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News Analysis

Nixon Pledges Support for a
Nonpublic Education System

By W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--When a president of the United States makes a public policy speech, it is subject to careful analysis from every possible viewpoint. President Nixon's speech on nonpublic education before the National Catholic Educational Association in Philadelphia on April 6 is fertile soil in which the seeds of understanding can grow.

An understanding of such a speech must take into account political realities, personal convictions of the speaker, public policy trends, and the nature of the issues which are addressed. This analysis is a very brief discussion of some of these factors in the President's remarks to the Catholic educators.

For whatever it is worth, this is the second time Mr. Nixon has made major statements before Catholic audiences within a period of eight and one-half months. The first was on Aug. 17, 1971, before the international meeting of the Knights of Columbus in New York City.

The speech also occurred following a White House announcement that the President's schedule does not permit him to address the Southern Baptist Convention in Philadelphia in June.

Furthermore, the speech was made a month following the report of the President's Commission on School Finance. It was made about two weeks prior to the expected public release of the report of his Special Panel on Nonpublic Education, chaired by President Clarence Walton of the Catholic University of America.

Mr. Nixon explained to the Catholic educators why he wanted to speak to them--"to reaffirm the commitment I made last August when I said to the Knights of Columbus meeting in New York City, in your fight to save your schools, 'You can count on my support.'"

He also stated his broader objective by saying, "What we really seek in America is an educational free market." He explained this by saying that "nonpublic schools give parents the opportunity to send their children to institutions that they choose."

In other words, President Nixon is seeking a major change in the nation's educational system.

To support his objective, the President claims that the present educational system denies to many parents "freedom of choice" of the schools which they want their children to attend. This is the standard line that proponents of public aid to parochial schools have taken for many years.

The President charges the public education system with failure to provide quality education for the poor and for minority groups. He appears to think that public support for nonpublic schools would close this gap.

Mr. Nixon adds the charge that public schools have failed to provide the values of honor, of morality, of love of country and of religious faith. Nonpublic schools would fill this need, he seems to think.

Referring to nonpublic schools, the President said: "Children who attend these schools are offered a moral code by which to live. At a time when the trend in education is too often toward impersonal materialism, I believe America needs more, rather than less, emphasis on education which emphasizes moral, religious and spiritual values."

These are points that make it difficult to challenge Mr. Nixon's views on education. Too many people agree with him without getting at the root of the problems of the nation. He knows the mood of the nation and is responding to that mood.

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It has become popular in recent years to blame the public schools for many of the ills of the country. This has been accelerated by a revolt against rising taxes, by misrepresentation of Supreme Court decisions, by highly emotional race issues, and by the social upheavals that have beset the nation during the past decade.

We need to ask, however, whether or not major responsibility for causing and curing these ills rests elsewhere than on the public schools, as for instance the homes, the churches, the governments of the nation.

It needs to be pointed out that the President's Philadelphia speech to the Catholic educators was restrained in specific promises. While he was most emphatic in his pledge to design measures "to preserve the nonpublic school system in the United States," he was extremely cautious in specifics.

He warned the Catholics that his plans would require time, that quick solutions are not available. He said that his final recommendations must be equitable, workable and constitutional. All of these are high hurdles for him to overcome before he achieves his goals.

A major section of the President's speech dealt with the financial plight of nonpublic schools and with the effect on the nation if such schools were forced to close. Did he really intend to imply that without the nonpublic schools the nation cannot provide a public school education for all children? Does he mean to say that it would cost less to support two separate school systems than one good one?

Some contradictory elements in the President's speech are plain. He pointed out that nonpublic school enrollment has crested and is on the decline. Yet he proposes massive efforts to help such schools.

Mr. Nixon warns of impossible costs to provide public education for all if the nonpublic schools close. At the same time he said that "it would be misleading to suggest that Catholic education and nonpublic schools in general are about to disappear altogether."

Politically speaking, the President's drive for help for nonpublic schools looks like this. He pointed out that 70 per cent of the financial burden (in the event of the closing of the Catholic schools) would fall on seven states: California, New York, Illinois, Ohio, New Jersey, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

These states, it should be noted, provide a total of 202 votes in the Electoral College for the election of a president. Only 268 electoral votes are required to win the presidency.

If Mr. Nixon can win the electoral votes in these seven states, he will need to pick up only 66 more votes in the remaining 43 states to be re-elected.

With political support for the President running strong in non-Catholic states, it is little wonder that he is focusing major attention on capturing Catholic support this year.

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Baptist Men Named
To Jamaican Senate

4/11/72

KINGSTON, Jamaica (BP)--Two Baptists have been sworn into the Jamaican Senate here, and one was elected Senate president.

The two are C. S. Reid, president of the Jamaica Baptist Union and pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Montego Bay, and A. G. R. Byfield, an educator and a deacon of the Jonestown Baptist Church.

During the ceremony for swearing in the new members of Parliament, Byfield was elected president of the Senate.

The two men had been appointed by newly elected Prime Minister Michael Manly.

Reid said he interpreted his appointment as an opportunity to bring to Senate deliberations the insights of a churchman, and that it would be made clear that he was in no way representing any political party. On this understanding he accepted the appointment.

After taking the oath of allegiance as president of the Senate, Byfield said: "This is a great surprise to me, but I believe this nation expects under God the best of all of us in whatever capacity we may be called to serve. What we do now and in the coming years will be regarded by others as part of the history of our country."

"The appointments were the greatest honor to be conferred on Baptists since Jamaica gained her independence in 1962," said Southern Baptist Missionary Betty Carroll. "In the more than 150 years of witness in Jamaica, Baptists have played a major role in the abolition of slavery and beginning of education processes," she added.

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CORRECTION

In the Baptist Press mailing dated 4/10/72, please delete the -30- at the bottom of page 1. The story should continue from graph ending "to tell and write the truth" to the graph at top of page 2 beginning, "Another workshop speaker, John Howard Griffin..." Thanks. --Baptist Press

