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Editorial Viewpoint: Education and Federal Legislation

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editorial viewpoint:

education and federal legislation

I am gratified by this opportunity to communicate with the readers of *Educational Considerations*. Education is a subject that is very close to my heart. I have dealt with it in many ways—as a student myself, a parent, the wife of a university administrator, and now as a member of the United States House of Representatives.

I believe that every individual has a right to the level of education that develops and utilizes the maximum capacities he or she possesses. This right should not be denied or infringed upon because of any conditions which differentiate among individuals: economic factors, physical, emotional or psychological handicaps, sex, race, age, creed or vocation. The ultimate goal of an educational system must be to assure that each person has access to and receives those educational services which best meet his or her personal needs.

All levels of government have a role to play in providing those services. Elementary and secondary education is the primary responsibility of local and state government, with the federal government playing an important supportive role. The federal government occupies the major role in higher education.

This year Congress will again examine the relationship of the federal government to higher education. The Higher Education Act of 1965, which was last amended in 1972, is scheduled to expire later this year. The House Education and Labor Committee will review this legislation in two steps. It will first consider the student assistance programs—college work-study, basic and supplemental opportunity grants, the guaranteed and direct student loan programs. Then it will consider the act's other programs—community services, developing institutions, extension programs, library programs—to name a few.

In addition to evaluating changes in the law, the Committee will exercise its oversight responsibility and examine closely the administration of the programs by the executive branch.

The other major education legislation to be considered by the Committee this year will be the extension of the Vocational Education Act of 1963.

Chairman Carl Perkins of the House Education and Labor Committee has already introduced several draft versions of this legislation which have been developed by groups involved in this field. Congressman Perkins wants a wide range of views presented to the Committee, so that the federal government will provide the most effective assistance possible in the overall areas of vocational, occupational and career education.

Another matter being considered by the Committee which is of interest to educators is the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). This legislation, a successor to the Manpower Development and Training Act, was passed just two years ago and is not up for extension. However, because of the recession, and the critical need for public service employment, hearings are being held to determine whether provisions of the law can be strengthened to meet our pressing economic problems.

CETA affects educational institutions in two ways: in training persons in new skills and occupations and in providing employment under the public service jobs program.

Overshadowing all of this legislation, however, is a more basic matter facing Congress—the continued attempt by the Administration to reduce federal funding for education.

President Ford wants to reduce fiscal year 1975 spending for education by \$286 million and defer an additional \$375 million in funding. In addition, he has asked for a cut of \$360 million in fiscal 1976 spending. Altogether, these proposals mean the President wants to postpone or eliminate more than \$1 billion in federal spending for education.

I strongly oppose his plans, and I believe that a majority of his proposals will be rejected by Congress.

Federal educational programs benefit not only the persons involved but also the nation as a whole, by increasing individual productivity. We need vocational and career education to provide persons with job skills, adult basic education to give fundamental language and mathematical skills to poorly-trained persons, compensatory education to bring disadvantaged students up to our overall standards, and student assistance programs to enable qualified but financially limited students to achieve their educational goals.

These programs, and others like them, are investments in the future. They are part of an essential commitment by the federal government to our educational system—a commitment to ourselves and our children. I pledge to work to make sure that commitment is honored. I ask for your help and for your advice.

Congresswoman Martha Keys