Is Federal Aid to Education Necessary?

SENATOR J. STROM THURMOND
Democrat, South Carolina

and

SENATOR JOSEPH S. CLARK
Democrat, Pennsylvania

THEODORE GRANIK
Moderator
The Announcer: This is American Forum of the Air. Meet Senator Strom Thurmond, Democrat of South Carolina.

SENATOR THURMOND: I am opposed to general federal aid to education. It is unconstitutional, unwise, and unnecessary.


SENATOR CLARK: I believe that additional federal aid to education is necessary for the well being and future prosperity of America.

The Announcer: Who will discuss "Is Federal Aid to Education Necessary?"

Here is the moderator of the AMERICAN FORUM OF THE AIR, Theodore Granik.

Mr. Granik: Will federal aid to education lead to eventual control of our schools by the government? Should the federal government subsidize the public school system? Are the states failing in their responsibility to provide an adequate education for our children? Where does this responsibility lie and what can we do that will improve our present school situation?

This crucial issue is currently under consideration in the United States Congress and is of vital concern to each and every one of us. The future of our nation rests with an informed and educated youth. How we can best achieve this will be discussed on the AMERICAN FORUM OF THE AIR. Won't you join us in this most provocative debate? Our discussion will begin after this important announcement.

Mr. Granik: Senator Thurmond, will federal aid to education lead to control of our schools by the government?

SENATOR THURMOND: I think it will definitely lead to federal control.

Mr. Granik: Senator Clark, will federal aid to education lead to control of our schools by the government?

SENATOR CLARK: I am sure it won't. My reasons for thinking so are that we have had federal aid to education ever since the Morrell Land Grant Act back in Civil War days. We have had rather substantial federal aid to education since World War II. In fact, well over a billion dollars of federal aid has been granted to educational institutions throughout the country in increasing amounts in connection with our defense program. This seems to me to prove that we are not in much danger of federal control.

Mr. Granik: Senator Thurmond, these are specialized programs and they have been in effect. However, I am certain that if we provide general federal aid to education that it will lead to federal control because wherever federal money goes, there goes federal control.

I don't think there is any question about it.

For instance, in 1917 during World War I, the Smith-Hughes Act was passed and it was to provide trained mechanics and so forth. Now, there is a book of federal regulations, 108 pages, and each state has to submit a plan. That plan has to be approved by the U.S. Office of Education. There in itself is federal control.

SENATOR CLARK: Well, of course, with the Murray-Metcalf bill which I am sponsoring, there is no such provision for the interference of the federal bureaucracy. In fact, the grants are made to the state agencies of the states.
educational systems to be used for one of two purposes: Increase in teachers' salaries or for school construction.

Within those broad grants of authority the states can do anything they want with the money and there are specific provisions in the act which prohibit federal control.

SENATOR THURMOND: That is what was said in the Smith-Hughes Act, but that is not the way it works out, because if the federal government puts money there, in fact it has an obligation to see that that money is properly spent.

For instance, in the 1956 Highway Act the Federal government will control the wages and the federal government will also control the location of the highways to a certain extent. At least it has to approve them.

So we know that when the federal government puts money somewhere, that means federal control.

SENATOR CLARK: This seems to me to be a question of judgment on which my good friend Strom and I are almost sure to disagree. I wonder if we couldn't get on with the discussion of the need a little bit.

I think the need is very great indeed. We have in my commonwealth of Pennsylvania, for example, 600 school projects stacked up on the shelf because there just isn't enough money in the state treasury and in the local school districts to provide for them. We have $550 million of need for school construction alone during the next two years. Our teachers' salaries are so low that we are unable to recruit enough teachers for our primary and secondary schools and this seems to me to be a good indication of the fact that the local school districts in the states just don't have the money to do the job.

Mr. Granik: Do you see that need, Senator Thurmond?

SENATOR THURMOND: I do not see the need and if the state of my good friend would impose an income tax like most other states, they probably have that money and not have to come to Washington with hat in hand and beg it.

Now, in 1951 the U.S. Office of Education made a survey of classrooms and in 1954 it made its report and said there was then a shortage of 370,000 classrooms; and also said at that time that five years later there would be a shortage of 470,000 classrooms. But six months later it revised those figures and said there is a shortage of only 176,000 classrooms, and in February of this year it revised them again and said there is a shortage of only 133,500 classrooms.

SENATOR CLARK: Well, the Senator is right. The shortage at the moment is about 135,000 classrooms, but that will continue at the rate of 75,000 additional classrooms needed each year.

Now, the basic fact we must remember is that there was twice as many babies born in America in 1956 as there were in 1936, and where are we going to put all those kids?

Might I answer something that he said a minute ago about Pennsylvania and an income tax?

The fact of the matter is, Senator, that you collect 72 per cent of all your taxes in South Carolina from sales tax and that is where
you get your major educational funds. You do, of course, have an income tax but it only provides nine per cent of your funds.

Now, my point is that sales taxes are a regressive and unfortunate way of raising the money for education because they bear far more heavily on the lower income families than they do on the wealthy.

SENATOR THURMOND: The states can meet this responsibility; they are meeting it.

For instance, enrollment in the last four years has increased 15 per cent. Classroom construction has increased 25 per cent. It has been estimated that during the next twelve years—that is from '57 to '69, there will be a need for classrooms averaging 55,800 a year. We are now constructing 70,000 classrooms a year, more than that average, and I am sure it will not be but a very short time until the states will meet all of the needed shortage in classrooms.

Mr. Granik: Do you think the states can do that, Senator Clark?

SENATOR CLARK: No, I am confident they can’t. I think my Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the figures I just gave is a pretty good example. That seems to me to be general throughout the country. We put over one billion dollars in Pennsylvania into state aid to education since World War II. We raised our taxes substantially; we are about to raise them again.

Many of our local school districts, because of our unemployment situation, are in drastic financial condition. This is true throughout the country generally. I just couldn't disagree with my good friend more.

SENATOR THURMOND: I am afraid my good friend favors injecting the federal government into almost everything, not only education but many other things. I believe he made a speech some time ago saying that he favored increased funds for national defense, foreign aid, housing, urban renewal, airports, water resources, atomic energy, area redevelopment, health and welfare, and unemployment compensation.

That is injecting the government into great expenditures for almost everything, and the field of education just seems to be one of those fields that my friend wants to go into in a larger degree.

SENATOR CLARK: The Senator is quite correct. I believe in a first-class America and I want to turn over to my children a first-class America and I don't see how we are going to do it unless we use the tax collecting system of the federal government.

I am also very much in favor of keeping up with Red Russia in the field of education as well as in the field of armament and general promotion of the economy.

We are just not going to be able to do it unless we step up the level of our effort.

SENATOR THURMOND: We are certainly not going to turn over a first-class America to our children if we leave them a heritage of insolvency. Our government has now reached a debt of $285 billion. We can't keep on like this. We must practice more economy and if
we follow the program of my distinguished friend, I submit that this country will become insolvent.

Mr. Granik: Does the program infringe upon the state administrations, Senator Clark? The federal bill or the bill you are sponsoring?

Senator Clark: No, it doesn't, as I said a little while ago, but let me go back to something Senator Thurmond said about the national debt and its relation to education.

Our national debt today is substantially less in relation to our gross national product than it was at the end of World War II and that is the vital fact. Nor need we spend ourselves into insolvency because if we closed existing tax loopholes, which are inequitable, and enforced the federal tax laws to prevent tax evasion, we could in my judgment raise the money for all of the programs which I have advocated and have a substantial surplus to apply in reduction to the national debt.

Senator Thurmond: The loopholes would only bring in a reasonable amount. Some of them should be closed, but we have the largest debt in history. We owe more money than all the countries in the world owe and we can't keep on like this and, furthermore, I want to quote to you what the President of the Association of American Colleges said:

"Whoever and whatever controls education controls all of life. Whoever seeks dictatorship starts with education. Let the federal government get control of the education field and this country will end up with a dictatorship."

Senator Clark: Well, of course, that seems to me to be as they say in the words of the popular song, "a foolish fancy." "All your fears are foolish fancies, baby."

Let me read what the United States Commissioner of Education, Lawrence Derthick, reported after inspecting the Soviet educational system last year:

"What we have seen," he said, "has amazed us in one outstanding particular. We were simply not prepared for the degree to which the USSR as a nation is committed to education as a means of national advancement. Unless we meet that commitment, we are going to fall behind. The brains of our boys and girls of America are our most priceless national asset and we must give them adequate training."

Senator Thurmond: I agree that we must have better education, but what we need is more education for dollars rather than more dollars for education.

The Russians don't spend nearly as much as we do. We spend more than Russia and almost as much as the rest of the world together on education.

Mr. Granik: Do you see any emergency need or any permanent need, Senator Thurmond?

Senator Thurmond: I think we need improvements in our education program, but I think the states can meet it. I think they are beginning to meet it. We are now beginning to teach foreign languages in the lower grades, which we didn't do. It is true that Russia
is training 40 times as many as we are in physics, 18 times as many in chemistry, four times as many in algebra, 15 times as many in trigonometry and eight times as many in foreign languages, but we are making headway and I am sure that we will soon reach the stage where Russia will not be ahead of us and our states can meet it.

SENATOR CLARK: We are not making headway nearly fast enough in my opinion. I wonder if we could turn for a minute to the question of teachers’ salaries?

You know down in South Carolina the average salary for a classroom teacher is $3250. In Pennsylvania it is $4681. The medium income of an American family today is somewhere between $5,000 and $6,000 so at the present time we are paying our teachers, both in Pennsylvania and in South Carolina, substantially less than the average or the median of an American family.

Now, that to me gives a rating to education which is almost disgraceful and I think we’ve just got to raise those teachers’ salaries if we are going to get decent people into the teaching profession. Not that we don’t have many good ones now, but we need more.

SENATOR THURMOND: I would tell the Senator that we have a state schedule of salaries, but our local district supplements the salaries to a great extent.

I would also remind the Senator that it doesn’t cost as much to live in South Carolina where we have so much sunshine and so many advantages as it might in some other states.

SENATOR CLARK: I was pointing out, Strom, that both of our states are in dereliction in this regard. I agree it costs more to live in Pennsylvania. We don’t pay our teachers anything nearly like enough either.

You know in Russia the professor is a character of great national esteem. In America we pay our teachers less than we do our truck drivers. This does not seem to me to be right.

SENATOR THURMOND: I think teachers should be paid more, but I think it should be done by the states and the local school district.

I would like to inquire of the Senator, is he favoring federal aid generally to go in to raise, or supplement salaries in education from all standpoints or does he just favor giving federal aid to the schools that need it?

SENATOR CLARK: Well, my point would be, Strom, that under the Murray-Metcalf bill which I favor, the grants would be made to the states by the federal government on a per-pupil basis for two purposes, one for classroom construction and second for teachers’ salaries and at that point it would be up to the state to decide what it wanted to do with the money.

They could either put it all in the classrooms, all into teachers’ salaries or in any proportion which they saw fit without any problem of interference at all.

Mr. Granik: How about personnel or formulation of policies, Senator Clark, who would determine it?

SENATOR CLARK: That would be up to the states.

SENATOR THURMOND: Those bills heretofore introduced said we
must raise the level of education in the states where it is not high enough. They based it on need. That was their point. That was the main point, the only point, practically.

But now my distinguished friend is getting away from that. He is deviating and now he says he wants federal aid to education for all purposes, not just to the states that need it, but to all states, the richest states, and he has completely reversed he field from the original design and intention of those who favored federal aid to education.

SENATOR CLARK: Well, the need is national and the remedy should, therefore, be national. The Murray-Metcalf bill has been thought out pretty hard over a number of years.

Mr. Granik: Is it based on need in any way, Senator?

SENATOR CLARK: It is based on per-pupil population and within each state the need is distributed by the state.

Now, in Pennsylvania we have very many poor school districts; we have several very rich ones. Our state aid program takes that into account and they would do the same thing.

Let me point out that the appropriation the first year would be $25 for each school child age—each child of school age.

SENATOR THURMOND: I am confident that such a program as my distinguished friend is recommending here will plunge the federal government into the general education field and we would have the biggest lobby in the United States. Some of these lobbies we have had heretofore would be infinitesimal. We would have every teacher writing his Senator and member of Congress to increase the amount so he would get a raise in salary. It would be a dangerous situation.

You would have the federal government dealing with the teachers; you would have the federal government controlling the schools and when you do that, then the federal government will say, "If we are going to put the money in there, we will prescribe the curriculum."

When it does that, you’ve got a dictatorship. That is the way Hitler and Mussolini arose in their countries.

SENATOR CLARK: Well, of course, I just don’t think that is true. This must be a matter of judgment, after all. But even if it were true, I would suggest the possibility that it would be the lesser of the evils of not giving our children a decent education.

Just as a matter of advancing western civilization, but in addition to that, keeping up the competition with Soviet Russia.

SENATOR THURMOND: In fact, the federal government has no business in the education field.

When the Constitution was written in 1787, the states or colonies, as they were then, delegated certain powers to the federal government. They reserved all other powers to themselves in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

The federal government today doesn’t have the power to enter a field unless it has been delegated to it by the states. The states have all the powers not delegated to the union.

We had states before we had a federal government and we must remember that, and education is not one field that has been dele-
gated to the federal government. Therefore, it is reserved to the states.

SENATOR CLARK: My friend is a very distinguished constitutional lawyer and his arguments might have been persuasive 25 or 30 years ago, but I think we have long passed that point and the general welfare clause of the Constitution has been interpreted many times as permitting federal intervention in these fields when the national interest requires it.

I don’t think we are going to turn the clock back the way my friend suggests.

SENATOR THURMONT: There is a way, if the federal government wants to go into the education, to do it. We can amend the Constitution in the manner provided in the Constitution to delegate the field of education to the federal government, but at present it doesn’t have the right to go into the field of education and it should not do so. It not only doesn’t have the constitutional right, but I think it is very unwise, as I said, and I think it would be one of the greatest mistakes this country has ever made to go into the field of general federal aid to education.

SENATOR CLARK: Strom, you are not seriously suggesting that federal aid to education is unconstitutional, are you?

SENATOR THURMONT: I am suggesting that the field of education has not been delegated to the federal government and just as the federal government has usurped the powers of the states in many other fields, it has usurped the powers of the states in the education field. They have done it on the pretense of emergency and in this government we have had one crisis after another. That has been the theory on which a lot of the do-gooders have gotten the federal government to enter these various fields. That is, that a crisis is existing, an emergency is existing.

SENATOR CLARK: If you will excuse me saying so, Strom, and I know you will because you are a good friend, I think you represent the voice of the past, I like to think that I represent the voice of the future, and let me point out to you that the definition of a do-gooder is a Christian. I know that you are a good Christian too.

SENATOR THURMONT: I am speaking of do-gooders as welfare staters and those for state socialism. I am opposed to state socialism. I believe in private enterprise. I believe that we have got to encourage private initiative. I think that we destroy local initiative when we plunge the federal government into the schools and let the federal government furnish the money and operate the schools, prescribe the curricula which they will eventually do—maybe not in a few years, but it won’t be too long if they put the money there, and I think that is a very dangerous thing to do.

Mr. Granik: Secretary Fleming has stated the Administration’s program protects state and local control. Do you feel that is so?

SENATOR THURMONT: I do not think it protects it because in all of these other instances where they said it would be controlled locally that has not been the case. Just as I cited with regard to the Smith-Hughes Act, they’ve got this book of 108 pages of regulations.
They've got to submit their plans, each state has, to the U. S. Office of Education.

The U. S. Office of Education has to approve those plans or they won't get the money.

SENATOR CLARK: Strom, after we strip everything you say down to its essentials, the end result of it is, it seems to me, that you want education to be paid by the lower income families of America and I want education to be paid for in part at least by those who have the capacity to pay.

As you know, the state tax systems are regressive. If you put the burden on the states and on the school districts the major burden is going to fall on real estate and on sales taxes and that bears three times as heavily on the people of this country. The federal income tax exacts——

SENATOR THURMOND: I don't——

SENATOR CLARK: Now, please don't break in. I didn't break in on you.

The federal government exacts three times as much out of families with an income of $10,000 a year or more in federal income tax than your South Carolina sales tax or our Pennsylvania sales tax exacts and I think that education should be paid for in large part by those who have the capacity to pay and you think it should be paid for by the lower income families of South Carolina and Pennsylvania and I couldn't disagree with you more.

SENATOR THURMOND: The Senator is completely erroneous; he is distorting the facts. He makes the point that the people who are able to pay should pay, and yet his own state doesn't have an income tax because people don't pay income taxes unless they are able to pay income taxes, and that is the big source of income for schools. It was our main source of income in South Carolina until we passed the sales tax in 1951. It is the main source of income in a great many other states. And then the distinguished Senator raises a point that those should pay—that the people who are able to pay should pay. Where does the money come from? Where does the federal money come from? Why it comes out of the people. Whether the states pay it into the state treasuries and is spent, or whether it is paid into the federal treasuries and is spent. The money comes from the people and it is just like taking the shirt off of a man's back and giving the shirt back to him. It all comes from the people.

SENATOR CLARK: Strom, I don't really mind your taking more time than I do because I think our audience is not going to agree with you, but I do want to point out that no matter what you say, 72 per cent of the taxes in South Carolina are raised by a sales tax and 57 per cent in Pennsylvania. And those two facts alone make me believe that we ought to have the federal income tax contributing to federal aid to education.

SENATOR THURMOND: Well, I am surprised that the Senator has a sales tax in Pennsylvania which he says hurts the little man and doesn't have an income tax because that is the group that is most able to pay. So I think the Senator has destroyed his own argument.
SENATOR CLARK: Do you want to know why we haven't got an income tax? It is because of our outmoded constitution of 1873 which won't permit it and the Republican party is 100 per cent against it and I know you are a good Democrat, as I am, and it has been the Republican party of Pennsylvania which has prevented us from having an income tax.

SENATOR THURMOND: Haven't you had a Democratic Governor in recent years?

SENATOR CLARK: We haven't been able to——

SENATOR THURMOND: And don't you have two United States Senators who are Democrats? Aren't you Democrats in control of your state government?

SENATOR CLARK: Certainly not. No, they are not.

SENATOR THURMOND: I am a Democrat too, but I am not going to blame things on some other party for which my own might be responsible.

SENATOR CLARK: Our Democrats have never been in charge of the Legislature and we can't get a constitutional amendment before the people unless it passes the Legislature twice in succession. It is the Republican party who is preventing an income tax in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Granik: Gentlemen, a recent Gallup Poll survey indicated the public wanted more money spent for education. Would you accept that opinion?

SENATOR THURMOND: I agree with that. I think there should be more spent but it should come from the states and the local districts just like Pennsylvania, which are able to pay it and other states which are able to pay it.

SENATOR CLARK: Well, the states just haven't got the capacity to pay and neither have the local school districts and these are facts which are universally admitted. Neither South Carolina nor Pennsylvania can afford the kind of educational appropriations which are necessary for a first-class America. I think almost everybody who has given serious study to the problem agrees with that.

SENATOR THURMOND: If the states can't pay it, where do they get their money from? The people. Well, if the people can't pay into the states, how are they going to pay into the federal government?

SENATOR CLARK: Well, Strom, that is just not true.

SENATOR THURMOND: In fact, it is more economical. I know you don't agree with me and you don't like this, but I am telling you what is true because I am confident that if the people can support the federal government with taxes, they can support the taxes in the states. And, furthermore, money paid into the states will bring you a bigger return. When it comes to Washington it goes through a wringer and you get only about 50 per cent back or a little more.

Mr. Granik: Gentlemen, let's take a brief moment for a summation by Senator Clark and a brief summation by Senator Thurmond.

SENATOR CLARK: Well, my feeling is that federal aid to education
in terms of the Murray-Metcalf bill is essential to the future prosperity of America.

First, because American’s are ambulatory; they move from state to state. We need their talents and skills all over the country—this is a national problem.

Secondly, because we are in competition with Soviet Union and we are not measuring up to them in terms of education.

Third, because the more schooling people have, the more they earn and the more they contribute to our national income and the greater and richer our country will be.

And finally and most important of all, because this is the only decent, compassionate, Christian thing to do.

SENATOR THURMOND: The Constitution doesn’t give authority for the federal government to operate in the education field. The word “education” is not even mentioned in the United States Constitution. Therefore, this field is reserved to the states and very wisely so, by our forefathers who wrote the Constitution.

And the next point, I am confident that federal aid will lead to federal control. Wherever federal money goes, there goes federal control. No one can deny that has been the case in the past with all of the federal programs.

And next, it is unnecessary. The states can do the job; they have been doing it and will continue to do it.

Mr. Granik: Thank you, Senator Thurmond, Democrat of South Carolina; Senator Clark, Democrat of Pennsylvania, for being our guest on the AMERICAN FORUM OF THE AIR. Now, this is Theodore Granik bidding you goodbye.

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