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Do we need federal aid for education?

Strom Thurmond
"Do We Need Federal Aid for Education?"

Senator Clifford P. Case
Republican of New Jersey

and

Senator Strom Thurmond
Democrat of South Carolina

Stephen McCormick
Moderator
The Announcer: Freedom of discussion. The freedom of all Americans to hear all sides of important issues and decide accordingly.

The National Broadcasting Company presents America’s leading discussion program, founded and produced by Theodore Granik, THE AMERICAN FORUM.

Today, THE AMERICAN FORUM presents another timely discussion of importance to you: “Do We Need Federal Aid For Education?”

And here to introduce our speakers is your moderator, Stephen McCormick.

Mr. McCormick: One issue of vital concern to all Americans is the need for adequate educational facilities for our youth. Many of you remember the little one-room school house of bygone days with the old pot-bellied stove, the hard benches and the dreary interior as contrasted with the bright, cheery class rooms of today where learning is no longer a chore but a pleasure under ideal conditions.

But despite the number of modern schools being built throughout the country there still exists a serious shortage of class rooms. President Eisenhower has proposed a three and a quarter billion dollar program to aid the states in solving this critical problem, but there is serious congressional opposition to this program.

Today we are pleased to have on THE AMERICAN FORUM, Senator Clifford Case, Republican of New Jersey, and Senator J. Strom Thurmond, Democrat of South Carolina, to discuss the need of Federal aid for school construction.

Well, gentlemen, let’s begin with this question: Does Federal aid to schools also mean Federal control.

Senator Case, how do you feel?

SENATOR CASE: It is very clear, Steve, that the proposal that the Administration made and indeed the bill the House Subcommittee has approved would not mean Federal control.

Mr. McCormick: Senator Thurmond, how do you feel, sir?

SENATOR THURMOND: Federal aid does lead to Federal control and it is inevitable that this would do so.

Mr. McCormick: Do you feel that it will eventually work its way in or that it will work its way in immediately, Senator?

SENATOR THURMOND: I think if this program should be adopted it will be an entering wedge and later on there will be a demand for Federal aid for teachers’ salaries and then when that comes, there will be a demand for the Federal Government to prescribe the curriculum. Then that means control of the schools and that is the way dictatorships arise.

SENATOR CASE: Well, of course, if we had Federal control of curricula we would have Federal control and that is what none of us want.

I don’t share Senator Thurmond’s fear about this, at all. We have had a history of Federal aid, as a matter of fact, in this country to education and very directly. It goes back to the land grant college acts of the middle 1800’s and the $18 billion that was spent for the GI bill of rights led to no Federal control whatever and most partic-
ularly our experience in the last few years with spending some $1.2 billion or 3, for Federal aid to school districts—we are talking now about elementary schools and high schools, where the need for assistance comes about because of Federal activities, has been spent without any vestage of Federal control and I am sure that is the experience that you, Senator Thurmond, have had in South Carolina, where some $20 million has been received and spent in this Federally impacted program.

Mr. McCormick: Are you convinced, Senator Thurmond?

SENATOR THURMOND: No, I am not convinced at all. In the impacted areas, that is one area in which we do have Federal grants, to date. For instance, like Army camps or an atomic energy area, something like that where the Government comes in with an unusual number of employees or civilians come in to be employed there and it is impossible for the local community to take care of the situation.

Now there are specialized programs like agriculture and industrial programs that also fall in that category and then there are selected programs like school lunches, but all of these together constitute only three percent of the education budget, today. The states are now bearing 40 percent, the local communities 57 percent and the Federal Government only three percent. Those are particularly specialized programs and they would be entirely different from general aid to education.

SENATOR CASE: Well, I can see your point, if the Federal assistance to education ever got to be a very substantial part of the total education budget, then indeed, we would have a question as to whether if we are giving that much money toward education, we in Congress wouldn’t have a responsibility to see how it was spent and none of us wants that, of course.

But we are not talking about anything like that, we are talking about something in the range of the amount spent in the last few years in this Federal impacted program. As I said a billion two or three has been spent and it is proposed under the President’s program to spend a billion three for this construction bill we are talking about and the bill the House Subcommittee approved, of only $2 billion. A very small part and yet an essential part to take care of the backlog of need that has arisen and to give stimulus to the states, particularly those states and the areas in all states which are unable to meet the need, not eventually because all states can do it eventually but the problem is getting it done now rather than 10 or 15 years from now when three or four or five generations of school kids will have passed through inadequate schooling.

SENATOR THURMOND: Even with those programs there was Federal control. There were regulations. For instance, under the Smith-Hughes Act which was passed in 1917, there is a book, today, of 108 pages of regulations. Each state is required to submit a plan that must meet with the approval of the Office of Education in Washington.

SENATOR CASE: I don’t agree with that.

SENATOR THURMOND: Isn’t that Federal control?

SENATOR CASE: It borders on it but this is not what we are talking about, Senator. We are talking about a plan in which the
plan for the states will be presented to the Federal Government, moneys allotted in accordance with the simple provisions of the bill, Federal control ends except for the auditing. That is different.

SENATOR THURMOND: It may be very simple, but I have never seen anything simple with the Federal Government and anywhere the Federal Government puts money I think they are going to control. For instance, in the 1956 highway act, the Secretary of Labor, there, is empowered to fix wage scales.

You are familiar with the Supreme Court decision in 1942 in the Wickard vs. Filburn Case in which this was said:

"It is hardly lack of due process for Government to regulate that which it subsidizes."

In other words, if the Government subsidizes it, they will have the right to regulate. I am bitterly opposed to that.

Then, right here in Maryland, the Maryland officials are not permitted to build certain kinds of class rooms for certain people the way the local officials want it done.

Congressman Hyde brought that out in March 1957. The Federal Government stepped in and gave them directions as to what they could do.

SENATOR CASE: This is the Federally impacted program you are talking about, Senator Thurmond?

SENATOR THURMOND: It was a similar program to that.

It was a special program you had there and they said they would have to build certain facilities when the local people desired other facilities.

SENATOR CASE: This is plain money to the states for their programs of building school facilities.

SENATOR THURMOND: That is the typical argument that has been used to get these programs before, but it doesn't work out that way. And furthermore, the states haven't asked for it. Why do you want to give the states something when they don't want it?

Congressman Gwinn, a member of the House Education Subcommittee, said on March 11, 1957, that no Government, no legislature and no school board had come forward asking for Federal aid to date and he said that—

SENATOR CASE: I agree that that is probably true. I don't know of any case as a matter of fact, except where you have a program already instituted as for aid to the drought areas, under a plan already established, where a Governor of a State ever comes to Washington or a state legislature ever comes hat in hand.

What we have had here though is a very careful survey made at the instance of the Federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare, in which all the state officials of all the states in charge of schools answered these questions as to the need in their states for new school class rooms. Last fall they produced this data on which the House Committee has finally acted, that 159,000 class rooms are needed to take up the slack, and they gave much evidence of the need of the overcrowding in their school systems all over the country. These were state officials who made this survey.
Mr. McCormick: Do you label that an emergency, Senator Case? Is this an emergency program?

Senator Case: I think it should be regarded as an emergency, and the emergency it is very clear how it came out. We had a long period of war following a period of depression and we have had an unprecedented period in which people have moved from place to place in this country. I know that the Bureau of the Census said yesterday over 20 percent of the people moved in one year and this has created chaos in local school districts.

Mr. McCormick: Is there an emergency, Senator Thurmond?

Senator Thurmond: There is no emergency at all. The Health, Education and Welfare Department in 1953 said there was a shortage of 340,000 class rooms. Now, the same Health, Education and Welfare Department collected these figures that you are speaking of, 159,000 class rooms shortage in 1956.

In other words, the shortage has been reduced from 340,000 in 1953, to 159,000 in 1956 in a three-year period, which is a 57 percent reduction. Just give the States 2 to 3 years longer and they will finish the job, so where is the emergency?

Senator Case: That sounds very much like the arguments or some of them, that the chambers of commerce have made.

If these two figures were on the same basis and if they were talking about the same thing, there would be great sense in the argument, but they were not. In the early survey to which you referred with some 300,000 coming back to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, that was based not upon absolute need, but upon the desirability and this figure of 159,000 was a bare-boned essential that we are talking about. The figures were not comparable at all.

Everyone is agreed, all the figures that I have seen prove that while the states have done a tremendous job and I include very well your own state of South Carolina in the enormous effort it has made in building schools in the last few years, still they have barely kept up with current needs and current increases in population and all the rest of it, and they haven’t made a bit of a dent on this backlog caused by the depression, the war, and the extra business of moving that the American people have now come to have as their habit of life.

Senator Thurmond: Of the 159,000 rooms you spoke of, of course, half of those are in existence. They just said they were inadequate. But, anyway, suppose we take the 159,000. That is only less than half of what the shortage was estimated in 1953.

Senator Case: But on a different basis.

Senator Thurmond: That is what the bankers association said and they testified before the House Education Committee and they had the figures to back it up and it was uncontradicted, that the local officials have already made plans, now, to build 165,800 rooms which is 6800 more rooms than the alleged shortage of 159,000.

In other words, 6800 rooms have already been planned for, more than the shortage to date and these can be built within 2 or 3 years so why throw the Federal Government into the job?

Senator Case: That would be a very fine thing if the states could
actually do this, but the point is that over all this period, with this extraordinary effort they haven’t been able to make a bit of a dent on this backlog and the kids are going to school, 880,000 of them are going to school part-time. Two million three are going to school in overcrowded conditions. In addition to this, an equal number, about 79,000 class rooms are inadequate and unsafe. Now, why not solve the problem now instead of waiting for generations of school kids to pass through these inadequate facilities. That is the point and that is why it is an emergency. I am not arguing and most of the people for this program are not arguing for permanent Federal aid to education, certainly the President doesn’t want it, but time after time people who don’t want this kind of program, if they don’t have to have it, have come around and said they do.

Marion Folsom, the Secretary, here, was on a commission that didn’t like the Federal assistance, but when he met the problem he said it was necessary.

Mr. McCormick: You don’t agree on control and you don’t agree on the emergency. How do you feel about the cost of it?

Would the Federal aid to schools mean in reality that the wealthy states support the less wealthy states? Would you say that were true, Senator Thurmond?

Senator Thurmond: I would say they would send money to Washington, they would send a dollar there and get about 60 cents back, that is true, so the wealthier states might break even in the end, but that is not the question. There are bigger principles than that. There is a terrific principle involved here.

The field of education—

Mr. McCormick: Let Senator Case answer one question.

Senator Case: You don’t mean 40 percent of this money is going to be held in Washington, do you?

Senator Thurmond: That is the estimate of money that comes to Washington and goes through the wringer here and when the Government agencies get through with it here it is estimated that from a third to 40 percent gets back to the states.

Senator Case: I didn’t mean to interrupt your discussion of the bigger point you started on, but I did feel we shouldn’t leave this erroneous impression stand without clearing it up. This question of how much money sticks in Washington instead of being put to the use it is intended for when raised, is something there has been an awful lot of confusion about so this Commission on Intergovernmental Relations had a study made. Out of all the Federal aid programs, 25 of them, it was shown that 1.4 percent of the money was spent in Washington for administrative purposes. And Secretary Folsom has estimated that the cost of administering this money under the Administration bill or under the House Committee bill either one, would amount to about two-tenths of one percent, all for the purpose of seeing that the thing was properly handled. Two-tenths of one percent, not 30 or 40 percent.

Senator Thurmond: I want to read what your President’s Commission on Inter-governmental Relations said since you brought that up: SIX
"The Commission recommends that responsibility for providing general public education continues to rest squarely upon the states and their political subdivisions. The Commission does not recommend a general program of federal financial assistance to elementary and secondary education, believing that the states have the capacity to meet their educational requirements."

That commission itself said the states have the capacity to meet it. Now it went further and said that if any aid is to be given it should be only of a temporary nature and then only where the need is shown.

**SENATOR CASE:** Well, I think you have almost fairly summarized it. It goes on to say:

"However, when a clear factual showing of need and lack of resources, it is demonstrated that one or more states don’t have adequate tax resources to support an adequate school program, the National Government through some appropriate means would be justified in assisting such states temporarily in financing the construction of school facilities."

This is exactly the point we are at. Secretary Folsom is a member of that commission. He signed this report and after having looked at the need decided it existed and now recommends it most strongly.

**SENATOR THURMOND:** That was his department which in 1953 said there was a shortage of 340,000 classrooms and last fall it was estimated at 159,000 and therefore there has been a reduction in the shortage of 57 percent.

**SENATOR CASE:** No, there hasn’t been. I thought we covered this ground, that in the earlier figure they were talking about what was desirable in a perfect situation. In the later figure they were talking about absolute bedrock definite needs and there was no making up of any shortage. It was entirely a different kind of standard that was being applied in the two times. No shortage has been made up, at all.

Everyone understands and everyone agrees that years of depression have left this shortage and that the efforts of the states thus far, though they have been very great—and I include yours, of course, among them—have not caught up beyond catching up with current needs and have made no dent, at all, upon the backlog.

**SENATOR THURMOND:** There is no question but what the states have and can do the job. They have reduced the need 57 percent in three years and can reduce it more in three years and catch up in my opinion.

And besides, with the plans being made to construct 185,000 more rooms it will more than offset the deficit. I think it is clear it is not needed and it would be a great mistake to enter into it.

Furthermore, I want to say this: The states are more able than the federal government. Our federal government owes more money than all the nations in the world put together. Our federal debt, today, is $275 billion. For the last twenty-five years, we have had a deficit for twenty-one of those years. The states are in much better shape than the federal government.
In 1932, the federal taxes amounted to only one-third of the total taxes. Today, they are seven times as much as the state and local taxes.

The federal government is in terrible shape, today, as you well know.

**Senator Case:** No, I don't agree the federal government is in terrible shape. Of course we have a big budget and of course we have high federal taxes, but the reason isn't welfare payments, the reason is the burden of saving this country and the world from destruction and anybody who doesn't recognize that isn't facing the facts of life.

Now the federal budget is high, but I want to point out this, for the last three years it has been stabilized at twenty percent of the national income. Before that in 1953 it was 25 percent, in 1954, 23 and in 1955, 21. The high point, of course, was at the end of the war in 1945 when it was 53 percent.

We are not bleeding to death. It is an extraordinary thing but this country is more prosperous than it has ever been and so is every person in it. I am among the first to say we shouldn't waste a nickel. The President says himself, that any money spent for schools and school kids, where it is necessary, is spent on the highest priority. We can't afford not to do this kind of thing. You don't argue yourself the money should not be spent. You argue, I assume, that the money should only be spent by the states and then the question comes whether the states and local communities can do it. They have proven that they haven't done it.

**Senator Thurmond:** I am a strong believer in schools, I am a former school teacher and former school superintendent. No one believes more in schools than I do, but it would be a terrible mistake for the federal government to go into this program because eventually without any question it will lead to federal control of the schools and it will cause us to go terribly in debt to a greater extent than we are now and besides it is not necessary, the states are meeting their responsibilities and so why inaugurate at this time when the people are crying for economy, a new program that is going to lead to billions and billions of dollars?

**Senator Case:** Senator Thurmond, in the first place, included in this year's budget, which is in balance and has a surplus, is the provision for the first year's payments under this program. So we are not going to go in debt for this program. Don't you agree that it is necessary money be spent and it isn't just a question of who spends it? I assume that we have agreement on that. I assume you don't think we have an adequate supply of schools because if you do you are almost the only person I have ever talked to who thinks that our schools are adequate, now.

**Senator Thurmond:** What right has the federal government in the educational field, anyway? Under the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution, the federal government has only those powers which are specifically delegated to it by the states in the Constitution. The word Education is not even mentioned in the United States Constitution. What right has the federal government to enter into this field? The field of education is reserved to the states.
And furthermore—

SENATOR CASE: Would you have opposed the Land Grant College provision, the GI Bill, would you have opposed the aid to this impacted area? I don't think you would, Senator Thurmond.

SENATOR THURMOND: If the Federal Government had not put on high taxes and left those taxes back with the states, the states could have done the job and done it much better and much cheaper than the federal government can do it. You and I were not here, at that time and we are looking now retrospectively.

SENATOR CASE: You were in your state and I was in mine.

SENATOR THURMOND: I am convinced the states could do the job much better, I am convinced they could do this construction job much better and they should be allowed to do this job.

SENATOR CASE: They will do it under this bill. The federal government won't build the schools, the federal government only allocates the funds and the states build the schools themselves, just as they have always done it.

Now I would like to say a word about your point on the tax burden, here. By and large the states raise their money either one of two ways, either property taxes or sales taxes. Both kinds of taxes bear most heavily on the little guy—the person of relatively small income, whereas the federal tax is largely the income tax and is paid progressively by the people most able to pay it, and so the tax burden here under a federal aid program will be borne by the people who can pay it and not added to already overburdened people in the states. I would like to point out in this connection, it isn't only the question of school buildings that is involved, here, it is a question of using state resources that are vitally needed for other things, and particularly for aid to current education.

And until we have made up a better national average than $4,220 for school teacher's salaries over the country as a whole, we had better not say the states are in a position to take on this added burden of meeting this backlog of school construction.

SENATOR THURMOND: Do you agree the federal government has run a deficit for twenty-one out of the last twenty-five years?

SENATOR CASE: I assume that your figures on this are right but that deficit hasn't occurred in the last four years under this present administration. It isn't occurring even though in this year's budget there is a provision for aid to education.

SENATOR THURMOND: I suppose you are familiar with the fact that today we have the highest per capita income in the history of the United States?

SENATOR CASE: Yes, we do.

SENATOR THURMOND: We have the fullest employment and the highest standard of living and that this is an unusual situation or period in which we are living now and that it is not a normal period, and you of course fully know that we cannot count upon the income of this country being as great year in and year out as it is now.

SENATOR THURMOND: I will say that it is going to increase and continue to increase because we are in a period of high income and high employment forever, I believe.
Mr. McCormick: Money, of course, leads to construction which you have mentioned several times. I would like to ask you this question: In a very interesting book now out called “Work Place for Learning”—Lawrence B. Perkins wrote it—it is a book of pictures and a text on new school buildings. He has pictures of schools such as this one.

If you will just take a look at that school, it is a rather good looking one, wouldn’t you say? Is this the kind of school construction you are talking about?

Senator Thurmond: That is the kind the states are now building and if they are let alone they will build the rest of them like that.

Senator Case: I would leave this as Senator Thurmond would, entirely up to the states to decide what is the most desirable thing. I would think this very luxurious layout is hardly typical. It is probably a desirable thing for all of us to shoot at, but that isn’t the point. The point is the states should decide this, they will spend the money under the proposed program as they have in the past.

Senator Thurmond: I will not say that is typical, but certainly they have built magnificent schools and the states are meeting their obligations and they should not be interfered with.

Senator Case: They are attempting to meet them, but they are not succeeding.

Senator Thurmond: With regard to why it costs the Federal Government more to do jobs, California asked for $852 per pupil in an impacted area. The Federal Government allowed $1420. Mississippi asked $682 per pupil and they were given $1040.

Mr. McCormick: Who decides these things?

Senator Case: That is under the Federally impacted school program.

Senator Thurmond: It is under the Federally impacted school program and it is typical of the way the Federal Government does business. It costs the Federal Government 2 or 3 times as much to do anything as it does anybody else.

Senator Case: Even under the Federally impacted school program, there is a certain amount of discretion as to how much a school district should get in the way of Federal assistance.

Under the bills now pending for aid to school construction there is no discretion whatever. It is entirely mathematical formula and things of that sort couldn’t happen. Now, whether in those particular cases it was justified, whether it was desirable to build more adequate facilities than the local people wanted to build and the Federal Government thought “If you are going to put anything in, it ought to be put in right.” I don’t know, but I say there is discretion under that legislation and none herein, in the federal government.

Mr. McCormick: Is the big question here, do you want guarantee of no control, Senator? If you get a guarantee from Congress, will you go along with this thing?

Senator Thurmond: My position is first that the Congress has no jurisdiction in the field of education. As I said, the word “education” is not to be found in the Constitution. The Federal Government
can only operate in fields where it has been specifically delegated the authority to do so in the Constitution.

My next position is that it will lead to Federal control, and my next position is that the states are meeting their responsibilities and have not asked for this aid. And the taxpayers furthermore want economy and now is no time to be launching on new programs.

SENATOR CASE: I would like to take those things point by point.

In the first place, Federal control is not involved here. The only thing that will give us Federal control is if the people want it and if there is one thing clear in the United States history at the present time, and I am sure for all time to come is that the people want their schools controlled at home and that no paper provision—and I am not belittling the Constitution or no provision in law or anything we may say in Congress or anything else is going to stop it, if they want it. If they don’t want it, then they will not get it.

Now, on your other point, that this is no time to be spending the money, I cannot believe that you don’t believe that these school facilities shouldn’t be built and if you do believe it, this essential need should be met now and not sometime in the hazy future so the kids for the next generations are going to be adequately taught.

SENATOR THURMOND: It will be met in the next two or three years because the plans are already under way now to build 6800 more rooms than the office of education says are needed and furthermore, I want to tell you what President Eisenhower said about this program on Federal aid to education in 1949 when he was President of Columbia University.

Mr. McCormick: You had better digest it, Senator, because we don’t have much time. Did he oppose it, or was he for it?

SENATOR THURMOND: At that time he was opposed to Federal aid for education.

SENATOR CASE: That was a different kind of a bill, Senator Thurmond.

Look, let me read what President Eisenhower said in his message to Congress. “Notwithstanding record-breaking state and local expenditures for education in recent years the nation is faced with a current shortage which they cannot meet.”

Mr. McCormick: I must interrupt, gentlemen, I am sorry, I wish we had more time.

Our guests today have been, and we thank them very much for a very interesting discussion, Senator Clifford Case, Republican of New Jersey, and Senator J. Strom Thurmond, Democrat of South Carolina.

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This is Steve McCormick bidding you good-by.


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