

STATEMENT OF ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, AFL-CIO
REGARDING S.1675 AND OTHER MEASURES RELATING TO
FEDERAL TEACHER TRAINING
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & HUMAN RESOURCES
January 30, 1990

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee: I am Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers. Our union with more than 725,000 members nation-wide has a great interest in the legislation before you which would reestablish a federal role in the area of teacher training and recruitment. National policy makers are gradually becoming aware of the scope of the impending teacher shortage. The bills before this Committee indicate that you are already aware of the need to do something to attract qualified people to the teaching profession. Because of the extent of the teacher shortage, it must be said that while federal action is needed and welcomed by the AFT, neither a legislative remedy nor an unexpected decision by college graduates to enter the teaching force is likely to produce enough qualified teachers to operate the schools the way we do today. Given the overall achievement of today's school structure, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the impending teacher shortage can be a blessing in disguise if it forces us to rethink the role and structure of public education.

A shortage of qualified college graduates will force changes in the way we staff schools at all levels. Our nation will experience a severe shortage of college graduates for all fields in the next 10 years. Current demographic projections tell us that, by the early 1990's, our nation will have to replace 1.3 million teachers, about one-half of our current teaching

force. To replace those expected to leave teaching, we would need to attract 23% of each college graduating class for the next several years to staff our classrooms. If we want to draw new teachers from the top half of the graduating class, it would take 46% of that group. In 1982, 4.7% of all college students indicated they were heading for a teaching career, in 1985, it was 6% and in 1988, 8.8%. This shows improvement in teacher recruitment during a decade where education needs received tremendous publicity. However, even if other sources of teacher recruitment are fully developed, such as former teachers returning to the classroom; and if the schools do somewhat better at attracting qualified college graduates than in the past, the current structure of education with one teacher in every classroom talking to 30 or more students will still become a thing of the past. These developments are not tragic -- the current system needs to be rethought and reshaped. If we try to maintain the status quo, it can only be done by sacrificing teacher quality in an attempt to carry on educational business as usual. The future structure of our schools must change not only to accommodate a different workforce, but to educate young people for life in a very different economy and society than the one which produced the current factory model of education.

The AFT supports the bills before this Committee. We think that they are well thought-out proposals which will help to improve teacher training and recruitment. By and large, you have chosen the areas of greatest need to concentrate resources. Minority recruitment, bilingual education, early childhood, math and science are all specialties in need of a boost from new initiatives. The tuition subsidies for upper-division college students interested in teaching, taken together with the existing congressional teacher scholarships, should generate new interest in teaching by talented individuals who are not now considering the profession. Professional Development Academies in S.1675 can be used to focus on issues that can have a major impact on the overall performance of our educational system such as school restructuring. It is clear, however, that more must be done than traditional pre-, or, in-service teacher training to meet the challenges that face the schools in the 1990's.

You are aware, I am sure, that there is currently a move afoot to "restructure" education -- to bring the management of teaching and learning to the school level so that teachers have the freedom to accommodate teaching practices to the many different ways that students learn. Its spokesmen, myself included, argue that our traditional factory model for school organization creates an environment that is actually unfriendly to student learning. Today's schools, as yesterday', ignore

most of what learning theory tells us about how students learn. The regimented, lock-step character of today's schools limit teacher imagination and style, thus relegating teaching practice to a few set patterns.

At least three sections of this bill acknowledge this problem: Title I, Part B -- Senior Teacher Corps; Title II -- Professional Development Academies and Title VIII -- Shared Decision-Making Incentive. The first two of these merely give a nod to the restructuring movement by including allowable activities that might stimulate restructuring among these granted funding eligibility. The last, which I congratulate you for including, is in need of much greater funding.

I would like to make three specific suggestions:

1. Redefine the eligibility requirements for individual teachers, as well as the requirements in state plans, so that the sabbatical activities of scholarship recipients will be heavily directed at school-wide change.
2. Redefine the purpose of "professional development academies" to be the preparation of both new and experienced staff to restructure schools through shared decision-making.
3. Triple the funding for "Shared Decision-Making Incentive."

I believe that these kinds of changes would make what is now a good bill truly significant. The strategy outlined here could and should make a federal statement about the need to create a totally different kind of school from the ones we have known.

There is currently widespread pervasive recognition among the best education leaders that in these days new dollars demand a multiplier effect in productivity reward. I believe that the sorts of short-term start up funds this bill could make available for school change will save us money down the road as schools necessarily begin to change the ways they allocate resources, along with changes in the ways teachers teach kids. More importantly, the investment represented by these bills must enable our schools to educate a literate, thinking, functional and democratic citizenry.

The effort to establish another teacher corps is strongly supported by the AFT. The emphasis on professional development is well taken, and we believe that focusing in-service training on things that can have major impact, such as school restructuring, will pay dividends.

One major goal of both these bills is to increase the number of minorities entering teaching and to increase the retention rate of minorities who do enter the teaching force. The AFT believes that a major source of minority teachers can be found among paraprofessionals and other school employees. AFT has extensive experience in the creation of career ladders that have led to the development of thousands of teachers out of the ranks of paraprofessionals. These bills should allow funding of teacher education for individuals who already work in schools in a certificated position. It is our experience that teachers who

come out of the school employee ranks start with an edge in experience and have a significantly higher retention rate than those who are new to the job. For example, in Baltimore more than 200 paraprofessionals have become teachers. Their attrition rate is less than 5%. The normal teacher attrition in that city is 10%. In New York City, over the past five years 5000 paraprofessionals have become teachers and they have less than a 1% attrition rate. The general attrition rate for New York City was 16.2% in 1986-87.

This legislation is an important priority for the AFT. I thank Senators Kennedy and Pell for their hard work and interest in this important endeavor. Tightening of the focus and emphasis on the issues that will make or break public education in the 1990's will make these bills even better. The teacher shortage about to hit education presents us with an opportunity to rethink the role and structure of our schools.

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