

TALKING POINTS

Dr. Boyer's Remarks to
Westchester County school officials
May 18, 1979

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

On Monday the House Committee on Government Operations reported out the bill which would establish a Department of Education in the Federal Government. The House bill differs somewhat from the previously passed Senate version -- chiefly in what programs will be included in the new Department. I am confident one will be created in the present session of Congress. But I am not so confident that I will tell you your support is not needed. It is needed and it is justified.

All educators should support a Department of Education for exclusively educational reasons. There may be political reasons, or bureaucratic reasons for questioning the formation of a new Department, even among educators, but when we look at the critical importance of schools in our society, I find it astounding that education is not represented in our highest executive council, the Cabinet.

President Carter has said education is the noblest task of government. I would agree. I might even put it more strongly. It's the noblest purpose of government. The security, the wealth, the freedom we enjoy in the United States are both the products of an educated citizenry and the conditions for the pursuit of thinking and learning.

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Education must be pursued as a primary national aim. This has nothing to do with the question of governance of education -- the constitutional reservation of the control of education to the States. Federal policies affect schools and education. Foreign policy affects education. (Remember Viet Nam?) Taxation policies affect education. Conscription for the armed forces affects education. The space program affects education. Job programs, welfare programs, and a host of other Federal Government actions affect what happens in our schools. Education -- the schools and colleges of the Nation -- must be represented as these policies are formulated so that the conditions which allow education to flourish will not be altered inadvertently, and can be consciously and wisely cultured.

In those areas where the Federal Government directly supports and makes demands upon the schools -- the laws directly applied to schools -- I see a palpable advantage in having a department of education where those officials responsible for administering the laws are out front, accountable for their stewardship to the President and to the public. If accountability in education is demanded, it should start with Federal officials.

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I wish to make it plain that I am speaking from no disillusionment as the Commissioner of Education within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. An Office of Education within HEW is the next best thing to a department as long as Joe Califano is Secretary. He was the prime mover of Lyndon Johnson's landmark education legislation and is as devoted to the cause of education as any person in government. He would make a superb Secretary of Education. But with his present duties he cannot be as effective a leader for education as he might be. Nor can Mary Berry and I be as effective as we might be so long as we must deal with the President and with other agencies through a secretariat that is handling the truly mind-boggling responsibilities of welfare and health along with education.