

REMARKS BY STATE SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY III

MINNESOTA FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

ACCEPTANCE OF PENNELL AWARD FOR

U.S. SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

St. Paul, Minnesota

April 16, 1977

I am honored to accept this award on behalf of my father.

I know he greatly regrets not being able to be here today, and that he is very proud to be receiving this award.

The right to an education is one of the cornerstones of our society. The educational opportunities that abound in this country stand firm as one of our most important yard sticks for assessing the quality of life within this country.

One of the most important aspects of my dad's public life has been his support for education.

He has worked relentlessly to help ensure that every individual has equal access to quality education. He firmly believes that the future of our democratic society depends on our constantly improving education and educational opportunities for all our citizens.

My father and I strongly believe that there is urgent need today to establish a new education policy for America -- a policy to guarantee that all children and youth, without regard to circumstances of residence, family income or race, will have a full and equal opportunity to obtain a quality education.

Dad has introduced two bills in this session of Congress toward establishing this new education policy.

One bill would create a Cabinet level Department of Education. The second would alleviate the financial crisis confronting the public schools of the nation by providing increased financial resources for elementary and secondary education.

My father believes that by organizing the federal education effort in this way, we can move effectively to establish national education priorities and better administer our wide-ranging education programs.

This action is long overdue. Similar bills have been introduced in recent years -- only to die. But we cannot afford to delay any longer.

Continued ineffective management of education programs could spell disaster for colleges and universities that depend on federal resources for stability.

Lack of coordination could deprive local and state education agencies of the level of support required to maintain the high standards of quality in education that we demand for our children.

Restructuring and consolidation must be the bywords to strengthen the federal education effort and to meet the needs of the future.

We are the only major nation in the world that lacks a Cabinet-level post in Education. A United States Department of Education would not add to the levels of the federal structure. Rather, it would streamline the bureaucracy by incorporating all of the federal education programs into one department.

It would provide the national leadership and the assignment of responsibility in an area which has for too long been neglected. And it would put us in the best position to address the problems of our fragmented education effort which have been created by a lack of effective communication among federal agencies.

The need for a Department of Education never has been more pressing.

But strong and comprehensive organization of our federal education assistance effort is only the first step that must be taken.

It also is urgent that the federal portion of public resources devoted to education be substantially increased -- for the simple reason that education represents a vital national interest; it is a solid investment in a better future for the United States.

It is profoundly wrong that the quality of a child's education should continue to be dependent on the wealth or poverty of his or her community.

Minnesota has for the past several years developed a progressive program to utilize a statewide income tax in balancing per-pupil expenditures among school districts.

Nationwide, we need to establish a policy to guarantee that all children and youth, without regard to circumstances of residence, family income, or race will have a full and equal opportunity to obtain a quality education.

And it is most urgent that we begin spending the money in such a way that it yields results. We need to maintain accountability for participants in the educational process at all levels -- for our students, for our teachers, for our principals, for our State commissioners, and for our elected officials and representatives.

We need to set priorities, to assess the needs of our youth, to plan, and to evaluate our performance.

To achieve these ends, my father has introduced the National Education Investment Act. This Act provides for the establishment of a National Education Trust Fund in the Treasury.

Payments would be made from this trust fund to state and local jurisdiction applicants which agree to reduce substantially or eliminate the taxation of real property for the purpose of financing elementary and secondary education. This would be done under a program which would promote progressive tax reform in the state and the improvement and balancing of per pupil expenditures among all local school districts.

The title of this bill, the National Education Investment Act, indicates the fundamental commitment that must be made to increasing the Federal investment in education to one-third of all public resources.

In recent years, the courts increasingly have focused their attention on the disparity of the resources available to students among the school district within a state. Some states are under court order to alter the means by which public education is funded, and pressure for reform is increasing in other states.

Federal funding must make up a substantial share of the total funding of reform in educational financing in order to make a positive change in this area and to avoid raising false expectations. If there is no serious commitment to a substantial and continued amount of federal funding, the potential improvement in educational financing will be negligible.

The National Education Investment Act proposes that a major advance be launched in federal policies toward education.

The bill is comprehensive. It proposed to correct major fiscal resource disparities among school districts. But it also pinpoints special education needs of children which for too long have received a totally inadequate response -- including the needs of preschool children, of mentally or physically handicapped children, and of educationally deprived children in areas of poverty.

The National Education Investment Act presents clearly defined measures and a definite time schedule for addressing all these problems -- not through just providing more federal dollars, but through using federal assistance as leverage to promote counterpart efforts by state and local governments. It calls for a total national effort on behalf of our children and youth.

Passage of legislation along these lines would make the beginning of a new era in education. But it would just be a beginning.

New programs need to be established -- comprehensive early childhood development centers, vocational and career training centers, and adult education centers.

We also need to be thinking more about the rights and need of classroom teachers. They deserve the opportunity and assurance for professional enhancement and a decent income commensurate with the cost of living. And teachers need an adequate retirement program which would solve the problem of teacher mobility.

But in demanding the best education for our children, we also must demand the best of our society. Values imparted in the classroom too often seem hypocrisies in the outside world. By intensively examining what, how, and why we teach our children, we may discover answers to education's ills that also can help heal the sicknesses of our society.

At root, we must rededicate ourselves to the unique worth and the kinship of every man as a fundamental truth in education and as a basic explanation of what America is all about.

This is why we must look upon education as a total social experience. Progressive learning cannot take place in an atmosphere of hostility, fear, racial bitterness and deprivation.

The education of a child is the sum total of that child's native ability, the experience in an education system, and the social environment in which that child lives and grows -- the neighborhood, the community, and the nation, and indeed, the world. He is conditioned by it.

The best in education -- facilities, teachers, books -- is diminished by the inadequacy of the surroundings and the inadequacy of the social environment.

Likewise, the capacity to learn is affected by the condition of a child's health, the adequacy of his or her diet, and the sense of mental peace in which a child or youth lives.

Therefore, educators have a greater responsibility than just to advocate better teaching methods and tools, modern school plant and facilities, and the use of the most up-to-date educational technology.

The true educator also must be a spokesman for social justice, a crusader against the evils of poverty and deprivation, and an advocate of communities that are wholesome and safe.

Let us resolve here and now to make education in America the finest in the world.

Let me accept this award for my father, not for what he has done for education in the past, but for the foundation he has helped to lay for education in the future.

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