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M E E T T H E P R E S S

Sunday, August 5, 1984

12:30 P.M., Washington, D. C.
(Live)

GUESTS: GOVERNOR CHARLES S. ROBB (D., Va.)
Chairman, Education Commission of the States

ALBERT SHANKER
President, American Federation of Teachers

PANEL: Bill Monroe - NBC News
Lucia Solorzano - U. S. News & World Report
Edward B. Fiske - The New York Times
Haynes Johnson - The Washington Post

MODERATOR: Marvin Kalb - NBC News

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MEET THE PRESS

MR. KALB: A new Gallup poll out today shows that Americans confidence in their public schools and teachers, even in their willingness to pay more taxes for public education, has gone up dramatically in the past year. Our guests today have strong views on the subject.

Governor Charles Robb of Virginia, a moderate Democrat who yesterday became Chairman of the Education Commission of the States, and Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, whose membership exceeds a half-million, making it the second largest union of American teachers.

Our reporters today are Haynes Johnson of The Washington Post, Edward B. Fiske of The New York Times, Lucia Solorzano of U. S. News & World Report, and to open the questioning, our regular panelist, Bill Monroe, of NBC News.

MR. MONROE: Governor Robb, we do want to deal with education, but I have to ask you first about the Mecklenburg Prison situation. I understand you stayed up all night, or most of it, dealing with it. At that prison some inmates took over one section of a building, seized nine hostages, and injured two of them. Is that situation now over? Is it under control?

GOV. ROBB: Fortunately, that situation has been resolved. We established a deadline at 7:00 a.m. this morning for release of all the hostages and the inmates who were in control of the second floor of one of the buildings complied with that deadline. The hostages have been referred to a local hospital. I am informed that there are no serious permanent injuries. There are a couple

of puncture wounds, several other abrasions, but nothing that looks like it will be permanent in nature.

MR. MONROE: Those inmates made something like 14 demands, including an end to what they feel was brutal treatment by the guards, dismissal of the warden, better meals - did State officials give in to any of those demands?

GOV. ROBB: No, there was no giving in to any of the demands. As a matter of fact, there were some additional demands that were made later on in the process. We indicated that it was necessary to get the hostages out. There was never any real risk of danger outside of the prison walls, clearly there was to the hostages that were involved. Two of them that were stabbed in the original take-over were released initially, one additional guard that had difficulty with a medical condition was released during the night, so the last six were released this morning.

MR. MONROE: One more question on that subject, are you due for some basic reform at that prison? You've had tremendous amount of trouble there in the last couple of months. You've had death row inmates escaping, a fight between guards and inmates --

GOV. ROBB: This is largely a reaction to some of the reform that is taking place at this time. A new warden has been installed, new senior corrections officials are in place at the facility. Most of the demands, if you will look at them, are really a reaction to tightened procedures at the prison itself, and it is a relatively predictable situation when any new management comes in and when new procedures are established, but we will continue to look at the

situation, investigation is ongoing at this time.

MR. MONROE: Mr. Shanker, the new Gallup poll which Mr. Kalb referred to showing the public much more favorable to public schools, is the public in touch with reality? Is there any reason why they should be more favorable to public schools now than they were a year ago? Is something happening that's good in the public schools?

MR. SHANKER: Well, I think clearly the public schools have not changed that much in one year. You can't change that much in an institution of this size, but what the public sees is very real. It sees that there are 50 governors, 50 state legislatures, members of the business community nationally and at the state level, teacher organizations, they see a tremendous amount of interest, they see piles of new legislation. They see a tightening up. They see requirements for teachers being tested, for students in terms of promotion and graduation. Requirements in courses, additional money being put into schools. States mandating substantial increases in minimum salaries to attract more talented youngsters. So I think what they see is that attention is being paid, and that changes are being legislated. I'm not sure that the public is aware of the fact that when you pass a law things - it's not like pressing a button. That these reforms will take years before there is real payoff.

MR. KALB: Thank you, gentlemen. We'll be back with more questions for Governor Robb and Albert Shanker.

(Announcements)

MR. KALB: Our guests on MEET THE PRESS, Governor Charles Robb of Virginia, and Albert Shanker of the American Federation of

Teachers. We'll resume the questioning with Ms. Solorzano.

MS. SOLORZANO: Mr. Shanker, two-thirds of the adults in the recent Gallup poll said that they think high school students don't work hard enough. They don't do enough homework, they're not challenged enough by their schoolwork. Why has it been so difficult to make school more challenging to students?

MR. SHANKER: Well, I think that we have to remember that what we're doing now in bringing in these new reforms is we're changing a previous bunch of reforms. If you go back to the late 1960s, I'm sure somebody appeared on this show who said that schools were too tyrannical, that we were requiring students to do too much, that the materials were irrelevant, that the kids shouldn't be reading Shakespeare anymore, that whatever a child wants to do is good for him and we should let them do what they want, and that a teacher should be more like a travel agent selling tickets to a kid who is going on his own way rather than a teacher cramming things down his throat. So actually, the public got what it wanted during that period, and it went too far the other way. It created a system that was too loose. Now of course these new course requirements will require a good deal of homework, and that's good.

MS. SOLORZANO: But couldn't teachers all along have decided to give more homework if they believed the old policies had flaws?

MR. SHANKER: No, they couldn't. The policies are set by states, they're set by boards of education, they're implemented by superintendents and principals. When I was a teacher, if I was in a school and I required tough standards and decided not to pass a

large number of students because they didn't meet those standards I was in trouble. I could be rated unsatisfactory for being tough, and furthermore, the principal of the school did actually come in and change some of my failing grades to passing grades, because he said you're acting against the policy of the schools. Most teachers were against this softening all along.

MR. KALB: Mr. Fiske?

MR. FISKE: Mr. Shanker, as you mentioned before, the legislatures and governors in virtually every state over the last year or two have enacted reforms aimed at improving schools. Political bodies don't normally stick money and political prestige on the line without asking also for more control. Do you expect that one of the consequences of all of this concern with educational reform will be a shift of power away from the local school boards and to the state capitols?

MR. SHANKER: Well, you have it already to a certain extent. I'm sure that the school boards in California, for instance, are complaining that that 150-page piece of legislation means that they are told which text books to select, which teachers they can and cannot hire, how many minutes of the day have to be spent on this subject and that subject - I think it's unfortunate, and I hope it's temporary, but I think it was necessary. I think that there was no other way to tighten up things quickly except for states to move in and to regulate. I also think that in passing all that legislation I think we're sending an unfortunate message to future teachers. The bright kids who are in college or high school right now, they

notice that nobody is passing laws telling doctors what to do, or lawyers what to do or dentists what to do, they're going to say somebody must think that teachers are just awful. These states are just busy every day passing laws telling them which books to use and what methods to use and everything else. I think that once we've tightened up, which we're just about completed with now, that we ought to move on to give local people, and I think the professionals especially, more decision-making power. Otherwise, you're not going to get talented people to come into a field where everything is legislated.

MR. FISKE: Governor Robb, do you as you look at your own state, and as you talk to your colleagues around the country, do you see this kind of a shift of power toward the state government as opposed to the local governments in controlling schools?

GOV. ROBB: To a certain extent there is at this time, but I think inevitably the power, as you describe it, is always going to follow the money, and where the money is raised, and it's a basic question of federalism here, it's one of the things that the Education Commission of the States is looking at and trying to assess the appropriate level. I think everyone agrees that as much control as you can vest in local jurisdictions, local school boards, you're always going to be better served. But if the Congress of the United States appropriates a great deal of money inevitably there are going to be strings attached to it. The same is going to be true at the state level.

MR. KALB: Mr. Johnson?

although they have real reservations about it, they are participating in the dialogue with the rest of those who are concerned about enhancing the educational prospects and improving our commitment to excellence.

MR. KALB: Governor, you're a Democrat, and Mr. Shanker, your union has come out for a Mondale victory. The President says he's putting more money into education than has ever been put in before. What's wrong with the Reagan program, in your view, Governor?

GOV. ROBB: Oh, I'm sorry - as far as I'm concerned, the program in education is perhaps not the area where we have the biggest difference. I think the commitment to taxes, as Mr. Johnson indicated earlier, it's a matter of candor, and the same poll that was referred to indicated that even though in that poll Mr. Reagan was preferred generally, they felt that Mr. Mondale would do a better job of enhancing education, and I think it's simply because of the fact that there is a commitment to fund education. I don't think they're making distinctions in terms of which level is most appropriate for the funding. I'd have to concede that there's an open question as to whether or not the federal government ought to be the principal player in terms of funding. Clearly, the federal government has to protect access, it has to provide for special populations, it has to provide for certain types of basic research. I happen to believe, as many other governors believe, however, that we ought to focus on the states and the local levels for most of the major increases in funding that are coming forth.

MR. KALB: Okay. But in your view, what's wrong with the Reagan program on education?

MR. SHANKER: Well, the main Reagan program, unfortunately, hasn't been able to get through, and that's to provide tuition tax credits for students, and that would mean that public schools - it would mean essentially that parents who can now already afford to send their children to non-public schools would be given tax monies, and he proposed that that monies be shifted away from students who already - poor students mainly, and minority students who are already in the public schools. I think that's - I think it would be extremely destructive of public education, and I think we would end up ultimately with the problems of Quebec and other places with Catholic schools, Jewish schools, Protestant schools, Communist schools, Ku-Klux Klan schools, Mexican-American -- the whole function of our public school system to pull our country together would be destroyed in that sort of system. I think that for a conservative he is being extremely radical in terms of his major school program.

MR. KALB: Mr. Monroe?

MR. MONROE: Governor, what about Mr. Mondale's \$11 billion federal program for education? That would presumably mean taxes, presumably from what you and Mr. Shanker have just said, it would enhance federal control - are you in favor of that?

GOV. ROBE: Well, let me say that there are some philosophical differences, but the basic commitment to education is sound, and I think that's reflected in the attitude of the poll that you were discussing earlier. The American people want to see more resources put into education. They want to see a commitment to excellence. We may differ as to exactly where that funding ought to be lodged, but I think the commitment is what the American people are looking for, and as I

have said previously, I think it is clear that Mr. Mondale has been very candid in acknowledging that you cannot achieve this excellence and fund the other programs, and reduce the deficit without some increase in taxes, in addition to more controlled spending in the defense area, some question of the whole entitlement program, the means test, is going to have to be examined carefully, and all of these are politically - political no-no's at this point, but they're going to have to do it on the table and address.

(Continued on next page)

MR. MONROE: Since you passed by the opportunity to endorse Mr. Mondale's \$11 billion program in specific terms, I gather you are not in favor of it?

GOV. ROBB: I haven't had an opportunity to review the specifics of his program, but again, I come from -- from the view of many of the states that are willing to bite that bullet themselves, and are not looking to the Federal Government for the kinds of increased funding that I know many of the American people think ought to come from someplace, and the Federal Government seems to have the deepest pocket.

MR. KALB: Ms. Solorzano.

MS. SOLORZANO: We've talked here and much of the action has centered on rewarding superior performance in the classroom, merit pay. Governor Robb, what kinds of actions are being taken on the opposite end, removing teachers from the classroom who may be incompetent or may just not be doing a good job?

GOV. ROBB: Well, there have always been some vehicles for removing teachers, and certainly the process of teacher certification and the -- the concept now of recertification in the basic skills will continue, and the concept of merit pay really isn't designed to address that component equation.

MS. SOLORZANO: But are states beginning to look at the problem of tenured teachers who may not be doing an adequate job and yet are kept in the classroom?

GOV. ROBB: States have done that. One of -- one of the advantages, and I'm almost contradicting myself here, but to suggest that providing special incentives and rewards for exceptional performance, you tend to leave behind, at the very least, those who are

marginally acceptable, those who clearly don't meet standards. There are procedures in most states for ridding the system of those who are clearly incompetent, but we're talking about enhancing the entire profession, and you will stretch out the -- the entire spectrum of teacher quality with any program that's designed to recognize that added benefit.

MR. KALB: Mr. Fiske.

MR. FISKE: Mr. Shanker, you mentioned earlier that one of -- one of the perennial problems about improving the schools is the quality of new recruits to the teaching force. It's well known that teaching -- education students tend to have lower SAT scores than students in most other fields. Other than higher salaries, what -- what can be done to get more talented people into the teaching profession?

MR. SHANKER: Well, I think other than higher salaries, I think you have several issues. One is that until we solve some of the extreme discipline problems, which was the number one concern on this poll of the -- of the American people in terms of conditions, you're not going to get somebody who loves Shakespeare or who's really good at math or science to, first, make the financial sacrifice, and then be locked in a room where essentially that person is a prison guard or a policeman handling very disturbed children. So that problem has to be taken care of.

Secondly, there's the problem of those children who weren't reached early enough in the first few grades, and as you have a high school teacher who wants to teach these subjects, but is faced with children who are still counting on their fingers or who are illiterate. That person didn't become a nursery school or a first or second-year

teacher. So I think that's it, but I think that we ought to tap two groups of people that we haven't tapped before. There may be millions of people out there who are willing to teach for a few years, but who are not willing to devote an entire lifetime to it. I think that we ought to offer to pay for a person's college if they teach for five years, provided that they are outstanding students, and the second grade pool is to go to retirees, people in industry who are retiring at 50 and 55 years of age, many of them with one year of additional training could be teachers for another 10 or 15 years and could do a great job.

MR. FISKE: One of the things that you -- complaints that you hear, especially from governors and members of State Boards of Education is, that whenever people come up with an idea of that sort, they buck up against the Unions. In New Jersey, Governor Kean has a proposal to -- to get liberal arts graduates into the teaching profession to -- to smooth the way and make it a little easier. Now, what -- are you contradicting yourself, that the Unions tends to oppose this or --

MR. SHANKER: No, not at all. I like Governor Kean's idea, in terms of getting liberal arts graduates. I don't like the idea that a person could become a permanent teacher without knowing anything about child behavior, without knowing anything about the issues in education. Let the person come in. Let the person even start teaching, but within a year, or two or three years, there's nothing wrong with saying that that person ought to also know something about his own profession, or her own profession and field. I feel that what he's doing is not strengthening but watering down.

MR. KALB: Governor Robb, did you want to add something?

GOVERNOR ROBB: I just wanted to say we have a program like the one you described in Virginia right now that was put into place about two years ago, where a liberal arts graduate, not a graduate of a teacher college or what have you, comes into the program, within the first two years they have to take three courses that basically deal with pedagogy, but we have found that it is beginning to stimulate additional interest, brings in a whole pool of new talent, and I agree with Mr. Shanker, that there are a number of other sources of talent that simply haven't been adequately tapped as yet.

MR. KALB: You've got about two minutes to go. Mr. Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON: Governor Robb, the Gallup Poll says that discipline remains the greatest concern among the American public when it comes to education. You've had that problem today with your problems with prisons, but how do you address that problem? People are concerned about discipline in the schools.

GOV. ROBB: Well, for the most part, it starts at home, and we have to -- I think the whole increased emphasis on education is healthy, because it is creating awareness of the problem from stem to stern, if you will, and discipline has to begin at home, and it has to be reinforced, and if there is no discipline in the home, it's going to be very difficult for a teacher to exact and expect the kind of discipline that most of us would regard as appropriate for classroom behavior.

MR. JOHNSON: And Mr. Shanker, from the teacher's standpoint in the classroom, should they have more power to exercise discipline?

MR. SHANKER: I think the school needs more power to remove the student who is consistently and -- disruptive, not just on one day

or with one teacher, or during one tough period of time, but the student who can't get along with anybody, and who's preventing everybody else from learning, it's not nice and it's difficult to do, a tough decision, but if we can't remove that student and allow the others to learn, the American people will take their children out of public schools and demand private schools, because that's the biggest difference between a private and a public school. The private school doesn't take that child, or if they have them, they just throw them out. We've got to educate everybody, but the first thing is, we ought to guarantee the safety and education of the overwhelming majority who want to learn.

MR. KALB: Less than a minute. Mr. Monroe.

MR. MONROE: Governor Robb, a political question. You originally were for John Glenn for the Democratic nomination, and now that you have watched the Mondale-Ferraro ticket operate for about two weeks since the Democratic Convention, do you have a feeling it has any chance in Virginia?

GOV. ROBB: Virginia, admittedly, is going to be one of the tougher states, but I think the -- the team or the ticket does have a real chance. I think that the addition of Geraldine Ferraro to the ticket adds a dimension that is exciting for most of the American public. I think that the issues that they are focusing on now are going to bring more of the main stream back to support the ticket, and I applaud the candor of the ticket in telling the American people truthfully some of the hard choices that they face in the next four years. I hope that that kind of candor can be encouraged by success in November.

MR. KALB: Thank you Governor Robb, and, Mr. Shanker, for
being our guests today on MEET THE PRESS.
