

First Suit This Fall Is Filed in the South Over Desegregation

WASHINGTON, Nov. 30 (AP)—The Nixon Administration filed today its first school desegregation suit in the South since the beginning of the current school year.

The suit was filed against the Valdosta, Ga., Board of Education, which was charged with refusing to carry out a voluntary plan for desegregating its elementary schools.

Attorney General John N. Mitchell said the suit had been filed in Federal District Court in Macon, Ga.

Although the Justice Department has filed several motions this fall against school districts already in desegregation litigation, the Valdosta suit was the

first to be initiated against a Southern school district that was allegedly in default on a voluntary desegregation plan.

The suit said the Valdosta Board of Education refused to implement the second phase of a two-step desegregation agreement submitted last August to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

The three elementary schools in the Valdosta system were desegregated in the school year that ended last spring.

The Valdosta district is one of 237 Southern districts that agreed to voluntary desegregation plans for this fall. There are 2,702 school districts in the 11 Deep South and border states, and 740 of them were to desegregate for the first time this fall.

The suit seeks a court order requiring the Board of Education to dismantle the allegedly dual elementary school system at once.

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Heavy Hand at Interior

Further depressing events in the Interior Department confirm the view that the recent firing of Secretary Hickel was essentially a blow at conservation and only incidentally the settling of a personal account. Hardly had the pilot been dropped when his last orders were countermanded and an Assistant Secretary dedicated to wildlife conservation made to walk the plank.

A cloud of confusion, not yet dissipated, surrounded the suspension of two of Mr. Hickel's excellent administrative orders, one to ban whale products from the American market and the other to prohibit billboards on Federal public lands. After a flurry of damaging publicity, the whale order seems to have gone into effect after all. But if the backing and filling can be attributed to the confusion that normally accompanies a change in management, the firing of Dr. Leslie L. Glasgow can be seen only as an anticonservation act, impure and simple.

Unlike most of the other department aides sent into exile with their chief, Dr. Glasgow was not a Hickel follower nor a political man of any kind. He was a mild-mannered scientist whose prime offense, it seems, was to speak out against the oil companies that were despoiling the coastal waters of his native Louisiana.

Less important only than the purpose of the ousting of Dr. Glasgow was the insulting manner in which all the firings were executed. To send an unknown White House aide in his twenties to dispatch a body of public servants including an Assistant Secretary and a Commissioner was bad enough. To empower him to order them "out of the building by 5 o'clock" was the sort of crudity one might have expected in a county courthouse of another era, not in Washington today. If the Nixon Administration suffers from frequent comparisons of its political life-style with that of its predecessors, the delicacy of its touch in the Department of the Interior will help to explain why.