

Text of President's Statement

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Following is the text of a radio and television statement by President Nixon on education opportunity and busing:

Tonight I want to talk to you about one of the most difficult issues of our time. The issue of busing.

Across the nation in the North, East, West and South states, cities and local school districts have been torn apart in debate over this issue.

My own position is well known. I am opposed to busing for the purpose of achieving racial balance in our schools. I have spoken out against busing scores of times over many years.

I believe most Americans, white and black, share that view.

What we need now is not just speaking out against more busing but action to stop it. Above all, we need to stop it in the right way in a way that will provide better education for every child in America in a desegregated school system.

The reason action is so urgent is because of a number of recent decisions of the lower Federal Courts. Those courts have gone too far; in some cases beyond the requirements laid down by the Supreme Court in ordering massive busing to achieve racial balance.

The decisions have left in their wake confusion and contradiction in the law, anger, fear and turmoil in local communities and worst of all agonizing concern among hundreds of thousands of parents for the educational and safety of their children who have been forced by court order to be bused miles away from their neighborhood schools.

A Fatal Flaw

There are many who believe that a constitutional amendment is the only way to deal with this problem. The constitutional amendment proposal deserves a thorough consideration by the Congress on its merits. But as an answer to the immediate problem we face of stopping more busing now, the constitutional amendment approach has a fatal flaw. It takes too long.

A constitutional amendment would take between a year and 18 months at the very least to become effective. This means that hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren will be ordered by the courts to be bused away from their neighborhood schools in the next school year with no hope for relief. What we need is action now, not action two, three or four years from now.

There is only one effective way to deal with the problem now and that is for Congress to act. That is why I am sending a special message to the Congress tomorrow urging immediate consideration and action on two measures.

First, I shall propose legislation that would call an immediate halt to all new busing orders by Federal Courts, a moratorium on new busing.

Next I shall propose a companion measure—the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1972.

This act would require that every state or locality must grant equal educational opportunity to every person regardless of race, color or national origin.

For the first time, the cherished American ideal of equality of educational opportunity would be affirmed in the law of the land by the elected representatives of the people in Congress.

The act would further establish an educational bill of rights for Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Indians and others who start their education under language handicaps to make certain that they, too, will have equal opportunity.

The act I propose would concentrate Federal school aid funds on the areas of greatest educational need. That means directing over two and a half billion dollars in the next year mainly toward improving the education of children from poor families.

This proposal deals directly with the problem that has been too often overlooked. We all know that within the central cities of our nation there are schools so inferior that it is hypocrisy even to suggest that the poor children who go there are getting a decent education, let alone an education comparable to that of children who go to school in the suburbs.

Even the most extreme proponents of busing admit that it would be years before programs could be set up and financed which would bus a majority of these children out of the central-city areas to better schools in the suburbs. That means that putting primary emphasis on more busing rather than on better education inevitably will leave a lost generation of poor children in the central cities doomed to inferior education.

National Commitment

It is time for us to make a national commitment to see that the schools in the central cities be upgraded so that the children who go there will have just as good a chance to get quality edu-

cation as do the children who go to schools in the suburbs.

What I am proposing is that at the same time that we stop more busing we move forward to guarantee that the children currently attending the poorest schools in our cities and in rural districts be provided with education equal to that of the good schools in their communities.

Taken together, the two elements of my proposal—the moratorium on new busing and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act—would focus our efforts where they really belong: on better education for all of our children rather than on more busing for some of our children.

In addition I am directing all agencies and departments of the Federal Government at every level to carry out the spirit of this message in all of their actions. I am directing that the Justice Department intervene in selected cases where the lower courts have gone beyond the Supreme Court's requirements in ordering busing.

These are highlights of the new approach I propose. Let me now go to the heart of the problem that confronts us. I want to tell you why I feel that busing for the purpose of achieving racial balance in our schools is wrong, and why the great majority of Americans are right in wanting to bring it to an end.

The purpose of such busing is to help end segregation. But experience in case after case has shown that busing is a bad means to a good end. The frank recognition of that fact does not reduce our commitment to desegregation. It simply tells us that we have to come up with a better means to that good end.

The great majority of Americans, black and white, feel strongly that the busing of schoolchildren away from their own neighborhoods for the purpose of achieving racial balance is wrong.

The great majority, black and white, are determined that the process of desegregation must go forward until the goal of genuinely equal educational opportunity is achieved.

The question, then, is, "How can we end segregation in a way that does not result in more busing?"

The proposals I am sending to the Congress provide an answer to that question.

One emotional undercurrent that has done much to make this so difficult as an issue is the feeling that some people have that to oppose busing is to be antiblack. This is dangerous nonsense.

The Human Element

There is another element to consider—the most important of all. That is the human element, which I see reflected in thousands of letters I have received in my mail from worried parents all over the country, North and East, West and South. Let me give you some examples.

"I believe it is wrong when an 8-year-old child, who was once able to walk to a neighborhood school, is now forced to travel two hours a day on a bus."

"I believe it is wrong when a working mother is suddenly faced with three different bus schedules for her children and that makes it impossible for her to continue to work."

"I believe it is wrong when parents are burdened with new worries about their children's safety on the road and in neighborhoods far from home."

"I believe it is wrong when a child in a poor neighborhood is denied the extra personal attention and financial support in his school that we know can make all the difference."

All these individual human wrongs add up to a deeply felt and growing frustration. These are wrongs that can be and must be set right.

That is the purpose of the legislation I am sending the Congress tomorrow.

I submit these proposals to

the Congress, and I commend them to you, mindful of the profound importance and the special complexity of the issues they address. The key is action and action now. The Congress holds that key. If you agree with the goals I have described tonight—to stop more busing now and provide equality of education for all of our children—I urge you to let your Congressmen and Senators know your views so that the Congress will act promptly to deal with this problem.

Let me close with a personal note. This is a deeply emotional and divisive issue. I have done my best to undertake to weigh and respect the conflicting interests; to strike a balance which is thoughtful and just; to search for answers that will best serve all of our nation's children.

I realize the program I have recommended will not satisfy the extremists who oppose busing for the wrong reasons.

I realize that my program will not satisfy the extreme social planners who insist on more busing even at the cost of better education.

But while what I have said tonight will not appeal to either extreme, I believe I have expressed the views of the majority of Americans.

I believe that the majority of Americans of all races want more busing stopped and better education started.

There is no escaping the fact that some people oppose busing because of racial prejudice. But to go on from this to conclude that "anti-busing" is simply a code word for prejudice is a vicious libel on million of concerned parents who oppose busing not because they are against desegregation but because they are better education for their children. They want their children educated in their own neighborhoods.

Many have invested their life's savings in a home in a neighborhood they chose because it had good schools. They do not want their children bused across a city to an inferior school just to meet some social planner's concept of what is considered to be the correct racial balance — or what is called "progressive" social policy.

There are right reasons for opposing busing, and there are wrong reasons—and most people, including large and increasing numbers of blacks, oppose it for reasons that have little or nothing to do with race. It would compound an injustice to persist in massive busing simply because some people oppose it for the wrong reasons.

Let us recognize that the issue of busing divides many Americans. But let us also recognize that the commitment to equal opportunity in education unites all Americans.

The proposals I am submitting to Congress will allow us to turn away from what divides us and to turn toward what unites us.

The way we handle this difficult issue is a supreme test of the character, the responsibility and the decency of the American people.

Let us handle it in a way we can be proud of—by uniting behind a program which will make it possible for all the children in this great and good country to receive a better education and thereby enjoy a better life.