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STATEMENT BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION, ARTS AND HUMANITIES

by

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October 3, 1979
Washington, D.C.

The accomplishments of American education since 1965 have been notable. Indeed, education is the one domain within the humane services that can be pointed to as having gone far toward achieving the goals society set for it. This is perhaps especially true of higher education when in less than fifteen years we have made available to virtually any qualified young person the opportunity to pursue postsecondary study under a wide variety of institutional arrangements. We too seldom note this achievement bemused as we are with our continuing problems. The fact that at this juncture, as the Congress pursues reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, no great new initiatives are being urged, is a clear sign that we have a success on our hands.

It may be indiscreet to note this situation to this subcommittee. I once heard President Pusey of Harvard announce the successful completion of a very large fund-raising campaign. He was masterful in expressing his satisfaction and in immediately inundating his audience with a full account of Harvard's urgent, on-going unmet needs. While we all realize that there are grave problems to be dealt with by American higher education, these are not intractable and many of them are being worked at vigorously by the interested parties in Washington, in the states and in educational institutions themselves.

Consequently at this time reauthorization would seem to afford the opportunity to take a solid look at the higher education system from the viewpoint of making

it function with maximum effectiveness. I use the phrase "higher education system" advisedly. Some spokesmen for higher education take fright at the term. They see it as implying a tightly meshed network, centrally controlled, in which the autonomy of individual institutions is forfeited.

As I speak of the "higher education system" I am referring to that complex set of arrangements involving the federal government, the states and academic institutions which has much to do with the conduct of the higher education enterprise. These are arrangements built around shared goals; shared administration; and shared financing.

Postsecondary institutions, state and local governments, and the federal government have at least six goals in common: to allow qualified students to fulfill their postsecondary needs and interests; to give students a choice of institutions so that their educational requirements will be well-served; to satisfy society's needs for knowledge, for cultural expression, and for an educated citizenry; to deal with public service problems; to maintain a responsive, pluralistic, high-quality system of higher education; and to use education resources effectively and efficiently.

The shared administration of many programs is a second source of evidence of a highly interdependent education system. We may simply cite the most notable example, the student aid programs. The federal BEOG awards are now widely accepted as the base on which additional student aid is built. State student aid awards are increasingly contingent on whether students have applied for the BEOG. The packaging in individual institutions, and the application of other federally aided or philanthropically provided funds which institutions disburse, are similarly contingent on the federal BEOG and state student aid awards.

The shared funding of the higher education system is self-evident. What we too seldom realize is that the proportions are approximately equal: about one-third from the federal government; one-third from the states; and one-third from students, parents, and philanthropy, institutional and otherwise.

To look at higher or postsecondary education as an interdependent system has many utilities. Given the fact of shared goals, it then becomes possible to assess whether each goal is being adequately pursued by federal, state and institutional endeavors. Are new or modified measures called for to better accomplish a particular goal? Given the fact of shared administration of many programs, it becomes important to assess the impact of administrative requirements that flow through the system and variously affect the participating components. Given the shared funding that maintains higher education, it should be possible periodically to evaluate the appropriateness and fairness of the division of fiscal responsibilities. In our view, wider understanding of the partnership nature of the higher education enterprise could lead the federal government to be more sensitive to state and institutional interests and capabilities. It could aid the states in responding to federal initiatives and in their expectations regarding institutions. It might allay some of the persistent fears of institutional leaders that governments will become too intrusive.

We would like to suggest three areas where federal action during reauthorization could be particularly helpful in strengthening the higher postsecondary education system. In doing this it is worth remembering that only the federal government has the capability to influence the system as a whole. While individual states may undertake activities that are illustrative for the nation, they can directly affect only their own constituencies. The efforts of individual institutions may also be

instructive for others. But it takes federal action for national impact.

First is the area of planning and coordination of postsecondary education. Section 1202 of Title XII of the '65 Act, as amended, called on the states to establish broad planning agencies for postsecondary education. Virtually all of the states have responded by either designating existing agencies as their 1202 planning commissions or by creating new bodies for this purpose. The question is frequently asked as to why the federal government should be concerned with state planning of postsecondary education. And from the institutional side, alarms (largely unfounded by experience, I should note) have been expressed that federal encouragement of state planning will lead to intolerable requirements imposed on individual colleges and universities and infringements of their autonomy.

It seems apparent that with its heavy investment in postsecondary education the federal government should be deeply concerned with having a higher education system which is well-coordinated, avoids excessive duplication, weeds out poor quality, and provides a sufficiently varied array of opportunities so that citizen needs are met. That concern can best be addressed by having each state plan and coordinate its own postsecondary activities. There is too much complexity across the nation and within each state to have the federal government do the planning. State planning permits the distinctive features of postsecondary education to be assessed and addressed at a meaningful level.

There is strong pressure from institutional spokesmen, and from those who retain a primarily institutional outlook, against having the federal government encourage and share in the support of state postsecondary planning agencies. This,

in our view, is parochial. Planning is essential and states can best accomplish it. The federal government has a deep interest in the effective planning of the postsecondary system. It should continue to encourage the states, under provisions which take account of each state's unique history and traditions. The proposed state agreements, to replace 1202 Commissions, as called for in HR 5192 would admirably accomplish this. The federal government should also continue to share in the cost of state planning since its interest is so clearly being served.

During reauthorization the titles and parts of the '65 act, as amended, should be reexamined from the planning perspective. Are there planning activities now required which should be related to the states' comprehensive planning for postsecondary education, for example, community service and continuing education planning under Title I? Should such a program as the Developing Institutions Program under Title III, which now has only a federal-institutional relationship, be subject to review by the state planning agency? Is sufficient information about activities under each title and part of the Act being provided to the state planning agency so that it can effectively accomplish its work?

The second area we wish to mention has to do with the fiscal and administrative capabilities of the states. Since the constitutional responsibility for education resides in the states, it is appropriate that the states do all they can to pursue the national interest in education. But state efforts do not always add up to addressing the national interest because of limited perspectives, limited resources and limited administrative capabilities. Nonetheless, as the federal government meets unattended national needs in postsecondary education it can properly expect the best possible performance from the states commensurate with their capabilities. Sometimes it seeks to assist states through

providing technical assistance and through meeting part of the cost of joint federal-state programs. Under the Act of '65, as amended, seven different provisions proffer administrative and technical assistance to the states. We believe the entire act should be reviewed to determine whether such existing provisions should be continued or modified and to consider whether there are other areas where states might be benefitted by offers of technical and fiscal assistance from the federal government to strengthen state performance. We further think that the Secretary of Education should periodically have an assessment made of the overall fiscal position of the states. While their economies tend to be highly volatile, there will undoubtedly be periods in which the states, because of relatively favorable financial conditions, can assume a larger share of the costs of higher education.

The third area we wish to speak to is that of the administrative and fiscal capabilities of individual institutions. It is quite evident that federal and state higher education dollars will be well utilized only if institutions are fiscally and administratively competent. The health of individual institutions is also very much at stake. The present act recognizes this, if in a somewhat erratic fashion. Twelve different provisions, many never funded, assist institutions to meet the costs of program administration and program planning, and to carry out specific tasks such as work-study job location. Subsidies are authorized to defray instructional costs in certain programs. Two titles provide for the training of institutional administrators. Title VII provides funds to aid in complying with federal construction and renovation requirements. We recommend that all parts of the act be reviewed thoroughly from the perspective of assisting institutions to strengthen their administrative capabilities both through funding and technical assistance. The costs of such assistance are modest. The pay-off can be substantial.

Finally, given the permanent reality of a highly interdependent post-secondary system, we urge a regular review of its performance. This could perhaps be undertaken as one of the tasks of the Inter-governmental Advisory Council on Education provided for under the bill creating the Department of Education.

As noted at the beginning of this statement, the American post-secondary system is a success. It is unique throughout the world. Our capacity to strengthen it through using resources wisely and effectively will have much to do with the kind of judgment we and the nation can make about our enterprise a decade hence.