

The Listening Post

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It is our hope that The Listening Post will, in the present year, continue to serve as a channel to communicate current developments regarding legislation of interest to school people at both state and national levels. The column will, of course, do more than simply report proposed legislation. With the support of the ASCD Legislative Committee, and the help of other persons sensitive to current legislation, this department will comment upon trends in legislation, ways in which particular state or national groups either promote or oppose certain legislation affecting them, and other similar matters.

The editor of this column will read with much interest any manuscripts of this type which may be addressed to her in care of the ASCD headquarters office.

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Coming Attacks on Federal Grants for Education

WHEN the 84th Congress meets in January, it will face a number of irreconcilable alternatives. Neither tax reduction nor improved defenses against the A and H bomb threats can leave a balanced budget. Should the national economy continue the slow decline under way, federal tax collections will decline at a much faster rate. This is the most serious factor of all. It could result in no further federal tax reductions beyond those already authorized, dangerous decreases in defense expenditures and a seriously unbalanced budget, all at the same time.

Under these unhappy conditions, it is natural that Congress and the Administration will search for ways to reduce federal expenditures. Defense costs at home and abroad, politically untouchable veterans and farmers bene-

fits, interest on the national debt and similar items leave perhaps no more than 15% of the budget politically vulnerable, and this part of the budget has been pruned repeatedly in recent years.

The Administration, nevertheless, seeks further cuts in this small end of the budget and is carefully laying a foundation upon which Congress might justify such cuts to the public. Among the grants in aid for the current year that may be trimmed or eliminated next year are many of importance to education such as \$69,500,000 for construction of public schools in defense areas and \$66,500,000 for their maintenance and operation, \$25,673,000 for vocational education, \$8,000,000 for the National Science Foundation, \$83,500,000 for the national school lunch program, \$2,550,000 for land-grant colleges,

\$23,000,000 for vocational rehabilitation and many millions for research in colleges and universities.

Smaller in amount but nevertheless important are appropriations for federal administration, such as the current \$2,900,000 for the U. S. Office of Education. In this appropriation, leeway for saving has long since disappeared as new duties have been imposed by Congress without additional funds for their administration. Of the \$2,900,000 for the U. S. Office of Education, \$930,000 is earmarked for administration of emergency aids in defense areas and another \$480,000 for the Division of Vocational Education. Funds for administering most of the regular functions of the U. S. Office of Education have been cut substantially in recent years. The surviving professional staff has been immobilized and made relatively ineffective by extreme cuts in travel and printing funds.

Whether federal programs involving grants in aid will survive probably depends more on politics than on how well the programs serve or how badly they are needed. The questions being asked are such as: "Can we cut out the school lunch appropriations, or is it supported by too many people? Even though we can't eliminate direct federal aids to farmers, can we safely abolish federal grants to vocational education and land-grant colleges?" These are primarily political questions.

A favored technique of the government in handling legislative questions filled with political dynamite is (1) get a federal law authorizing a commission, (2) appoint a commission certain to recommend approximately what is desired, (3) present the recommendations to Congress for enactment as primarily those of the commission, supporting them on the basis of the long and careful non-partisan or bi-partisan

study which is claimed to have led to the recommendations. If the regular lawmaking process of the Congress can be avoided through statutory authority to place the commission's recommendations in effect by executive order, as in the case of the first Hoover Commission, so much the better. National, state and local citizens committees to put pressure on Congress complete the technique.

There are several current studies organized to provide reasons to eliminate or reduce federal financing of federal-state programs. A second Hoover Commission is moving into action with an initial appropriation of \$550,000. It is authorized to recommend changes in federal-state programs as well as improvements in the organization of the federal government. The educational programs already mentioned do not appear to have been assigned specifically to any of its first group of task forces. Other task forces will probably be formed, however, and it would be surprising if the federal grants in aid to education escape attention.

The staff of the Council of State Governments has also been studying these federal grants. Some of its recommendations to the several governors are: (1) the \$83,500,000 appropriation for the school lunch program should be eliminated at the close of the present fiscal year, (2) federal distribution of surplus commodities for school lunches should be continued, (3) federal grants for vocational education under the Smith-Hughes and George-Barden Acts should be eliminated by July 1, 1955, (4) federal grants for vocational rehabilitation, which account for nearly 70% of its total support under the 1943 Vocational Rehabilitation Act, should be eliminated more gradually, perhaps by 1960. Not all the governors, of course, will agree with all these rec-

ommendations, but the fact that they have been made after staff study will have some influence.

A commission of great interest and importance to education is now set up. It will probably be the principal springboard for efforts to reduce the scope and expense of federal programs affecting education. We will describe its development to date and discuss some of the possible effects it may have on financing of education.

The Commission on Intergovernmental Relations is charged by the law to ". . . study and investigate all of the present activities in which Federal aid is extended to State and local governments, the interrelationships of the financing of this aid, and the sources of the financing of governmental programs. The Commission shall determine and report whether there is justification for Federal aid in the various fields in which Federal aid is extended; whether there are other fields in which Federal aid should be extended; whether Federal control with respect to these activities should be limited, and, if so, to what extent; whether Federal aid should be limited to cases of need; and all other matters incident to such Federal aid, including the ability of the Federal Government and the States to finance activities of this nature."

The Commission is composed of five Senators, five Congressmen and 15 additional members appointed by the President. The Senators are Republicans Cordon, Hendrickson and Schoepel; Democrats Hoey and Humphrey. The Congressmen are Republicans Mason, Dolliver and Ostertag; Democrats Dingell and Hays.

The President's appointees include eight Republicans, five "Eisenhower" Democrats and two Independents. The latter are the two representatives of education, Clark Kerr, Chancellor of

the University of California and William Anderson, Professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota and formerly a member of the first Hoover Commission. Chairman Clarence E. Manion, once Dean of the Notre Dame University Law School, is one of the "Eisenhower" Democrats.

The law became effective early in July 1953, and provides that the Commission's final report shall be submitted to the President for transmittal to the Congress not later than March 1, 1954. Late in October, no office had yet been established and the Commission had met only once. No doubt it will seek an extension of time from Congress early in 1954; any report it could make by March 1, 1954 would necessarily be based on little study.

The legislative history of the Commission, particularly the discussions in the Senate and House, makes clear the purposes for which it was established. It will recommend elimination or reduction of a number of federal grants in aid to education, health, welfare and other fields and present the reasons for its recommendations. Considering the federal budget and debt ceiling and the membership of the Commission, it would indeed be surprising if it should recommend any new federal grants in aid or any increases in present grants.

The U. S. Chamber of Commerce recently held a national conference to discuss the Commission and to pledge support to it. Throughout the conference it was assumed that the Commission would recommend abolition or reduction of some federal grants to states. The conference resolved:

"Whereas, some 400 business and political leaders from thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia assembled in Washington on June 10, 1953 to discuss federal-state relations, now therefore be it resolved that:

"(1) we believe the federal government has gone much too far in granting aid to states and local communities and said states and local communities have been much too eager to accept such aid.

"(2) that immediate steps be taken to re-evaluate the fiscal relationships between the federal, state and local governments, looking to the day when (a) the federal government will withdraw from the many enterprises in which it now grants aid to states and local governments, and (b) that in consideration of such withdrawal the federal government relinquish to the several states and local governments tax fields which rightfully belong to the states and local governments, and that states and local governments do likewise with respect to those fields of taxation which rightfully belong to the federal government."

The record of the conference includes an unchallenged assertion that public education is too expensive and that the entire concept of compulsory education for all children ought to be re-examined. This is a hint of one kind of danger to education inherent in the Commission's work—attacks on federal grants to the states may be extended to include attacks on state grants to local districts for the support of foundation programs of education. Both are grants in aid from larger units of government. Public elementary and secondary education now receives 45% of its total financing from state funds. It would be set back half a century if local control should come to be regarded as compatible only with local financing.

It is unrealistic to suppose that the federal tax collectors will leave tax funds in the states to make up for federal grants lost and that the states will seize upon these tax sources and use them for education. Under present federal budgetary conditions, it is unlikely that any reallocation of federal,

state and local tax sources will reduce the total tax sources available to the federal government. It is not even likely that there will be any such reallocation. Elimination of a few federal grants for education, in any event, will hardly affect reallocation of tax sources one way or the other. Neither will the states and localities step into the breach to tax themselves for the amount of the lost federal grants as soon as they are lost, if at all.

If the Commission holds hearings, it will find evidence on both sides of the question in regard to each federally-aided program. Moreover, its recommendations may not be entirely what have been assumed, if only for the reason that the Commission is composed of intelligent and competent persons. The Commission will find that most supporters of education are willing to re-examine federal grants to education, but that will oppose any quick political operation based on preconceived ideas which will damage education.

Under the law, the Commission's recommendations cannot be sanctified as executive orders to become effective unless vetoed by a constitutional majority of one branch of Congress—they will have to be translated into legislation for Congress to pass in the regular manner. This usually means Congressional hearings and at least some opportunity for public opinion to express itself. The same political realism that originally caused the problem to be referred to the Commission will then reassert itself, and in an election year. Only after Congress has acted will we know which federally connected educational programs, if any, will be reduced or abolished.

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