

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
UNTIL 11:45 A.M. (EDT)
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 1976

June 24, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

I address this message to the Congress, and through the Congress to all Americans, on an issue of profound importance to our domestic tranquility and the future of American education.

Most Americans know this issue as busing -- the use of busing to carry out court-ordered assignment of students to correct illegal segregation in our schools.

In its fullest sense the issue is how we protect the civil rights of all Americans without unduly restricting the individual freedom of any American.

It concerns the responsibility of government to provide quality education, and equality of education, to every American.

It concerns our obligation to eliminate, as swiftly as humanly possible, the occasions of controversy and division from the fulfillment of this responsibility.

At the outset, let me set forth certain principles governing my judgments and my actions.

First, for all of my life I have held strong personal feelings against racial discrimination. I do not believe in a segregated society. We are a people of diverse background, origins and interests but we are still one people -- Americans -- and so must we live.

Second, it is the duty of every President to enforce the law of the land. When I became President, I took an oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. There must be no misunderstanding about this: I will uphold the Constitutional rights of every individual in the country. I will carry out the decisions of the Supreme Court. I will not tolerate defiance of the law.

Third, I am totally dedicated to quality education in America -- and to the principle that public education is predominantly the concern of the community in which people live. Throughout the history of our Nation, the education of our children, especially at the elementary and secondary levels, has been a community endeavor. The concept of public education is now written into our history as deeply as any tenet of American belief.

more

In recent years, we have seen many communities in the country lose control of their public schools to the Federal courts because they failed to voluntarily correct the effects of willful and official denial of the rights of some children in their schools.

It is my belief that in their earnest desire to carry out the decisions of the Supreme Court, some judges of lower Federal Courts have gone too far. They have:

- resorted too quickly to the remedy of massive busing of public school children;
- extended busing too broadly; and
- maintained control of schools for too long.

It is this overextension of court control that has transformed a simple judicial tool, busing, into a cause of widespread controversy and slowed our progress toward the total elimination of segregation.

As a President is responsible for acting to enforce the Nation's laws, so is he also responsible for acting when society begins to question the end results of those laws.

I therefore ask the Congress, as the elected representatives of the American people, to join with me in establishing guidelines for the lower Federal Courts in the desegregation of public schools throughout the land -- acting within the framework of the Constitution and particularly the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

It is both appropriate and Constitutional for the Congress to define by law the remedies the lower Federal Courts may decree.

It is both appropriate and Constitutional for the Congress to prescribe standards and procedures for accommodating competing interests and rights.

Both the advocates of more busing and the advocates of less busing feel they hold a strong moral position on this issue.

To many Americans who have been in the long struggle for civil rights, busing appears to be the only way to provide the equal educational opportunity so long and so tragically denied them.

To many other Americans who have struggled much of their lives and devoted most of their energies to seeking the best for their children, busing appears to be a denial of an individual's freedom to choose the best school for his or her children.

more

Whether busing helps school children get a better education is not a settled question. The record is mixed. Certainly, busing has assisted in bringing about the desegregation of our schools. But it is a tragic reality that, in some areas, busing under court order has brought fear to both black students and white students -- and to their parents.

No child can learn in an atmosphere of fear. Better remedies to right Constitutional wrongs must be found.

It is my responsibility, and the responsibility of the Congress, to address and to seek to resolve this situation.

In the twenty-two years since the Supreme Court ordered an end to school segregation, this country has made great progress. Yet we still have far to go.

To maintain progress toward the orderly elimination of illegal segregation in our public schools, and to preserve -- or, where appropriate, restore -- community control of schools, I am proposing legislation to:

1. Require that a court in a desegregation case determine the extent to which acts of unlawful discrimination have caused a greater degree of racial concentration in a school or school system than would have existed in the absence of such acts:
2. Require that busing and other remedies in school desegregation cases be limited to eliminating the degree of student racial concentration caused by proven unlawful acts of discrimination:
3. Require that the utilization of court-ordered busing as a remedy be limited to a specific period of time consistent with the legislation's intent that it be an interim and transitional remedy. In general, this period of time will be no longer than five years where there has been compliance with the court order.
4. Create an independent National Community and Education Committee to help any school community requesting citizen assistance in voluntarily resolving its school segregation problem.

Almost without exception, the citizens' groups both for and against busing with which I have consulted told me that the proposed National Community and Education Committee could be a positive addition to the resources currently available to communities which face up to the issue honestly, voluntarily and in the best spirit of American democracy.

more

This citizens' Committee would be made up primarily of men and women who have had community experience in school desegregation activities.

It would remain distinct and separate from enforcement activities of the Federal Courts, the Justice Department and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

It is my hope that the Committee could activate and energize effective local leadership at an early stage:

- To reduce the disruption that would otherwise accompany the desegregation process; and
- To provide additional assistance to communities in anticipating and resolving difficulties prior to and during desegregation.

While I personally believe that every community should effectively desegregate on a voluntary basis, I recognize that some court action is inevitable.

In those cases where Federal court actions are initiated, however, I believe that busing as a remedy ought to be the last resort, and that it ought to be limited in scope to correcting the effects of previous Constitutional violations.

The goal of the judicial remedy in a school desegregation case ought to be to put the school system, and its students, where they would have been if the acts which violate the Constitution had never occurred.

The goal should be to eliminate "root and branch" the Constitutional violations and all of their present effects. This is the Constitutional test which the Supreme Court has mandated -- nothing more, nothing less.

Therefore, my bill would establish for Federal courts specific guidelines concerning the use of busing in school desegregation cases. It would require the court to determine the extent to which acts of unlawful discrimination by governmental officials have caused a greater degree of racial concentration in a school or school system than would have existed in the absence of such acts. It would further require the court to limit the relief to that necessary to correct the racial imbalance actually caused by those unlawful acts. This would prohibit a court from ordering busing throughout an entire school system simply for the purpose of achieving racial balance.

In addition, my bill recognizes that the busing remedy is transitional by its very nature and that when a community makes good faith efforts to comply, busing ought to be limited in duration. Therefore, the bill provides that three years after the busing remedy has been imposed a court shall be required to determine whether to continue the remedy.

more

Should the court determine that a continuation is necessary, it could do so only for an additional two years. Thereafter, the court could continue busing only in the most extraordinary circumstances, where there has been a failure or delay of other remedial efforts or where the residual effects of unlawful discrimination are unusually severe.

Great concern has been expressed that submission of this bill at this time would encourage those who are resisting court-ordered desegregation -- sometimes to the point of violence.

Let me here state, simply and directly, that this Administration will not tolerate unlawful segregation.

We will act swiftly and effectively against anyone who engages in violence.

I assure the people of this Nation that this Administration will do whatever it must to preserve order and to protect the Constitutional rights of our citizens.

The purpose of submitting this legislation now is to place the debate on this controversial issue in the halls of Congress and in the democratic process -- not in the streets of our cities.

The strength of America has always been our ability to deal with our own problems in a responsible and orderly way.

We can do so again if every American will join with me in affirming our historic commitment to a Nation of laws, a people of equality, a society of opportunity.

I call on the Congress to write into law a new perspective which sees court-ordered busing as a tool to be used with the highest selectivity and the utmost precision.

I call on the leaders of all the Nation's school districts which may yet face court orders to move voluntarily, promptly, objectively and compassionately to desegregate their schools.

We must eliminate discrimination in America.

We must summon the best in ourselves to the cause of achieving the highest possible quality of education for each and every American child.

GERALD R. FORD

THE WHITE HOUSE,

June 24, 1976.

#