

TESTIMONY OF  
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, POVERTY & MIGRATORY LABOR  
REGARDING PROPOSED YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING LEGISLATION  
March 13, 1980

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, welcomes the opportunity to testify on proposed youth employment and training legislation. The AFT represents over 550,000 education and health personnel who are vitally concerned with the chronic inability of many of our young people to secure meaningful work. The fact that so many bills have been introduced by Members of the Committee attests to your interest in and determination to solve this critical problem. The Administration has also taken the initiative and proposed a new program designed to begin the task of eliminating the root causes of this problem.

The AFT believes that efforts to this date have addressed the symptoms of the problem and not the root causes. The real problem we must solve is how can we best equip young people to compete for jobs in our society. Previous efforts have concentrated on temporary jobs and work experience. In my view, however, the new direction taken by the Administration of emphasizing education and the public school system as major factors in any new program holds the greatest promise for success. Other attempts to deal with this problem have resulted in a mixed bag of results. While I do not underestimate the short-term value of income and work experience that has been gained by young people served through the existing

legislation, it is fair to say that a program so heavily reliant on temporary public service jobs funded with tax money is not a viable long-term solution. One needs only to examine the recent history of CETA and its increasingly vulnerable status to acknowledge the truth of this assertion. When the budget gets tight and reductions in spending without regard to real consequences become consensus policy it is clear that youngsters need to take more away from this program than a few dollars and a short history of employment.

It is well-known that today large proportions of our young people are faced with unemployment. This is particularly true for urban disadvantaged youth, especially minorities. In 1978 the unemployment rate among 16-19 year olds was 26% in Chicago; 34% in Detroit; 25.6% in Philadelphia; and, 25.5% in New York City. In the last quarter of 1979 teenage unemployment in New York City was 34.1% up nearly 99% from the previous year.

We also know that the causes of this grim picture are multiple. An economy in a recession has generally high unemployment rates, and when unemployment is high, youth employment is always disproportionately higher. Current attempts to slow inflation through ever higher interest rates and meat axe cuts in job programs will add to this problem. At least some of today's high youth employment is caused by the fact that there are simply more youth, the sons and daughters of the post-war baby boom generation, who are faced with a labor market in which entry level jobs are shrinking.

These causes are relevant and policies must be designed to address them.

But, the most immediate task before us is to insure that whatever the economic situation; whatever the relationship between demographics and labor market characteristics, all youth possess the education and the skills that will enable them to compete for a job.

Despite what some may tell you, education is, and will continue to be a crucial factor in the ability of a young person to secure employment.

Consider the following items:

- \*For men and women of all ages high school dropouts are 2 to 3 times as likely to be unemployed as high school graduates.

- \*Employability and income are enhanced by every year of additional schooling, according to recent studies (Christopher Jencks, Who Gets Ahead).

- \*The tighter the job market, the more employers tend to screen job applicants in terms of a high school diploma.

- \*Recent studies show that basic skills are the first priority of most employers in selecting applicants.

But, it is not enough to look only at crude facts that demonstrate the importance of education to employment. It is also essential to look at these facts in terms of projected trends and in terms of characteristics of the youth population we are trying to help. We know, for example, that the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that the demand for white collar workers who need skills will rise faster than the demand for unskilled workers. We also know that the American labor force is remarkably mobile and that the ability to change jobs successfully is enhanced by higher education skills. One study find 36% of the adult working population is either in work transition or anticipating one.

The question of how low-income, low-skilled uneducated youth will fare given this picture is easily answered--not very well. Three out of four low-income youth are below average in basic skills achievement. It is clear that education is what they need more than anything else.

I appeared at a hearing of the House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education two weeks ago. We offered a detailed analysis of the Administration education initiative. I would be pleased to supply that statement for Members of this Committee. I would also like to reaffirm the importance of that initiative. While all of us may disagree on the details of that proposal, the urgency of establishing an educational program to help unemployable youth achieve basic skills is undisputed.

I would like to concentrate now on the features of the new program administered through the Labor Department because success is dependent upon a more workable relationship between schools and prime sponsors. The Administration proposal leaves us with questions as to how these relationships will actually develop and what the true relationship will be. The definition in the Administration proposal of "in-school" and "school-aged" youth seems to be used in a way that makes it unclear as to whether young people will be served by the schools or through some alternative system of education. There should be a presumption that the public schools be the agency of choice when it comes to providing educational services to young people under the age of 18. The Administration proposal permits the use of alternative delivery systems to those youth over the minimum age for leaving school which in many states is 16. When the AFT testified before this Committee in 1977 we urged that this program not become a magnet to draw young people out of school. It is my belief that only by restricting such services to those young people over the age of 18 can we be sure that the schools are not undermined by a temporarily attractive setting offering stipends as an incentive to education outside the public schools. We also believe that stipends should be restricted to those who are pursuing a GED.

S.2218 as introduced by Senator Javits is superior in most respects to other bills on this subject. Some melding of this bill with the Administration bill would probably be the best solution to youth employment problems. S.2218 emphasizes that employability rather than work experience is the ultimate goal. It emphasizes programs in remedial education, skill training, good work habits and attitude, and career-oriented employment experiences in the public and private sector along with supportive services.

The bill emphasizes local partnerships between all agencies and private organizations concerned with solutions to the problem. While this problem is national in scope, many solutions can be found on the local level. Third, this bill calls for strengthening the bridges between the classroom and the workplace forged under the so-called, "22% set aside to reward CETA/LEA education to work transition programs. The bill also targets youth employment programs to those areas with the greatest need. Finally, S.2218 affects major consolidation of Title IV-Youth Programs, a necessity in any bill that attempts to make these programs work more effectively for our young people.

The major emphasis of S.2218 is the development of programs that result in graduates who can compete for jobs. The National Commission for Employment Policy states, "The major objective of federal education training and employment programs for youth should be to improve the long-term employability of these youth, that is, their basic education, work habits, ability to absorb new skills on the job and other competencies which will permit successful integration into the regular work force."

S.2218 is on balance a solid measure, well-thought out and strategically capable of addressing the real issues in youth employment.

It utilizes the resources and expertise of our local education agencies and will result in less duplication. No other bill before this Committee so strongly emphasizes the need for cooperation between the CETA system and the local education agency. No other bill requires the participation of the LEA in the educational aspects of the prime sponsors employment services.

The Administration bill contains many provisions which lead us to the conclusion that LEA-prime sponsor cooperation will not be as effective as S.2218. For example, the Education Cooperation Incentive Grants funds are limited to cover only part of the total costs of programs carried out in cooperation with LEA's. Such restrictions do not apply to programs carried out by C.B.O.'s. Further, funds to LEA's shall not be used to provide basic education while funds to C.B.O.'s may include classroom training leading to a high school equivalency certificate. We believe that education is the responsibility of the local agency established for that purpose. There seems to be a presumption in the Administration bill that local education agencies are not as trustworthy as other recipients of funds. As an example of this viewpoint, I offer as evidence a chart attached to this testimony as an appendix that compares prime-sponsor requirements with the requirements for local education agencies. It is clear that prime sponsors and LEA's are not held in equally high regard.

We believe that equal requirements should be enforced for LEA's and for prime sponsors.

One of the major difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of education programs in relationship to programs run by other agencies is the lack of

an adequate data base for comparison between the two. The consequences of such a lack of data shows up in at least one bill before this Committee S.2286 by Senators Schweiker and Randolph. This bill which the AFT opposes is based upon an assumption that many seem to hold but none can document. I quote from a statement by Senator Schweiker, " The conditions in many of our high schools today are appalling. Learning and training are almost nonexistent as teachers and school administrators struggle to maintain order within the school walls. Many students are completely apathetic and turned off--they have little hope for the future and no confidence in their ability to participate successfully in almost any activity. Many of these young adults drop out of school at the first opportunity." While this is a dramatic statement it has the unfortunate consequence of tarring a public institution with a very broad brush and to offer as a solution a program about which almost nothing is known. These type of programs while they may achieve impressive surface statistics have little comparison to a high school. High schools must serve all who show up as students. The programs urged in this bill can select their students. Public schools have virtually no ability to impose discipline beyond the walls of the school, CBO programs often utilize rigid discipline based upon attendance, attitudinal habits and other intangibles.

Young people with handicaps, disruptive behavior, language difficulty and other problems all must be served in the schools but not by CBO's. Rather than pass a bill which would build a system designed to drain resources away from the public schools we prefer the approach in the Javit's bill which would back up school programs with support service from CBO's designed to encourage and create a cooperative relationship between LEA's, prime

sponsors and CBO's with the student as the major beneficiary.

The AFT supports with some reservations the Administration's education initiatives, we believe that this proposal with some of the features of S.2218 represents the best hope for a workable program which can successfully attack the Youth Employment problem.

Thank you.