

THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT
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FEDERAL AID TO PUBLIC EDUCATION

Pending in the Senate at the present time is a bill officially known as S. 637 which for its purpose, the authorization of funds out of the Federal Treasury to assist States and Territories in more adequate financing their systems of public education during emergency and in reducing the inequalities of educational opportunity through public elementary and secondary schools. It has, however, become popularly known as the teachers pay-aid bill. It has developed some interesting and lively debate in the Senate and has stimulated growing public interest. It might therefore, be of general interest to examine this proposal and see what it does.

TWO SALIENT PROVISIONS.

The bill contains two basic provisions. (1) It would authorize \$200,000,000 in Federal funds to be divided among the states on the basis of active school population in the elementary and secondary schools to be used in increasing the salaries of teachers. The states would be required to pay the same salaries that were in effect on February 1, 1943 and the \$200,000,000 would be used to increase such salaries. (2) The sum of \$100,000,000 would be used to equalize the amounts spent on education in the various states by distributing this amount on a formula basis. That is to say that in states where the amount spent by the state per child is smaller than in other states, such states would receive larger amounts per capita out of this fund. On this basis, there are 13 states which would receive \$58,000,000 of the \$100,000,000.

SOME BACKGROUND.

In the year 1940, the average weekly wage of teachers in Mississippi was \$10 75 compared with \$32.69 in Illinois. In Georgia it was \$14.81 compared with \$50.08 in New York. Generally speaking, teachers salaries in southern and some western states are low, in central and northern states much higher. It is to be expected, therefore, that teaching in low-paying states is not alluring and that turnover from year to year is high. Secondly, there are 8 states, mostly in the south which expend less than \$50 per year per pupil on education as against 15 states which spend more than \$100 per pupil. New York is high with an annual expenditure per pupil of more than \$140 whereas in Mississippi it drops to \$28.00 per pupil. Now look at the length of the school term. For the nation as a whole the average is 174½ days per year. In Illinois it was 187 days in 1940. In Mississippi it was only 146 days. Now look at enrollment. Mississippi reports that in 1940, only 392 out of every 1000 persons between the ages of 14 and 17 were enrolled in high school. In the State of Washington, it was 952.

THE OBJECTIVE

There is a general desire to correct the condition by improving teachers salaries, increasing schools and school facilities and increasing the per-pupil expenditure for education but the question is how shall it be done when the real problem exists in those states where the per capita income and public funds are limited. The obvious answer was to ask the Federal Government for help and thus the aid-to-education bill found its way before Congress where it is now being considered.

SOME OBJECTIONS.

When the bill was first introduced, there was strong and widespread objection on the ground that it would inevitably lead to complete Federal control of education. To allay this fear, a section was inserted to the effect that no Federal agency shall exercise any supervision or control over any school or state educational agency. But this has not allayed the fear for it is pointed out how other subsidies eventually terminated in Federal control. Other argument which has been voiced against the bill is that in view of the Federal debt (now 170 billion) as compared with the outstanding debt of all of the states (less than 3 billion) the states can better afford to carry this expense. Still other points advanced are that this obligation will grow into billions of dollars, that it is a non-war expenditure, that it will not in fact equalize educational opportunities, that education is not strictly a Federal function and that it means the destruction of local self government in the field of education, that it is permanent law and not merely for the emergency, that it means a substantial number of additional jobs on the Federal payroll to administer such an Act, and that some states which maintain good schools and adequate wages for teachers would receive about one-half of what they pay in as taxes.