

# Our Schools Back Into Their Future

BY ROBERT E. SEGAL

Clarence M. Pendleton, Jr., the Administration's choice as Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, made a revealing comment recently when the body he heads criticized President Reagan's determination to cut more than \$4 billion in federal aid to schools and college students in fiscal 1983. After all, said Mr. Pendleton, many of the programs have failed to achieve their objectives.

This is a strange stance for a man selected to fill the shoes of such giants as Arthur Flemming and Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, former staunch chairmen of the Commission. To assume stewardship of a powerful agency charged with championing basic equality of opportunity in a number of fields, including education, then to hold such a myopic view of federal aid to education amounts to strange behavior.

Chairman Pendleton certainly knows that a keystone of the policy of advancing decent schooling practices in the U.S. is dedication to the achievement of equality for those who have traditionally been shortchanged in our schools

because they are poor, members of minority groups, immigrants, or pupils in states with low educational standards. A former leader of the Urban League, he is obviously aware of the 29-year battle to desegregate our public school systems following the historic 1954 Supreme Court decision. He knows how much busing, despite fierce opposition, has accomplished in the fight to end segregation. Yet, although he's chairman of the Civil Rights Commission, he is the sole commissioner opposing busing.

Those in the federal government who now insist on cuts, more cuts, deeper cuts are gambling with the future state of our security and our economy. At a time when there is an urgent need to train young people in mathematics and the other sciences, the projected \$4 billion cut in education for fiscal 1983 mocks our claim as an enlightened people. If we do not gear young people into mastery of skills required in a computer age, we will not only handicap our national security so dependent on technological advance, but we will force more thousands of Americans on to the ranks of the jobless. These trends, in turn, will hike the cost of welfare and unemployment assis-

tance. And what of the morale of those thus hampered by educational deprivation?

That the slashes in federal aid to education come in an inflationary period results in further hardship for those families desiring a sound education for their children, yet are hard - pressed to pay bills for everyday necessities. To illustrate this point, consider what is happening to the helpful Pell grants. Thanks to new eligibility requirements, the current year will see approximately one million students in families with incomes of \$14,000 to \$28,000 denied these grants. Or heed the warning of the retiring director of the Congressional Budget Office, Alice Rivlin, who points out that federal aid to college students in 1984 may be 50% of that in 1983.

These past several years we have been justifiably alarmed by crime and vandalism in many school districts. Now we find new problems aggravating these dangers. We learn that an estimated 55,000 teachers will lose their jobs this year. We learn, too, that some ambitious young people who now are obliged to work most of the night to try to pay for college courses find it hard to concentrate and stay awake in class.

What, then, is the federal government doing about this and a shocking list of other threats to our educational plants? Those in power are pressing for tax breaks and voucher grants to families preferring private schools to public schools. They are frowning on bilingual education in a shrinking world wherein knowledge of a second language eventually strengthens the nation's economy. They are neglecting a part of their obligation to handicapped children. They are slashing funds for libraries and educational research.

Dr. Jean Mayer, President of Tufts University, echoes the despairing cries of many when he says: "It appears the Administration's programs represent a policy of getting upper - middle class students into private colleges, middle - class students into state colleges, black students into black colleges, and poor young people nowhere."



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