Federal Aid for School Construction

REMARKS
OF
HON. JOHN L. MCCLELLAN
OF ARKANSAS
IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES
Wednesday, January 20, 1954

The bill (S. 2779) to provide for Federal financial assistance to the States in the construction of public and secondary elementary school facilities, and for other purposes, introduced by Mr. McCLELLAN (for himself and other Senators), was referred to the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare.

Mr. McCLELLAN. Mr. President, the need for raising educational standards and for equalizing educational opportunities for all our children throughout all areas of the country has long been recognized. All past efforts to have the Federal Government acknowledge a measure of responsibility in meeting this problem by making a financial contribution to the several States in aid to our educational system have failed. During the 11 years that I have been a Member of the United States Senate, three major bills designed to provide general Federal aid for education have been considered by, and have reached a vote in, the Senate. The first, on October 26, 1943, was, after lengthy debate, recommitted. The second was passed on April 1, 1948, by a vote of 58 to 22, and sent to the House of Representatives. The House took no action on it. The third passed the Senate on May 15, 1949, by a vote of 58 to 15, but, again, the House failed to act.

That record and history, I believe, precludes any reasonable hope or expectation of having in the foreseeable future for the enactment of general Federal aid for education legislation.

This bill, Mr. President, that I am introducing today and which I am happy to have cosponsored by those Senators to whom I have referred, is not a general Federal aid for education bill in the same scope and sense as were the previous measures to which I have referred. This bill is limited in purpose. It is limited to Federal financial assistance to the several States for the construction of public elementary and secondary school facilities. Not one dollar appropriated by the Congress under the authorization here proposed can be used to pay any part of the operating expenses of any school that would be or might hereafter become eligible for the assistance this measure will provide.

Yet its enactment will make possible considerably higher standards of education in many districts and areas throughout the United States. This would include, and in many localities assure, higher pay for teachers where local revenues are presently insufficient to provide both needed facilities and a higher standard of operation. Thus, while the bill provides only for direct financial assistance for the construction of school facilities, such assistance will substantially aid the States and the local school districts in providing a much improved school system.

Each State desiring to participate in this program would, among other things, be required to submit “a statewide public school construction program” setting forth “on the basis of a statewide inventory existing school facilities and a survey of the need for additional school facilities within such State.” The State plan would also have “to provide means whereby each school agency within the State shall have reasonable notice of the provisions of this act and opportunity to apply for a project grant or grants, and to be heard in support of such application, before the State plan is approved by the State agency for submission” to the Commissioner of Education of the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Such plan would further “prescribe the principles adopted for determining the relative priority of projects, and allotment of Federal and State funds to projects, included in such plans, taking into account (a) the relative urgency of the need within
the different areas of the State for additional school facilities and (b) the relative financial resources of the several school agencies within the State."

The bill further provides that "in any State in which separate school facilities are maintained for different racial groups, for equitable and nondiscriminatory priorities and for an equitable and nondiscriminatory apportionment of the Federal funds received under this act among such groups."

It therefore is the intent of this legislation to channel the Federal funds, or the major portion thereof, into States where the greatest need for assistance exists and also on down into the areas, localities, and particular school districts where additional school facilities are needed the most and where the local school revenues are presently inadequate to provide such facilities and at the same time to pay the operating costs essential to the maintaining of reasonably high educational standards.

To carry out that intent, the bill sets out a formula for the allocation of Federal appropriations to the several States. This formula is based on the number of school students and the per capita income of the State as compared to the average per capita income of the Nation.

That formula, or some formula very similar to it, must be used in any Federal aid for education law if we are to move toward the desired objective of providing equal educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of the State of their citizenship.

Possibly no formula yet suggested is perfect, but the one here used is workable and is substantially fair and equitable. It surely will operate to channel such Federal assistance as the Congress may be willing to authorize into those areas where school children are today confronted with substandard educational opportunities.

To show how this formula will work and how it will apply to the several States, I asked the Office of Education to prepare a table showing the amount that would be allocated to each State on the basis of each $100,000,000 appropriated annually.

Mr. McCLELLAN. Mr. President, based on the computation of the Office of Education as to how each $100 million will be distributed to the several States, I give as an example figures applying to my own State. Out of each $100 million appropriated, there would be allocated to Arkansas $2,298,620. To secure all of the funds allocated to it, the State of Arkansas, or its local school districts participating in the plan, would have to match that allocation with a total of $1,368,104. The use of Federal funds for any school project in Arkansas would have to be matched at that ratio. In other words, the State or local contribution is $37 for each $63 of Federal aid contributed. The percentage or ratio varies in the different States. Wealthier States with a much higher per capita income would, of course, contribute more and get less of Federal funds under the program.

Much of the opposition to previous bills designed to provide general Federal aid for education stemmed from a fear that Federal aid would open the door for Federal control and supervision of the public-school systems of the several States. Whether such fear was justified in relation to those measures was or is a matter of individual opinion. But there is no basis for such fear or for any anxiety of that nature with respect to the measure which I am introducing. It is patterned in principle after the Hill-Burton Act, which provides Federal aid for the construction of hospitals and mental institutions, and also after the law providing for Federal aid to highways. Those laws have been in operation for a number of years and they have thoroughly demonstrated that we can have Federal aid without Federal control or domination. The Federal Government exercises no control over the highways which Federal funds have helped construct. The Federal Government exercises no control, supervision, or authority over the operation of hospitals which have been constructed with Federal assistance under the Hill-Burton Act.

As a further safeguard, the bill provides that when any of the funds allotted to a State are paid into the State treasury they "become funds of the State to which it was paid." It further provides:

Except as specifically provided by this act, the office of the State, or any agency, office, employee of the State, or any private individual shall exercise any direction, supervision, or control over, or prescribe any requirements with respect to any State agency, school agency, or school to which any funds have been or may be paid under this act.

So, Mr. President, there cannot be, and there will not be, any Federal authority, control, or supervision of our public-school systems under the proposed legislation.

The need for this character of assistance is universally recognized. Candidate Eisenhower, speaking in Los Angeles on the 9th of October 1952, said:

"Another part of the task ahead concerns the conservation of our greatest asset: Our Nation's children. Part of this responsibility belongs to our schools.

American education is a living testimonial to the devotion, the intelligence, the deep concern, and sacrificial service for America's future on the part of tens of thousands of school teachers and school officials. Also laymen and women in thousands of communities have served and are serving the cause of education.

But here, again, we must frankly face the fact that, in too many places, we are not adequately meeting the school needs of America's children. More than 60 percent of all our public school classrooms are now seriously overcrowded. By 1958, it is estimated that our school system will have a shortage of 600,000 classrooms. This year 1,700,000 American boys and girls were without any school facilities."

The American answer is to do—In this field—what we have been doing for a long time in other fields.

We have helped the States build highways and local farm-to-market roads. We have provided Federal funds to help the States build hospitals and mental institutions.

Then, Mr. President, President Eisenhower, in his state of the Union message to the Congress on January 7, 1954, stated:

"Youth—our greatest resource—is being seriously neglected in a vital respect. The Nation as a whole is not preparing teachers or building schools fast enough to keep up with the increase in our population. The preparation of teachers as, indeed, the control and direction of public education policy, is a State and local responsibility. However, the Federal Government should stand ready to assist States which demonstrably cannot provide sufficient school buildings."

Mr. President, we, the sponsors of the bill, make no claim that it will provide an overall remedy for all of the deficiencies that may exist in our educational system, but it will stimulate and assist construction programs in areas and localities where there is an imperative need for additional and adequate school facilities—a need which cannot be met in any other way.
We recognize that buildings and facilities are not the only educational needs existing in many localities. Improved standards of operation, increased salaries for teachers, and other essentials are also urgent. While this measure does not authorize or permit the direct expenditure of Federal funds for those purposes, it will operate to free local revenues of many school districts from a large part of the future debt service obligations which they would have to incur for the construction of buildings, and the bill will make that part of their own funds available for meeting those other vital and essential needs.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I am glad to have had so many cosponsors of the bill. If enacted it will be sound, progressive, and constructive legislation. It appears to be consistent with the announced policy of the present administration, as indicated by the speeches of the President of the United States to which I have referred.

For the reasons I have given, Mr. President, I trust the bill will have the active support of each Member of the Senate, and that it may be passed at this session of the Congress.

(During the delivery of Mr. McCLELLAN's speech the following interruptions occurred, which, at his request, and by unanimous consent, were ordered to be printed at this point in the Record.)

Mr. HILL. Mr. President, will the Senator from Arkansas yield?

Mr. McCLELLAN. I yield.

Mr. HILL. Mr. President, I wish to commend the Senator from Arkansas on the introduction of the bill and to tell him how glad I am to join with him in its introduction. There is a crying need today for additional school buildings and additional school facilities of all kinds. As the Senator has stated today many children are being forced to attend schools where the classrooms are so crowded and congested that it is practically impossible for such children to obtain the adequate education they are entitled to receive. Today out of every 5 children attend a school which may well be termed a firetrap. Many children are being forced to go to classes held in basements, in attics, in hallways, in old warehouses and garages, in places of all kinds which are not at all fit to be used for school purposes.

The National Education Association and the United States Office of Education estimate that even if we continue to utilize the present old, inadequate, and poorly equipped buildings, we need at this time more than $5 billion worth of new construction to relieve the overcrowded conditions of schools.

So, Mr. President, I am, indeed, highly gratified that the Senator from Arkansas has taken this very timely occasion to present to the Senate a bill to help meet a compelling need.

Mr. HUMPHREY. Mr. President, will the Senator from Arkansas yield?

Mr. McCLELLAN. I yield.

Mr. HUMPHREY. I deeply appreciate the Senator's courtesy. I merely desire to commend him on his leadership in introducing this bill, and I should like to ask the Senator if I may join with the other distinguished cosponsors of the bill. I have long been interested in the Federal-aid-to-education program.

Mr. KEFAUVER. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. McCLELLAN. I am very happy to yield.

Mr. KEFAUVER. Mr. President, I wish to compliment the Senator from Arkansas for introducing the bill, and to say that I am very happy to have joined with him, a few days ago, as a cosponsor, because I have been interested in equalizing the educational opportunities of the young people of the Nation.

I am aware of the great need for school facilities in the State of Tennessee, at least.

I desire to ask the Senator from Arkansas if the formula provided in the bill is not substantially the same formula, of giving grants-in-aid to the States, as was contained in the bill for Federal aid to education which passed the Senate 4 or 5 years ago.

Mr. McCLELLAN. It is not the exact formula, but, in large measure, it follows the same pattern. As the Senator will observe from the table which I have made a part of the Record, and also from my remarks, the formula is designed, as I have said, to channel Federal funds, first, into the States where the need is the greatest; and then from the State level down into the districts and areas where school facilities are presently inadequate to meet the needs, and where the revenues of the districts are not adequate to provide for the physical facilities which are necessary, and also to permit the districts to have sufficient revenues of their own with which to operate a reasonably high standard of schools.

Mr. KEFAUVER. I am certain the Senator's formula has been worked out well to meet the needs. Certainly I hope there may be early action in the Senate on the Senator's bill.

Mr. McCLELLAN. I thank the Senator from Tennessee. I am most happy to have him joined as a cosponsor of the measure. I believe we shall find that it will enjoy popular support.

It is understood that the Federal Government cannot take over the whole burden of the educational system of the United States, but there has been much talk throughout the years of equalizing the opportunity of each child in the United States to receive an education, irrespective of his citizenship in a State. The bill is designed to go to the heart of the problem, and to begin that type of assistance which will help to raise the substandard educational facilities of some of our communities to a higher level of efficiency and a better system of education.

Mr. SYMINGTON. Mr. President, I may say to the distinguished senior Senator from Arkansas that in the short time I have had the honor of serving with him in the Senate, I have seen few bills which, in my opinion, should be more heartily endorsed for the good of the United States than this bill. I thank the Senator.

Mr. LONG. Mr. President, I desire to congratulate my friend and neighbor, the distinguished Senator from Arkansas, for the work he has done on the proposed legislation, and to wish him every success. The bill proposes to help meet one of the very desperate needs of the Nation, namely, adequate schoolroom and educational facilities for our children. I know such aid is needed in the State of Louisiana; I feel certain it is needed in Arkansas, and throughout the Nation generally.

Mr. KERR. Mr. President, I have joined with the Senator from Arkansas [Mr. McCLELLAN] and other Senators in the introduction of legislation to provide for Federal financial assistance to the States in the construction of public elementary and secondary school facilities, because I believe it is the best and perhaps the only way to insure that the public-school children of America have safe, decent, and adequate facilities in which to get an education. Every American child is entitled to an opportunity to do this, and the Federal Government has a responsibility to make an appropriate and equitable contribution toward it.
The legislation proposed by the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. McClellan), myself, and other Senators, to provide Federal financial assistance to the States for the construction of public elementary and secondary school facilities, is designed to accomplish the needed school construction through the joint efforts of the local school districts, the States, and the Federal Government, while at the same time leaving the complete management and control of the public schools at the local and State level. Under the provisions of the proposed legislation, each State will submit a plan of operation to carry out the purposes of the act within the State. Such plans coming from each State in the Nation will serve as a definite blueprint for action, and will be educational, in that each State may study the plans from the other States. Such a comparative study will serve to improve the operation in all States.