

# Editorial

## Secretary resigns, education left vulnerable

Terrel H. Bell, U.S. education secretary, has done a commendable job. He has consistently fought for higher quality education. He recently announced that he will resign Dec. 31. He will be sorely missed.

Although President Reagan wanted to dismantle the Department of Education, Bell kept it together, and protected education from deep cuts as well.

In the Nov. 21 Chronicle of Higher Education, several education officials expressed dismay at Bell's resignation and said they fear his successor will not be as staunch an advocate of education. Even if the new secretary is as adamant

about quality of education, he or she may be appointed too late to have an effect on the 1986 fiscal budget.

"We're feeling a little more sorry than we ever expected at his departure, and a little apprehensive about what may be coming," said William McNamara, director of communications for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. "I don't think we can envision right now a person who is more responsive or sensitive to our pleadings for public policy," he said in the Chronicle article.

In addition to fighting for improvement in education and funds, Bell was a

motivating force behind "Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education," a report that urged more funding for and emphasis on liberal arts and of the danger of "over-specialized" majors without sufficient training in language or the arts. Bell supported the report's conclusions and had he stayed in office, he might have made an impact on the shape of education in the years to come.

At the top of Reagan's budget cut list, along with agriculture programs, is educational programs, including student loans. A strong America in the long run depends on quality education. We all must hope Congress knows that, and that

any proposed cuts in education programs are carefully reviewed.

Planned Parenthood reports that about 20 centers have been struck by fires and explosions in the last year. The attacks have culminated nationwide protests against family-planning centers and abortion clinics.

The central question in the abortion controversy is when does the fetus become a human being with the rights accorded humans? We'll probably never know the answer to that question, but we can safely say that these attacks are morally wrong and especially ironic.

## Politicians twist school prayer controversy

### Courts ignore history, lose logical reasoning

The trouble with bussing for the purposes of integration, or as its opponents would have it, forced bussing for the sake of miscegenation, is that the lie overwhelmed the truth. Politicians talked of bussing as if it was some sort of social experiment in which the courts decided, for no discernable reason, that it would be a good idea to bus kids half-way across town while their parents pulled their hair out in rage. That was the lie.



Richard Cohen

The truth was that the courts only ordered bussing as a last resort. They ordered it only after school boards and politicians had purposely segregated the school system, after they had built schools and drawn boundaries so that whites and blacks would not — no matter what the Constitution said — go to school together. That was when the courts stepped in. They ordered bussing when there was no other way to integrate a school system that had been purposely segregated in violation of the law.

Now we have something similar happening when it comes to school prayer. As with bussing, the issue has fallen into the hands of unscrupulous politicians who talk of taking God out of the classroom or some such nonsense. An example of that sort of thinking comes not from a politician, but from a cartoonist for the Tampa Tribune, Wayne Stayskal. For Thanksgiving, he showed a group of Pilgrims on the beach at Plymouth, being warned by a policeman that praying is not permitted: "Hey, no praying here... This is a public beach!" Even for a cartoonist, this is sheer nonsense, but it reflects the apparently widely held view that the courts have banished prayer.

This, of course, has been President Reagan's theme for some time now, and he has been as wrong on this as he was when he lectured Charlotte, N.C., on the evils of bussing, choosing a city where bussing works and works well. From time to time, the president cites the case of some school kid who is ordered not to pray and implies that this or something like it is the intent of the courts and the evil liberals at the ACLU who brought suit. It's possible that from time to time something like that does happen, but if it does it's because someone got the law wrong, not right. The president, of all people, ought to know that.

Like bussing, though, school prayer and the role of religion in general is discussed as if nothing preceded the controversy — as if there is no history to it. In the case of school prayer, there happens to be a history of kids being compelled to say prayers, of prayers organized by the school, of minority kids being made to feel unwelcome, pressured — different.



"HEY, NO PRAYING HERE... THIS IS A PUBLIC BEACH!"

It is approximately for these reasons that the courts told the schools to get out of the prayer business, saying that the Constitution forbids the government to either interfere with or promote religion. There is nothing in the decision that would stop some kid from praying on his or her own time. If there were, it would not only be outrageous, it would be unconstitutional.

As with bussing, the reason for the various court decisions regarding prayer has been lost. Truth has been overwhelmed by a lie. And politicians, from the president on down, discuss the prayer issue as if the courts, with nothing to do on a slow day, decided to monkey with religion. That's cheap politics, of course, but it's something worse than that. It's yet another example of that lowest of low blows: Blaming the victim.

In the case of bussing, organizations like the NAACP who for years have been fighting school segregation get blamed when their opponents' intransigence finally compels a bussing order. In other words, those who only insist that the law be obeyed get blamed for a remedy forced on the courts by those who broke the law in the first place.

In school prayer, it works pretty much the same way. Those who wanted only to protect the rights of kids who either did not want to pray or did not like the wording of the particular prayer are

being blamed for kicking God out of school and for banning prayer everywhere — from New England beaches to the hallways of America's schools.

Thanks to political expediency, things get turned upside down. In both bussing and school prayer, the majority is made out to be the victim, and the real victim, the minority, is made to appear the oppressor. That's precisely what the majority wants to hear and that is precisely what it gets told by many politicians. They know where the votes are. It's their conscience they've misplaced.

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