



## OPEN LETTER TO THE 'EDUCATION PRESIDENT'

By Samuel Blumenfeld

Congratulations, Mr. President! We are delighted that you made ideology a campaign issue, thus giving the American people a clear choice between a conservative candidate and a liberal candidate. They chose the conservative. Which means that you, Mr. President, have a mandate from the people to pursue a conservative course, exercise conservative judgment, and uphold conservative values.

That the people chose liberals for Congress and their state legislatures is not because they wanted liberals, but because on the state and local levels the choices were seldom as clearly delineated as they were at the presidential level. It should be noted that the ultra-liberal National Education Association and its state and local affiliates were chiefly responsible for the liberal victories on the local and state levels.

Unfortunately, there are no conservative organizations at state or local levels that can match the militantly organized teachers in terms of money, political organization, and effective political action. The educators' years of political experience, their singular goal of electing liberals, their endless supply of money have made them the single strongest force in American politics. That their liberal objectives, when exposed in the glare of a national campaign, are rejected by a large majority of the American people, is quite clear.

But when the organized teachers work at the local level, they are seldom recognized for what they really are: the political vanguard of the far left in America. And because they are active and well financed in every school district, every town, every city, every county, their power is far greater than their numbers would imply. The *Reader's Digest* of May 1984 called the NEA's 1,172 full-time, professional organizers "the largest grassroots political army ever deployed in the United States." And until such time as conservatives can match that organized effort, liberals will control the Congress and state legislatures of America.

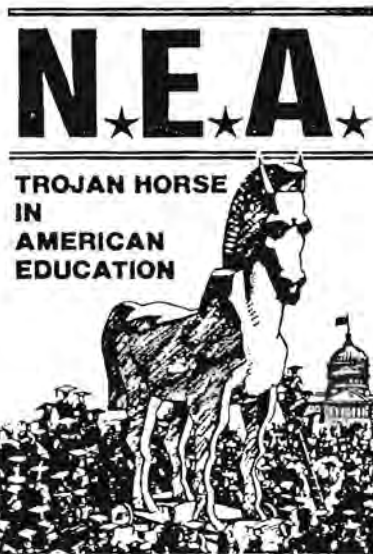
Which brings us to the pressing question at hand: how will the "Education President" be able to improve American education with a hostile liberal Congress and a hostile education establishment standing in the way?

The answer is surprisingly simple: by going around the Congress and the education establishment and going directly to the parents and taxpayers of America. *The fastest and most effective way to improve*

*education in America is to encourage the development of private alternatives. They not only provide better and safer education than the public schools, but they save the taxpayer much money.*

It now costs the taxpayer about \$4,800 a year to "educate" a child in a public school. The four million children being educated in private alternatives are saving the taxpayers of America \$19.2 billion a year!

As you know, Mr. President, the public schools are producing academic failure at unacceptable levels. The business community is particularly concerned about the inability of many of our young people to do the jobs needed to compete in the international marketplace. David Kearns, chairman of the Xerox Cor-



poration, has denounced the public schools as a "failed monopoly," producing workers "with a 50 percent defect rate." Businesses must hire workers "who can't read, write or count," he said — then spend \$25 billion a year to train them! (*USA Today*, 10/27/87)

The *A Nation At Risk* report, issued in April 1983, set the education reform movement in motion. But the "reforms" have failed to improve education. Why? Because what parents and businessmen really want is not what the educators want. The educators want more money and power for themselves but no significant change in the way the children are taught in the public schools.

A simple case in point is the way reading is taught. Back in 1955 we were told by Dr. Rudolf Flesch that

the reason why Johnny couldn't read was because of the way he was being taught to read — the wrong way. Flesch explained how in the early 1930s the professors of education changed the way reading is taught in American schools. They threw out the alphabetic phonics method, which is the proper way to teach children to read an alphabetic writing system, and they put in a new whole-word, look-say, or sight method that teaches children to read English as if it were Chinese, an ideographic writing system. Flesch explained that when you impose an ideographic teaching technique on an alphabetic writing system, you get reading disability.

Since the publication of *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955), there has been an on-going debate between advocates of phonics and advocates of look-say as to which teaching method works better. The education establishment has clung to the look-say method despite mounting evidence that it has caused our very severe and costly illiteracy problem. It is now estimated that about two million young adults emerge from our public schools each year as functional illiterates — that is, with literacy skills so poor that they might as well be considered illiterate.

Despite this blight of reading failure which has made us a nation at risk, the education establishment is not about to return to the method that worked so well for hundreds of years: intensive, systematic phonics. Instead, they are pushing a new fad called "whole language," which is simply the discredited look-say method dressed in fancier clothes. The hostility to intensive phonics by educators is still as intense and uncompromising as ever.

Thus, while parents and business leaders clamor for the kind of changes that will improve reading, the educators are determined to experiment on millions of children with a teaching method that is demonstrably harmful.

There is, however, a good straight-forward way, Mr. President, to deal with this problem. Have your secretary of education authorize a controlled experiment whereby three teaching methods can be fairly tested. Designate ten schools to use intensive phonics, ten to use a regular basal reading program, and ten to use whole language. In that way, we shall be able to determine once and for all which method is the most effective. Until such an experiment is conducted, the debate will go on and on, and millions of children will suffer needlessly.

Actually, such an experiment is already going on in America. There are many private schools and even some public schools using intensive, systematic phonics programs; vast numbers of public schools using the regular basal programs; and some schools using "whole language." It would not be difficult for the Department of Education to monitor the effectiveness of these programs in their respective schools and report back to you and the American people.

In any case, Mr. President, there can be no improvement in American education without a true improvement in reading instruction. If this is not done, our literacy will continue to decline and our working population will be sorely handicapped by a lack of basic academic skills, and our ability to compete will be greatly impaired.

Of course, you will meet with stubborn resistance to these needed changes from the education establishment. And that is why it is so important, Mr. President, to encourage the development of private alternatives — those thousand points of light of which you spoke so eloquently during your campaign. Parents and children cannot wait for the educators to reform the present system and that is why they are turning to private schools and creating home schools.

Home schooling is now the fastest growing educational phenomenon in the United States. It is creating better and stronger families; well-bred, moral children with a mastery of basic academic skills; and better educated parents. In the home-schooling family, education is a way of life.

But the ultimate success of this movement depends on the recognition by government and its bureaucrats that parents have the unalienable right to educate their children at home, in accordance with their own values and beliefs, without interference from anyone — the very same right exercised by the parents of our Founding Fathers. This movement, Mr. President, is worthy of your support and encouragement. It may very well be the salvation of this country.

Do not be surprised if public education continues to decline academically during your administration. The educators will take every dollar the federal government will give them, but they will not deliver the excellence that conservatives want — for one simple reason: American public education is and has been controlled for decades by liberals, humanists and behavioral psychologists. They are the enemies of our conservative values, and to win their favor you will have to betray the values you hold dear and become an accomplice in the destruction of American children.

If all of this sounds terribly pessimistic, it is — because we have studied the problems of public education for over 20 years, and in that time we have learned one important lesson: that what exists in public education today is not the result of accident, drift, or error. It is the result of careful planning and even more careful implementation of concepts and programs devised by history's best-financed, best-trained "educators." In fact, what we have today is exactly what they have wanted, and it is unlikely that even a president will be able to get them to want something else.

Yes, there will be "reforms" in the system, but only such reforms that give the educators more of what

*they* want. And, unfortunately, their enormous influence in Congress and the 50 state legislatures virtually guarantees that they will get what they want.

And so we will get more "whole language," more values clarification, more multiculturalism, more globalism, more Soviet-American exchanges, more teacher power, more blatant anti-Christianity, more federal and state funding of failed programs, more

disparagement of conservative values, more hostility toward home schooling, more disdain for parents' rights, more drugging of children in public schools, more death education, more school-based sex clinics, more condom distribution — in short, more social chaos and moral anarchy.

We wish you well, Mr. President, but don't be fooled by the organized educators. ■