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STATEMENT

by

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Member: President's Commission on
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Nonpublic Education

to

The Platform Committee of the Republican Party

Miami Beach, Florida

On May 31, 1972, in Boston, Massachusetts, I made a statement on education to a Subcommittee of the Platform Committee of the Democratic Party. At that time I declared my intention to accept President Nixon's invitation to appear before the Republican Platform Committee, an invitation personally extended to the members of the President's Panel on Nonpublic Education on the day its final report officially was submitted to the White House.

My appearance before the Platform Committees of both major political parties is evidence of two deep convictions: first, participation in the process of building a political party's platform is a privileged opportunity to be held in high esteem and to be fulfilled with commensurate responsibility; second, the educational welfare of the nation's largest group of non-voting citizens, our elementary and secondary school pupils, merits a bi-partisan commitment from the leadership of both parties. In good conscience I could not be associated with any political maneuvering which would set a party's ambitions ahead of the needs of school children. So today I speak to you about children in terms not of their

parents' votes but of their rights as young citizens of our nation. In that spirit I today reiterate several salient points in my statement to the Democrats, but with the added thought that most of what I propose has solid support in the research and findings of the President's Commission on School Finance and of his Panel on Nonpublic Education.

The following basic considerations merit the attention of the Republican Platform Committee:

1. All citizens of this nation have a right to an education appropriate to their needs and potential.
2. All school age children have a right to attend an adequately funded school staffed by competent teachers who follow an up-to-date curriculum in a safe school building.
3. No person should be deprived, either de jure or de facto, of adequate educational opportunity because of race, color, religion, national origin, economic condition or place of residence.
4. Racially integrated education in both public and nonpublic schools should be no less an ideal than adequate educational opportunity for all.
5. Though funding of schools is largely a responsibility of government, control of the educational process should be immune from governmental coercion and pressures and should be vested in local boards of education which are responsive to parents' wishes and preferences for their children's education. Local control of education, however, is not to be confused with local despotism which violates or ignores the rights of minority groups in a local community.
6. Public and nonpublic schools are integral components of a pluralistic pattern of education which is both an ideal and a tradition worthy of being preserved in this nation.

7. Parents' freedom to choose either a public or a nonpublic school for their children's education is a right enshrined in our nation's constitutional law. Exercise of this freedom should not be impaired by parents' inability to pay nonpublic school tuition and fees. Within constitutional limits, appropriations of public funds for education should be governed by principles of equity so that the largest possible number of parents will be in a position to exercise their free choice of either a public or nonpublic school.
8. Each State should reduce inequalities of educational opportunity within the State by state aid to those local school systems which lack sufficient local resources to finance their own schools. This state aid should include benefits for children in both public and nonpublic schools.
9. Because of the disparity of educational opportunity for children in different States and because of the States' wide range of fiscal ability to support schools, there is an evident need for federal aid as a means more nearly to equalize educational opportunity for all American children.
10. Categorical federal aid to education has the two-fold advantage of restricting the federal role to specific purposes and of guaranteeing nonpublic school pupils' participation. If non-categorical federal aid should become necessary to guarantee adequate school opportunities for all children, such aid should include benefits for nonpublic school pupils.
11. The critical condition of most large city public and nonpublic school systems calls for prompt federal attention. Emergency aid is needed for essential services. Beyond that, the federal government should initiate an urban educational assistance program to help public and nonpublic schools finance such programs as the replacement or renovation of unsafe, unsanitary, and antiquated school buildings and equipment; addition of remedial and

bi-lingual teachers and teacher aides; development of programs directly related to the unique needs of children residing in inner city neighborhoods.

12. Local, state and federal tax laws, notably income tax laws, should include provisions to stimulate and encourage the investment of private funds in American schools. To that end, tax exemption of school owned real estate, tax deductions for contributions to schools, and tax credits for part of the cost of tuition and fees are appropriate means. Upon these means largely depends the continued investment of private funds, now in excess of two billion a year, in the nation's nonpublic schools.
13. To ignore the serious financial problems confronting most nonpublic schools is to court disaster for both public and nonpublic schools whose futures are inseparably linked because of their proximity and inter-action, especially in the nation's large industrial States and large cities.

These basic considerations could well serve as a solid foundation for the Republican Platform's specific planks on education. To be meaningful, these planks will have to be promises of performance, not mere aspirations to achieve ideals. What commitments may reasonably be expected of the Republican Party at this time?

- A. The Republican Party should be committed to raise and to appropriate the tax funds required to give every American child at least a satisfactory education in adequately financed elementary and secondary schools. This commitment correctly would presume that schools in urban and rural neighborhoods with large concentrations of economically poor people are not giving their pupils a satisfactory education. This commitment means that the Party would not

shy away from the evidence that thousands of American children in large cities and in some rural areas are, as the Panel reported to the President, "locked into a cycle of unending deprivation which starts with substandard housing, insufficient diets, and inadequate schools. Retarded in basic skills by the end of the third grade, unable to undertake creative work in the intermediate grades, and frustrated by their growing inability in upper grades, thousands start high school with the self-fulfilling prophecy that they will be on the drop-out list at age 16, idle, unwanted and unemployable." This utterly deplorable and unnecessary condition cries for immediate action. Because there is no simple solution, all sorts of innovative programs, no less imaginative and creative than some of our nation's well subsidized scientific exploration, should be attempted even at the risk of failure. These innovative programs should go far beyond the limited authorization in Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which is restricted largely to remedial projects. What poor children need is not a lot of remedial work for built-in deficiencies in their schools. They need schools with programs which as far as possible compensate for all the handicaps connected with living in neighborhoods afflicted with over-population, bad housing, poor public services, and widespread crime. The persons who probably are best qualified to set up school programs which meet the real needs of the poor are the people in the neighborhood, including the administrators and faculty of the schools.

- B. The Republican Party should unequivocally be committed to the letter and to the spirit of our nation's constitutional law on racial desegregation in schools.

The important cause of law and order in our society will be ill served by legislation designed to impede the enforcement of the United States Supreme Court's interpretation of the fundamental law of our nation. The plain fact about school busing in connection with school desegregation is that in some places it has worked out well; in other places it has created severe difficulty and in some cases it has imposed much hardship on young children. Busing should be judged on the merits of each situation in which it is used. Doctrinaire opposition to busing under even favorable conditions will only exploit anxieties and arouse hostility on the part of parents whose children are not even remotely related to any present or prospective busing program.

- C. With regard to nonpublic schools, the Republican Party's platform should explicitly endorse the two most timely of the four major recommendations in the Final Report of the President's Panel on Nonpublic Education. Those two recommendations are:

Federal assistance to the urban poor through: (a) supplemental income allowance for nonpublic school tuitions for welfare recipients and the working poor; (b) experiments with vouchers; (c) full enforcement of ESEA provisions entitling nonpublic school pupils to certain benefits; and (d) an urban assistance program for public and nonpublic schools.

Federal income tax credits for part of nonpublic school tuition.

The rationale for these two recommendations is set forth in considerable detail in the text of the Panel's Final Report.

Neither the Panel as a group nor I as an individual have espoused tax credit legislatio

as the ideal way for the government to come to grips with the nonpublic schools' serious financial predicament. Tax credit legislation has been recommended to the President, to the Congress, and now to the Republican Party because it is a constitutionally sound way for the government to encourage parents to invest their personal funds in a nonpublic school. Tax credits are not a guaranteed subsidy to the schools. Only time will tell the extent to which tax credit legislation actually will stimulate private investment in nonpublic education.

For all practical purposes, the political issue has been joined. Those who want to do something about the nonpublic schools' financial problems are giving their support to tax credit legislation. Those who feel that the nonpublic schools' financial difficulties do not merit government attention take a dim view of tax credit legislation. Those who are inclined to avoid the problem continue to suggest more study, more research, another commission to investigate the problem, etc.

For parents who, this coming school year, will be asked to pay nonpublic school tuition at record-breaking high rates, the issue is perfectly clear. Tax credits will help them keep their children in a nonpublic school. No credit on their taxes will be no help.

During many years of controversy about tax aid for nonpublic education the debate generally was between legislators and spokesmen for nonpublic schools. Taxpayers sat on the sidelines. That has changed. Now that dozens of tax credit bills have been introduced in Congress, taxpayers who also are parents of nonpublic school children are showing an intense interest in the pending legislation. At stake are their children's education and their tax bills. Naturally they have an intense interest!

Many American citizens now are confident that at this convention in Miami Beach the Republican Party will approve a platform plank explicitly endorsing tax credit legislation and will support the legislation in Congress. Reasons for that confidence are these:

- President Nixon's official and personal interest in practical ways to help nonpublic schools overcome their present financial difficulties.
- The President's candid reaction to his Panel's recommendation that, all things considered, tax credit legislation would be the best step to take immediately in helping parents pay their mounting tuition bills for their children's education in nonpublic schools.
- Testimony on Monday of this week, August 14, by the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. George ~~S~~^g Schultz, before the House Ways and Means Committee in favor of tax credit legislation. •
- Support for the legislation from prominent Republican leaders in Congress.
- Sponsorship of tax credit bills by a number of Republican Congressmen.

The credibility of all these actions will be confirmed and enhanced by a plank endorsing tax credit.