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TESTIMONY OF THE  
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AFL/CIO  
ON THE  
HIGHER EDUCATION ACT  
BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON EDUCATION

PRESENTED BY:

DR. IRWIN POLISHOOK, VICE PRESIDENT

AND

PATRICIA WEILER

OCTOBER 3, 1979  
WASHINGTON, DC

TESTIMONY OF  
Dr. Irwin Pólishook, Vice President  
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO  
Before the Senate Subcommittee on Education  
On The Higher Education Act.

October 3, 1979

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

The American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, welcomes the opportunity to present our views on the Higher Education Act. As you know, the AFT is the largest representative of college faculty members in the United States. More than 75,000 AFT members teach in our Nation's colleges and universities and the AFT is the exclusive representative for the faculties of public systems in New York, Illinois, Florida, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Vermont, as well as, representing individual colleges all over the Nation.

The actions contemplated by this Subcommittee and the actions taken in the past have profound effect on the health and effectiveness of our higher education system. We note with appreciation and respect the landmarks in higher education already achieved by your legislative work.

The Basic Education Opportunity Grants program has made a college education affordable for thousands of students who might not otherwise be able to pursue higher education and has eased the burden of middle-income families faced with choices between necessities and higher education. Other Grants and the Loan program have clearly provided the means for a college education to many. And, while we are not in favor of all aspects of the loan program, we do acknowledge a continuing necessity for loans in financing higher education.

We also commend the fine work by this Subcommittee in 1976 with the establishment of the teacher center program. While teacher center programs are still a small struggling federal program, the concept is now established and it is our hope that in time these benefits can be extended to teachers all over the country. We know that this Subcommittee shares that goal.

TITLE I

The AFT has many higher education interests; it would be impossible to spell them all out no matter how much time we had. For example, Life-Long Learning. The program, that is currently on the books, has simply not attracted enough support in its current form in part because of the massive pressures on the federal budget. We believe that an effective response to these pressures would be to create a program that would reach-out and tap the funds already available nation-wide for continuing education. Many programs have been negotiated by unions to cover their members educational costs. Testimony given to the

House Education and Labor Committee indicates that there are at least 198 current plans in existence with more being negotiated each year and that these plans provide a potential of more than \$200 million for this purpose. It is our belief that channelling this large amount of private sector dollars into a coherent plan will do more to advance life-long learning opportunities than anything currently on the books. It can be especially significant if such plans were uncovered and publicized in conjunction with programs offered by existing educational institutions. A small amount of federal seed money could be used to coordinate the putting together of programs, dollars and students.

As with many other federal programs, a relatively small amount of federal money can trigger benefits far out-of-proportion to the amount of federal investment. This is just a concept but we believe the Subcommittee should examine it seriously as it begins its Reauthorization of Title I of the Higher Education Act.

With regard to the student loan provisions of this legislation, we would like to make it clear that while we support most of the content of the current legislation as well as its intent (which we believe is to increase educational opportunities for students) we do so with some reluctance and one major principle objection.

This objection is based in the extent to which such loan programs offer incentives to the states and the institutions to increase their costs; encourage the notion that students bear even greater responsibility for their education expenses than is now the case; and therefore, drive down enrollments among those portions of our population which are in most need of higher education, namely, the minorities and the poor.

There has been much contradictory and often confusing data offered as to the real impact of federal student aid dollars on the achievement of the goals of equality of access and opportunity within higher education. Because of this, we fully endorse the establishment of a "National Commission on Student Loans" and urge that the utmost care be given to assure that appointees to this body be representative of those constituencies most effected by the spectre of spiraling increases in college costs. We would assume that the first order of business of this Commission would be to make an assessment of the effect of this legislation upon students from families of all income brackets, as well as to develop a realistic definition of what it constitutes to be a "needy" student in these inflationary times.

We would also expect the Commission to develop mechanisms which would encourage both the institutions and the states to maintain their current levels of support of student assistance programs so as to insure that the entire burden of a student's educational cost do not become transferred to the student or the federal government in this entirety. In the interim, we support the maintenance of current programs as provided in this bill. We oppose steps to increase interest rates to loan users as a step toward student loans out of the reach of lower-and middle-income families.

The American Federation of Teachers supports the full funding of student aid programs; the Basic Educational Opportunity Grants, Supplemental Educational

Opportunity Grants, National Direct Student Loans, State Student Incentive Grants, College Work Study and Guaranteed Student Loans are essential. We especially support the phasing out of the "half-cost" provision of the BEOG which we feel discriminates against low-income students attending relatively low-cost public institutions as well as the increase in size of the maximum BEOG grant to \$2700 by 1980.

The Urban Grant University Act is one of the most promising federal initiatives in higher education--and in solving the Nation's urban problems. It would encourage colleges and universities to become intricately involved in assisting cities by applying their human and knowledge resources to the solution of urban problems and to the proffering of urban public services.

Categorical aid should be extended rather than eliminated. We also support the categorical aid program for colleges and universities depending on federal support: college library grants, library training and research, community services, and continuing education, public service fellowships, mining fellowships, law school clinic experience, education information centers, state post-secondary commissions and career education.

We also strongly support the recommendations that the minimum wage be paid to students working under the College Work Study Act. Students now working in colleges and universities for such private businesses as fast-food establishments and the like are paid subminimum wages and have no protection against such exploitation under the law. In addition, the AFT opposes the extension of college work study jobs to the private sector. Such a development would inevitably result in the displacement of full time workers and a windfall to private sector employers who would receive a federal subsidy for their payroll.

#### TITLE V:

##### Teacher Center Program

We strongly endorse legislative provisions that guarantee teachers a majority voice on teacher center policy boards. We are supportive of the criteria for proposal selection that gives weight to evidence of teacher involvement in teacher center design and implementation. It is our firm conviction that this emerging program needs stability during this first funding-cycle. Therefore, we suggest that changes that would significantly alter the legislation should be scrutinized to determine their long-range effects.

We propose a five-year funding-cycle for teacher center projects that would include a one-year planning period. This recommendation is based on the evidence collected from the teacher centers funded by the Teacher Center Program. The planning year will provide time for policy board members and the director of the project to develop a cooperative working relationship and design program activities that realistically meet the needs of the teachers in the service area. Many of the documented start-up problems that arose during the past year could have been avoided by this planning stage.

We recommend a five-year cycle to insure the time for institutionalization of the teacher center after federal support has emerged because of the collaborative efforts of teachers, administrators, university faculty and school board members. This unique element that exists in the governance structure of teacher centers must be given time in order to achieve a significant impact on teachers and students.

The extension from three to five years is not without precedent in federal programs. We point to the Teacher Corps Program as one example. Historically, districts have not placed in-service education on the list of priorities in the education budget, so we recognize the fact that a shift in emphasis must be given a reasonable length of time to bring about lasting results. Commitment to teacher in-service education and teacher centers will be insured if the positive effects are evident within a district and schools are turned around because of this success factor.

In line with these objectives, we also recommend that the five-year funding period apply to the teacher center projects presently funded by the U.S. Office of Education, to insure the successful institutionalization of those projects already in existence.

#### Teacher Corps Program

We applaud the significant contribution of the Teacher Corps Program to the improvement of teacher preservice and in-service education. We support the increased efforts to disseminate information and studies that focus on successful projects, instructional techniques and strategies that have been generated by Teacher Corps specialists.

#### Community Council

We urge consideration of a more collaborative framework for the community council which is elected "to assist the local educational agency or the institution of higher education or both in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects..." Since the local School Board members are the elected representatives of the citizens in the district, School Board members should serve with other community representatives on the advisory group. We recommend that the Community Council be replaced by a School Community Advisory Group. Elementary and secondary teacher representatives would serve with School Board members in an advisory capacity to the local educational agency. This group would not have veto power.

#### Beginning Teacher

During the past decade, the American Federation of Teachers has supported the concept of an internship program that would provide assistance to new teachers. It is in this same spirit that we propose that a new section be added to the Teacher Corps legislation that would provide funds for support for BEGINNING TEACHERS. This support program should serve the BEGINNING TEACHERS in the Teacher Corps Schools in particular because of the complex problems facing them in their new professional role. We recommend further that this program be extended to other non-Teacher Corps Title I Schools. BEGINNING TEACHERS in all Title I schools could be supported in their early professional development by such a program.

Funding would be used for released time for consultation, work with experienced teachers in the teacher center and observation in classrooms managed by successful teachers. The project would be guided by an Advisory Board which would include representatives from the school board, the teacher organization and institutions of higher education. Their function would be to act in an advisory capacity.

During this time of declining enrollment and greater stability among school staffs in elementary and secondary schools, we recommend that the ratio of five experienced teachers to one should be changed to ten experienced teachers to one new teacher.

We recommend full funding for both Teacher Centers and the Teacher Corps program. We congratulate this Subcommittee for the time you have put into this hearing and into the study of these issues. On behalf of the American Federation of Teachers, I wish to thank you for this opportunity to testify.

The American Federation of Teachers believes that the kinds of programs supported by Title VI -- Foreign Studies and Language Development, are essential if we are going to build our national capability to deal effectively abroad on a variety of problems. There are two basic approaches which we feel must be included here if these programs are to have an impact. One involves increasing positive attitudes toward language study and international study by increasing the capabilities of elementary and secondary school teachers in these areas. The second has to do with expanding the attention given to the American labor movement with programs for language and international study.

The perception that our status as a world leader is declining should mean that the atmosphere is right for initiation of a major legislative thrust emphasizing international and language studies. At the level of elementary and secondary education, concern for educational quality and standards should enable us to enrich the curriculum with language studies and solid substantive concentration on issues that require international understanding. We believe that one of the best ways to begin creating support for these areas is to broaden the knowledge and capabilities of American teachers:

- ° Language training ought to be offered on a broad scale to all types of teachers. In order to create respect and interest in the study of language, its pursuit should not be restricted to the domain of language teachers. Teachers who know and appreciate foreign languages will serve as role models to their pupils to do the same. Language teachers who are currently faced with declining interest in language study could be used to staff such programs.

We believe that if such programs were organized in relation to professional exchange and other international programs, they would encourage teachers to learn about education and other issues abroad. This would ultimately have a carry-over effect in classrooms, since international learning among teachers will tend to stimulate the treatment of international issues in classrooms. The fact that teachers have summer time and tax benefits tied to study make it likely that such programs would be used.

- ° Exchanges of teachers based on the teaching of language. These exchanges would be one way to facilitate language teaching and at the same time encourage international education. American teachers could teach English in France, for example, and French teachers could teach French here. Exchanges could be for a specific amount of time and on a one for one basis so that no job losses would occur in either country.

Relating exchanges like these to broader programs involving seminars and visits would enable American teachers and foreign teachers to learn about the educational systems, institutions, political processes and history of their respective countries. Such exchange programs could be open to language teachers, since they know the techniques of language instruction, but they might include some other teachers who were willing to develop language instruction skills through inservice courses, and who had facility in another language.

The value of such programs would be in their many possible accomplishments. We could help raise an interest in language instruction here; promote cross-professional understanding; encourage international relationships between teachers and their organizations; generate an interest in the substance of international studies; and develop a group of teachers who could pursue all of

these things once they came back to the United States.

° Language training ought to be offered to labor leaders, business representatives and the general adult population. Since language teachers are available, the schools should be granted a first priority in terms of administering such programs.

We believe that the schools offer an ideal site for such training because they are community-based. The fact that the schools made these offerings would also have a carry-over impact on school-aged children by demonstrating the importance of language study.

We also hope that the crucial role of the American Labor movement will be recognized in programs sponsored through this legislation, and that labor organizations will be recognized as capable conveyors of the interests of America abroad when it comes to futhering language and international study.

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October 3, 1979