


1-2-1958

Statement by Lewis F. Powell, Jr., Chairman, Richmond Public School Board

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Extra

Statement by Lewis F. Powell, Jr.
Chairman, Richmond Public School Board
January 2, 1958.

President Eisenhower's proposed educational program is a minimum necessity for our Country. My chief concern is that it does not appear to go far enough.

America is in the gravest danger of its history. This is a danger - not so much of physical annihilation today or next year (although this is quite possible), but of being "second best" in the contest with Russia for scientific superiority. Russia has already substantially equaled American atomic and hydrogen capabilities, and has moved spectacularly ahead in missiles and rocketry. This is not a matter of opinion - it has been shockingly demonstrated by Soviet Sputniks and superiority in ballistic missiles. The race is also now on for control of outer Space, and we are well behind.

Being "second best" in this contest with a Communist regime determined to "bury" us, as Khrushchev boasts, would indeed be the end of America.

We therefore must, as a matter of survival, devote every necessary energy and resource to regaining, and then establishing permanently, scientific superiority over Russia. Obviously, this means various "crash programs" for missiles, atomic submarines, anti-missile missiles, and other urgently needed means of offense and defense including extensive radiation shelters and the like. But these are relatively short-range programs. We need, with equal urgency, soundly conceived long-range programs to gain

scientific superiority and ultimate control of Space.

Reorienting and vastly improving our educational system at all levels is perhaps the most important of these long-range programs. Russia recognized this need a dozen years ago, and initiated an extensive and effective plan for training mathematicians, scientists and supporting technicians at all levels. It is a plan which accords due importance to education and to the teacher. It is also a plan which seeks out, motivates and rewards the talented child and young adult. Finally, it is a plan deliberately geared to the Soviet blueprint for world domination and extinction of all free nations.

America, within the framework of its own institutions, must match and better this educational program. This must be done not only in science and related subjects, but in the humanities as well. It would, indeed, be best if all of this could be accomplished at the state and local level, without aid and certainly without interference from the Federal Government. Regretably, there is little reason to believe that enough states and localities on their own initiative will make the necessary effort. Here in Virginia, as elsewhere, our people have been slow to accord education the emphasis it imperatively needs. This is seen in the relatively small proportion of our total income devoted to education, in low teachers' salaries, in the lack of status and recognition of teachers, and many other ways.

Even in Virginia, and other states properly devoted to the principle of "States' Rights", were to act promptly and

effectively to provide the funds and implement the required education program, one can predict with certainty that most states and localities will not do this. In the face of deadly national peril, we must act now on a national basis. It would be the gravest folly to wait and vainly hope for the requisite action from 48 states and thousands of localities while the Soviets continue to out-distance us in this race for survival.

Massive and immediate aid and motivation from the Federal Government is therefore necessary - not to supplant state and local action but to assist and expedite it. President Eisenhower's program should be welcomed and encouraged, and while details are awaited with interest, it is hoped that Congress will expand rather than restrict it.