

TESTIMONY OF ALBERT SHANKER
PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR
ON H.R. 950
February 25, 1987

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee: I am Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, an international union of more than 630,000 members. The AFT represents teachers, paraprofessionals and other classified school employees, all of whom have a great interest in your deliberations on the reauthorization of Chapter I of the Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act.

As everyone concerned with public education is aware, a major reform movement has swept our school systems. We in the AFT have welcomed this renewed interest in education because we believe our schools have been neglected and shortchanged far too long. The reform movement has succeeded in generating fresh ideas and resources at the state and local level. What has been missing from the education reform equation up until now is a constructive and vital federal role. Education will always be a state and local responsibility, but the federal government has a major stake in our system of education, and therefore a major role to play in the educational renewal now underway.

There have been times in our history when federal leadership in education made a significant difference. Prior to 1965, the single greatest involvement of the federal government in education came through what was known as the World War II G.I. Bill of Rights.

The G.I. Bill of Rights provided educational opportunities for millions of veterans who had served their country. The veterans, who took advantage of educational opportunities through the G.I. Bill that they would not otherwise have received, went on to enrich our national life in every way. It has been estimated that for every dollar spent on G.I. Bill education benefits, \$14 was returned to the Federal Treasury through the increased tax collections which resulted from increased earnings. This 14 to 1 ratio, as astounding as it may seem, indicates that spending on education is an investment rather than a cost.

As we approach the 21st Century, it is again time to make an investment in education that will not only serve the students who benefit directly from it, but will also benefit our entire society. Unless we can utilize the contributions of virtually every member of the next generation, our country may cease to prosper and for the first time relinquish its leadership role. We know that in the years ahead there will be intense competition for college graduates because the generation coming of age is significantly smaller than previous generations. The Federal

government has a major role to play in providing increased educational opportunities for all students and especially for those students who have traditionally been out of the college bound pool. If the Federal government does not fulfill its role, we may well be faced with an economy hamstrung due to a shortage of qualified people. All of the concerns expressed over American "competitiveness" will come to nothing without an educational strategy designed to reach students who have previously fallen by the way.

So far the Federal government's major contribution to education reform came in 1983, when the President issued the landmark report, A Nation At Risk. Since that time, American education has undergone an unprecedented examination of its shortcomings. We in the AFT feel that scrutiny of American educational practices was overdue. Yet, pointing out shortcomings is not the same as helping to solve them. While we applaud President Reagan and his Administration for having started the ball rolling, I will say that in the almost four years since A Nation At Risk was issued this Administration has been long on rhetoric and short on money. This Administration has become expert at telling others what needs to be done while denying the Federal resources needed to help solve our educational problems. We note that the Administration's latest 28 percent education budget cut proposal has been justified in part by pointing out that an \$11 billion education increase is projected from "other sources." We ask that the Congress address the issue of a proper Federal educational role, since it is clear that the Administration will not.

For the past six years, education has remained in the province of the Federal Government only because of bipartisan support in the Congress for a continued Federal role in education. We acknowledge the debt that education has to the members of this committee--Republicans and Democrats--who fought to preserve Federal programs at a time when the Administration aggressively sought ways to reduce or eliminate most education programs. H.R. 950 is another example of the bipartisan support that makes education such a unique enterprise. I congratulate Chairman Hawkins and Representative Goodling for the work they have done to bring H.R. 950 before this Committee.

While some of the pressing issues in education do not lend themselves to federal solutions, others, such as assuring access to quality education for the disadvantaged, are clearly appropriate for federal assistance. The major federal role, providing educational enrichment for the disadvantaged and the handicapped, is still unfulfilled. We believe that in the next two years Congress should focus its attention on improving programs such as Chapter I. The improvements contained in H.R. 950 are steps in the right direction.

The AFT recommends that attention be paid to restoring and expanding the Chapter I program, which has been hamstrung over the past six years by pressures generated by the budget deficit. I urge that Chapter I be reauthorized and enhanced. The financial

support of compensatory education provided by Chapter I is crucial to our country if we are to meet the challenges that confront us. Data proves that disadvantaged students who have been fortunate enough to attend a Head Start program and a Chapter I program do significantly better in school than their peers who were not able to participate in these programs. We recommend that Chapter I be expanded to create a preschool education program to function alongside the Head Start program so that every child who is educationally at risk will be assured of a good start in school. We note that H.R. 950 provides an authorization to start a preschool program, the so called "even start" proposal, and we support this beginning, although we would like to see more than \$25 million authorized to begin this needed initiative.

Chapter I is virtually non-existent at the high school level. Research tells us that gains made in the Chapter I program are partially lost when students go on to high school and lose the support Chapter I provides. We therefore support the establishment of Chapter I programs at the high school level. A phase-in may be required if budgetary restraints so require, but within three years we urge a full Chapter I program for high school students in need of such a program. We strongly support the provision in H.R. 950 that establishes Chapter I in the secondary schools.

Schoolwide Projects--Concentration Grants

We recommend that schools with 60 percent or more disadvantaged students be allowed to run Chapter I Compensatory Education programs schoolwide. The requirement for 50% matching funds from local school districts in order to run a compensatory program schoolwide is too high. We recommend a lower figure and support the use of Chapter I Concentration Grants for the matching funds. The schoolwide approach should be tried; it could result in programs that have an economy of scale which permits a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to compensatory education. AFT strongly supports the new Concentration Grants program. Enactment of the new Concentration Grant is one of our highest legislative priorities. The AFT also recommends a major evaluation of the Chapter I program to help focus compensatory education programs on the strategies that work best.

In addition to supporting educational enrichment for the disadvantaged, the federal role in education for the rest of this century must include a greatly expanded and improved research function. A small but necessary investment in the research capability of the Department of Education is needed to make sure that efforts to assist disadvantaged students do not founder because of a lack of qualified teachers or a misunderstanding of the real problems faced by our school systems.

We in the AFT are hopeful that H.R. 950 with its new pre-school and secondary school focus will have a positive effect on one of the AFT's greatest concerns, the problem of dropouts. We know what happens to the lives of students who do not finish school, yet nothing is being done on a national level that would help school districts meet their dropout problems head-on. In addition to the new Chapter I provisions, we ask that more research be done on the dropout issue. Expanding the research capability of the Department of Education is a must in the fight against dropouts.

In a similar vein, there is much controversy about teacher shortages over the next ten years. Some have offered the opinion that there may not be a teacher shortage at all. All the facts available to the AFT indicate that a teacher shortage is imminent. A strengthened federal research effort is needed to make sure that education policymakers know what they must do in the teacher training area.

Non-Public Schools

The AFT supports the provision in H.R. 950 that authorizes \$30 million to help pay the costs resulting from the Supreme Court's Felton decision. Our union has long supported compensatory education for needy children who attend non-public schools. We realize that the additional costs of providing assistance due to Felton are burdensome and should be offset.

We are pleased to see that H.R. 950 does not contain the

voucher plan sought by the Administration. Vouchers have a surface appeal that disappears when the practical matters of how to make a voucher fair and effective are examined. To the AFT, a voucher is essentially the same as a Tuition Tax Credit, except that in the case of Chapter I, vouchers would undermine a program that works. Vouchers are not a method of improving compensatory education and we strongly support your decision to keep vouchers out of H.R. 950.

The reauthorization of Chapter I is crucial to any effective strategy for our nation's schools. If our nation is to continue its leadership role in the world we must take steps now that will maximize the contribution of all our citizens.

As I pointed out earlier in this statement, education is an investment that pays dividends to our country. Now is the time to make sure our investment is adequate to meet the great challenges ahead. Education is the key to global competitiveness, military strength and domestic prosperity. The 100th Congress must reaffirm our nation's long tradition of commitment to education and thereby to our nation's future. H.R. 950 is an important step toward fulfilling both the federal commitment to education and our nation's needs. The AFT is in the process of formulating a full package of recommendations for H.R. 950 and for other education programs that must be dealt with in this Congress. We would like to submit them for this hearing record at a later date.

Thank you.

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