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### Title

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STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE  
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY, AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
AND THE  
SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
EDUCATION, ARTS AND HUMANITIES  
U.S. CONGRESS  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
October 1, 1985

Chairman Hawkins, Senator Stafford, members of the Subcommittees:

I am David Gardner, President of the University of California. I appreciate your invitation to testify at this joint meeting of your two subcommittees as you examine the problem of illiteracy in America. When the National Commission on Excellence in Education published A Nation at Risk two years ago, we pointed to the estimated 23 million functionally illiterate adult Americans as a significant indicator of the serious educational, economic, and social problems facing our nation. A few months ago the Los Angeles Times put the number of functionally illiterate Americans closer to 27 million. Whatever the numbers--and precise figures are hard to come by--they are obviously too high. This problem demands the nation's attention and action, and I commend you on your efforts to address it.

My purpose this morning is to place the matter of illiteracy within the broader context of educational reform in the United States. More specifically, I wish to speak about aspects of A Nation at Risk that have received less attention than they might have or that demand more attention than they seem to be getting. I hope that my discussion of this broader topic will assist you in your more focused consideration of illiteracy and what can be done about it.

National Reform Efforts

Since 1983 more than a dozen national reports have been issued on the condition and quality of schooling in America. And in the two years following their release we have seen a burgeoning school reform movement throughout the country. Although I do not believe the education reports created the national concern about education--it was the other way around, in fact--I do believe that the reports reflected and reinforced a growing national consensus that something had to be done to improve schooling in America. The nation's response to the call for reform has been clear, direct, and overwhelmingly on the side of major changes in our system of education. And in fact the first thing to be said about the education reform movement, in my opinion, is that it has achieved remarkable gains in a remarkably short time.

Virtually every state, for example, has raised high school graduation requirements. Many have passed comprehensive educational reform legislation responsive to the issues of teacher status and compensation, standards for graduation and promotion from grade to grade, the content, scope and sequence of curricula, the quality of textbooks, programs to meet the special needs of gifted and disadvantaged students, and the length of the school day and year. The business community nationwide has contributed enthusiastically to school reform, and a new generation of school-business cooperation is the result. Institutions of higher education have also taken steps to

shoulder their share of responsibility for improving the schools--including my own institution, the University of California--and real partnerships between the schools on the one hand and colleges and universities on the other have begun to spring up.

We can point to some encouraging quantitative improvements as well. The long and precipitous decline in SAT scores appears to have been arrested, at least for the moment, and average scores are beginning to climb. Pass/fail ratios on state competency and graduation tests are improving. Teachers' salaries have gained significantly, if not to the degree that is desirable and indeed essential--a topic I will return to in a moment.

Given the magnitude of the problems American education faces, on the whole we have made tremendous strides. Much of the reason, it seems to me, is that change occurred where it counts most: in states, localities, districts, and individual schools. That is just what we hoped for when we wrote A Nation at Risk. It was, after all, a report addressed as much to the American people as it was to the government. We were convinced that the answer lay not in national reports but in action by governors and legislators, by parents and students, by teachers and administrators and school board members--assisted by the Federal government in ways suggested on pp. 32-33 of the report.

But the second thing to be said about the educational reform movement is that it is far from over. The various reports and activities of the past two years have changed the educational atmosphere, and they are changing the definition of the problems the movement is now facing. We are now in the process of coupling with more effect than in the past our educational aims, policies, programs, and practice. And so this is an excellent vantage point from which to look at issues that need more attention.

The Teaching Profession: Improvement and an Opportunity

A Nation at Risk called for improvement in the recruitment, training, working conditions, and salaries of teachers by recommending that teacher salaries be increased generally, and that salaries be professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based. Several subsequent reports on teachers and teaching have reinforced the message that without a bright future for teaching, the future of educational reform will remain clouded. Many states and localities have appropriated and are appropriating money for salary increases, and some observers believe that this development is one reason for the relatively few teachers' strikes at the opening of school this year. Yet it is difficult, despite these efforts, to claim that the situation has improved as much as it needs to improve.

Just a few weeks ago, for example, the Los Angeles Times reported that overall increases in teachers' salaries have not kept them from varying widely from state to state and community to community. And according to a recent survey by the National Education Association, average state salaries for teachers range from a low of \$15,971 in Mississippi to a high of \$39,751 in Alaska.

The point is not that we should have a national salary scale for teachers, but that some states and localities are still far behind in terms of realistic compensation for a demanding profession. And everywhere, even in the states that pay the highest salaries, a gap exists between what teachers make and what other professionals can expect to earn for similar training and education. If we are serious about attracting outstanding people to the teaching profession, we must see to it that the overall salary average continues to increase and that the gap continues to shrink. This is not an issue that failed to attract public attention--far from it--but it is an issue that has, so far, been incompletely addressed. It is all the more important to do so in light of predicted teacher shortages in many states and in a number of disciplines and areas.

At the same time, I would like to suggest that the need to recruit increasing numbers of teachers presents us with an opportunity. Some states and localities have defined or are considering alternative routes to teaching certification as a way

of dealing with anticipated teacher shortages. One such route permits people with demonstrated competence in particular subjects to teach without extensive, formal pedagogical training. The National Education Association is unenthusiastic about this development, regarding it as a lowering of standards for the teaching profession. But the fact remains that the present arrangement is not working and we will be obliged to explore alternative paths to the teaching profession if the future demand for teachers is as great as now seems most likely. We should not, of course, assume that such alternatives are bound inevitably either for success or failure. But our uncertainty about the outcome should not render us unable or unwilling to try something new.

Research indicates, in fact, that good verbal ability--an ability the Scholastic Aptitude Test tends to measure--is correlated with effective teaching. And in recent years teacher education candidates have tended to score in the bottom quarter of those taking the SATs far more often than we would like. So it is possible that alternate certification requirements could attract more promising people into the profession and thereby raise standards. We have a naturally occurring experiment here, and perhaps a good opportunity to study that question to the benefit of the schools and the teaching profession alike. We should take the opportunity, not miss it.



A Nation at Risk recommended the use of performance-based merit pay and career ladders as a way of recognizing outstanding performance and keeping good teachers in the profession. A number of states and school systems are trying to develop these ways of evaluating and rewarding teachers. Their experience has underscored the difficulty of designing a process that will be fair and acceptable to everyone, but it has also shown that the difficulties are not insurmountable. I suspect that it will take a number of approximations before we arrive at a method of evaluating teachers that is sufficiently sensitive and demonstrably objective. Obviously, we need more research in this complex area. Yet many also believe that if principals, parents, and teachers can recognize good teachers, they can also express the basis for their judgments in some reasonable, fair, and objective manner. Ultimately, of course, the concerned parties--teachers, administrators, parents, students, and taxpayers--must all have confidence in the fairness, utility, and sensitivity of any proposed evaluation process. The fact that experiments are being tried, and that more and more schools are seeking to refine their evaluation procedures, is an enormously significant development.

It is imperative to restore the status of teaching as a profession, which means that teaching must have professional standards of competence, conduct, and accountability. The movement towards performance-based pay and career ladders is an

attempt to do just that. I believe it deserves more support than it has so far received from everyone involved in education.

### The Fine and Performing Arts

Although A Nation at Risk did not recommend that the fine and performing arts be required among the New Basics (English, social studies, mathematics, science, and computer science) the members of the Commission stressed the value of the arts and urged that the high school curriculum include them. And although the topic of the fine and performing arts has not been the center of much public debate, forty percent of the state legislatures have included the arts in their new definitions of graduation requirements. Ten states (and eleven programs--both the academic and diploma programs in Florida) require arts courses for graduation; nine other states require either an arts course or some alternative. Of the ten most demanding state diploma programs, seven require an arts course or an alternative, a figure that represents a slight increase in requirements in the arts.

The Commission believed that a rigorous program in the fine and performing arts ought to be a part of the education of our high school students. But if we believe that a good education includes the arts, then we must also believe that they should be as rigorous, demanding, and exciting as well-taught courses in science, history, or English. Moreover, we need to dispense with the idea that the fine and performing arts are frills or less

serious in intent and execution than other kinds of courses. We should give as much attention to the quality of instruction and of programs in the arts as we give to quality in science and mathematics and English. This important part of the high school curriculum needs more attention, support and encouragement.

### Standards and Student Diversity

The question of standards of performance was central to A Nation at Risk. We recommended that schools, colleges, and universities "adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations, for academic performance . . . [to] help students do their best educationally with challenging materials in an environment that supports learning and authentic accomplishment (p.27)." Critics have argued that by demanding higher standards we run the risk of losing students to early failure and discouragement. And some have also argued that greater standardization of the curriculum will be at the cost of lower-achieving students, who may well find tougher requirements in English or mathematics or science beyond their abilities or irrelevant to their future plans.

What these criticisms overlook is that A Nation at Risk did not argue or assume that a single standardized, comprehensive curriculum or a single educational experience would be right for all students. Nor did we assume that all students are the same. As a matter of fact, raising standards means that we have to pay

more attention than ever to the diversity of students in our classrooms. It may also mean that we must provide more resources for tutoring, for developing different kinds of curricular materials, and for tailoring courses and assignments to the special needs of individual students. But recognizing the fact of differing levels of accomplishment and ability among students does not mean lowering standards for any or for all. To expect less than the best from all of our students is to condemn them to the worst kind of intellectual impoverishment: diminished expectations, which lead to the failure to develop individual student talents and abilities to the fullest.

Some states and some localities have made strenuous efforts to pay attention to the differences among students while at the same time requiring high standards of performance--some states and localities, but not enough. This is one area in which we need more research and more information on what works and what doesn't. I hope the Federal government will take the lead in disseminating this kind of information among the states.

### Learning How to Learn

Another area that needs more attention is teaching students the skills of learning. There is a growing body of research that indicates these skills can be taught--that there are ways of teaching students habits, practices, and approaches that will help them to master not just a particular subject but whatever it

is they are trying to learn. Traditionally, our schools have tended to leave such matters to the imagination and resources of the students themselves. Schools of education have not done as much research in this area, it seems to me, as its importance warrants.

Obviously, it is up to states and local schools to decide which research is relevant and what works best for individual students and teachers. But the Federal government has an important role to play in supporting promising research and experiments and in disseminating the results. John Gardner has said that "The ultimate aim of the education system is to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education." One of the most effective ways we can do this is by helping our students learn how to learn. And it is within that context that the National Commission hoped our recommendations for improving the schools would be considered and implemented and what we called the "Learning Society" nurtured and encouraged.

#### The Centrality of Student Effort

The Commission also recognized that learning, despite its public aspects and its central importance to the public good, is essentially a private activity. All the good teachers and good programs and good intentions in the world can't make a student learn if he or she receives no encouragement at home, no stimulation to think and reflect, no direction about the importance of

studying regularly and studying hard. William Raspberry emphasized this point in a recent column in the Washington Post. "Learning is not a passive enterprise," he said. "It is not something that happens to you if you can get yourself into the right place. It is work. It may be relatively pleasant work for those lucky enough to love learning, but it is still work."<sup>1</sup> These words echo the conclusion of much educational research--that the single greatest factor in student academic achievement is student effort. That sounds like a truism, but it is surely relevant to education today--and all too often overlooked. Parents, teachers, school board members, governors, legislators, and government can help. They can't make learning happen. Only students can do that.

Schools across the country are beginning to recognize and to give appropriate rewards to academic success, but surely we can do more. If we can put the spotlight on athletically able youngsters, we can bring an equal measure of attention and praise to academically outstanding students as well. The mechanism can be as time-honored as a word of praise from a teacher or specialized homework assignments or as innovative as giving students a letter for academic achievement in the same way we give letters for athletic achievement. The point is that we must reinforce the usual kinds of encouragement with tangible evidence that we mean

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<sup>1</sup>Washington Post, September 16, 1985.

what we say. The school and home environment must both reflect the same message: learning is important and rewarding.

### A Learning Society

A Nation at Risk set as an overall goal of educational reform the creation of "a Learning Society." We defined this as a commitment for all to seek, and for education to offer, the opportunity "to stretch their minds to full capacity" through lifelong learning. The idea of a Learning Society is not simply idealistic; it is eminently practical. The nation needs skilled and educated people not only to meet the needs of our technological economy but also to make our complex democracy work through the creation of an informed citizenry. This in turn requires equal educational opportunity, high expectations of students, real opportunities for success and self-confidence, and appropriate support to face the challenges of schooling.

### Educational Leadership

So far, at least, most of the leadership in the educational reform movement has come from state legislatures, elected officials, and committed persons from within the educational community itself. Yet it is primarily the teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards who are responsible for implementing legislative initiatives. In some cases, unfortunately, the result has been conflict rather than mutual

understanding and cooperation; not all teachers and school administrators have welcomed the legislation dealing with schooling that has been enacted over the past few years.

To some extent, at least, this is not surprising; no one expected total agreement over so complicated a subject as schooling. But one aspect is troubling. The New York Times recently reported the results of a Harris Poll of teachers that indicated a majority--sixty-three percent of those polled--believed that their views were not sought in shaping educational reform. At the same time, forty-two percent also believed that recent moves towards improving education had had a positive effect on students. What this may reflect, it seems to me, is a willingness to accept change if it clearly helps students and a desire to participate more fully in shaping what those changes are. What happens in the future will be colored enormously by the alignment of trust, judgment, and attitudes of professional educators and of the public and legislators who are seeking change. Needless to say, the best interests of all of us lie in the direction of mutual assistance and cooperation. But this is yet another aspect of the current reform movement that will need care, sensitivity, and attention.

### The Federal Response

The National Commission assumed that, given the decentralized nature of our school system, primary responsibility for change



lay with state and local jurisdictions. And that is, as I have mentioned, the place where change has principally taken place. All of which is as it should be.

But we also envisioned a role for the Federal government. We tried to be explicit about that role in Recommendation E of A Nation at Risk:

The Federal Government, in cooperation with States and localities, should help meet the needs of key groups of students such as the gifted and talented, the socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority and language minority students, and the handicapped . . . . In addition, we believe the Federal Government's role includes several functions of national consequence that States and localities alone are unlikely to be able to meet: protecting constitutional and civil rights for students and school personnel; collecting data, statistics, and information about education generally; supporting curriculum improvement and research on teaching, learning, and the management of schools; supporting teacher training in areas of critical shortages or key national needs; and providing student financial assistance and research and graduate training. We believe the assistance of the Federal government should be provided with a minimum of administrative burden and intrusiveness.

Finally, we concluded, "The Federal Government has the primary responsibility to identify the national interest in education . . . . It must provide the national leadership to ensure that the Nation's public and private resources are marshaled to address the issues discussed in this report (pp.32-33)."

Now that states and local jurisdictions have acted, now that it is clear from the national response to the education reports that major change is an important national priority, this is an especially appropriate time for those in the Federal government to think about how programmatic initiatives at the Federal level can complement and reinforce the educational reform movement. I note recent efforts by the Department of Education to make the results of educational research more easily available to professional educators and to policy makers. Given the momentum that has been built up by the education reform movement--and I believe it is altogether fair and accurate to say that much of the impetus for this can be attributed to the tireless work of former Secretary of Education T.H. Bell and the vigorous personal involvement and participation of President Reagan--given that momentum, buttressed by the longstanding commitment you and your colleagues in the Congress have to help improve education in our country, systematic and complementary programmatic initiatives by the Federal government now will have a far greater impact than they could have had even two years ago. The Congress and the President now have a special opportunity to build on what has already been accomplished across the nation. I urge the Federal

government to move actively and confidently both to assure the reform movement's continuing success and to play its complementary role with a freshness of spirit and sense of excitement fitted to this historic opportunity.

### Looking Ahead

In thinking about the future of educational reform in this country, one issue seems to me of paramount importance, and it is with this question that I would like to conclude. Can we sustain the momentum for change that has been created in the past few years? The educational reform movement in the United States is at a turning point. We have accomplished a great deal in the first flush of enthusiasm. What remains now is to incorporate reform as a lasting element in our school system, and that takes time, patience, and commitment. It will require that we change some attitudes and expectations. Can we move from the assumption that educational reform is something we do every twenty-five years to the conviction that it is, and ought to be, a continuing effort? If we can't do that, then, at the least, we need five more years of sustained effort--the minimum, in my opinion, for lasting reform to take hold. We need to ask ourselves: Can we summon the energy and the interest to follow through on so many promising beginnings? A central message of A Nation at Risk was that if we truly care about our society, our economy, our future as a country and as a free people, we will find a way to do so.

I deeply appreciate your attention and will be pleased to respond to questions.