidder. I owe you more than an auction for Federal education dollars. I am working for meaningful, much needed reform in Government's whole approach to educational assistance.

As President, the first piece of legislation that I signed back in August of 1974, over two years ago, was the Omnibus Education Act. It improved the distribution of Federal education funds; it unclogged to some extent the administration of Federal education programs. This was a distinct move in the right direction, but in a major proposal that I sent to the Congress in March of this year, I urged the further consolidation of Federal education programs in the interest of service to local schools, effective administration and bona fide economy.

Under my proposal, 24 categorical grants would be consolidated into a single block grant program. The States and the communities, not some faceless bureaucrat in Washington, would decide how this money would best be spent to help their students and their teachers do a better job.

It was interesting in this past year since that proposal was made that all or most of the State educational heads, or whatever their precise title might be, agreed with the proposal because they felt that was a far more effective way -- with infinitely less red tape -- to get that money for elementary and secondary education from the Federal Government right at the local level.

I am optimistic that with the year that we will have had to educate people who want the job done, that we can convince the next Congress that this is the way to take whatever the funds are that the Federal Government makes available and get it to the source where we want the job done as quickly, as economically and as effectively as possible.

Now, in spite of my conviction that Federal spending must be held in check -- and just about a year ago that was a tough decision that I had to make -- I have, because of my strong personal dedication to America's schools, urged that Federal assistance be increased for the current fiscal year. The block grant program that I mentioned a moment ago calls for the increase in spending in each of the three fiscal years after its enactment.

MORE

As I said a moment ago, I am optimistic that that consolidation program will be accepted by the Congress with the kind of increases that I think can be justified and will be extremely helpful in solving some of the local and even the State financial problems involving schools.

When I spoke in Ohio State -- and, you know, somebody from Michigan who gets invited to speak at a commencement at Ohio State, you never forget the experience (Laughter) and they treated me better as a commencement speaker than they treat the Michigan football teams from time to time (Laughter) -- but when I was at Ohio State two years ago, I urged that the transition from the world of education to the world of work, a very crucial juncture in the life of every individual be explored by the most knowledgeable people in the field of education.

I said at that time the nation needs new ways to bring the world of work and institutions of education close together. The response from the education and business communities has been more than heartening. The U.S. Office of Education, the Departments of Labor and Commerce, private business and industry 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 worthwhile occupations while completing their education. These developments are exciting, they are innovative and they are a fine example of Government as a helpful servant rather than a meddling master in the area of education.

American schools have met and overcome many challenges in our nation's first two centuries. Today we have a civilization which has reached unparalleled heights of material well being, a civilization that has uncovered many of the secrets of the physical world. But even more important are our moral and intellectual values, the elements that constitute the very essence of civilization.

A Gallup poll this year reported -- and I quote -- "The public is overwhelmingly in favor of instruction in morals and moral behavior in the nation's public schools." Many years ago a great President, President Theodore Roosevelt, put it much more dramatically. He said, and I quote, "To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society." I wholeheartedly agree.

Unfortunately, too many citizens are uninformed, or, worse, unconcerned about the workings of their Government. Too many young Americans are graduating from our schools with a feeling that the law is a threat and that Government is an enemy. Too many are cynical. Too many don't care.

MORE

We cannot uphold our society's system of values by simply lecturing our children that it is good. We can only assure its future by educating our children to be aware of and to respect its strengths and, at the same time, give them the knowledge and the incentive to correct its faults.

Only then will they understand why America's moral values must be preserved, even though our society constantly changes. Only then will they understand that truth, equity and justice are more than mere words, but a way of life. Meeting the educational challenges of America's third century must not be the responsibility of educators and teachers alone. They cannot and must be called upon to assume the burden of curing all of society's ills single-handedly. It must be a cooperative effort by parents, school board members, teachers, religious leaders, Government officials, businessmen, labor leaders, every single one of us.

We do face great problems in America today. Overcoming them requires more than dollars, more than technology, more than programs. We need a belief in ourselves. We need the will, the education, the discipline to take action.

Let us take a new look at ourselves in America. Let us see a constructive partnership between the education community and the rest of our society. Let us seek the highest standards in every aspect of American life.

As Daniel Webster once wrote, and I quote, "If we work upon marble, it will perish. If we work upon brass, time will efface it. If we rear temples, they will crumble to dust. But, if we work upon men's immortal minds, if we imbue them with high principles, with a just fear of God and love of our fellow men, we engrave on those tablets something which no time can efface and which will brighten and brighten to all eternity."

Thank you very much.

END (AT 9:32 A.M. CDT)