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6643 – Federal Aid to Education

Guest: Reps. William Colmer and Jamie Whitten (D-MS)

Morphew: Introduction...Colmer is dean of Mississippi Congressional delegation, ranking member and ex-chairman of the powerful House Rules Committee...Whitten is a high ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee...to Whitten...as a member of the Appropriations Committee, various proposals have come before you including this matter of federal aid to education...when your committee was considering federal aid to education, did it have in mind that the money would be spent in a manner in which the commissioner of education, Harold Howe II, and the Department of HEW are now doing as far as the so called guidelines are concerned?

Whitten: Dick, certainly it did not. However, I don't believe that you'll find that Mr. Howe ever called anybody, any group in Congress attention to what he intended. I might also refer to your expression, it's not the money that's spent, it's the money they hold back as a result of these guidelines which have no basis in law, so far as I can find.

Morphew: To Colmer...your Rules committee has recently called Mr. Howe as a witness, and he is quoted as having said that is he had his way, 'schools would be built for the primary purpose of economic and social integration'...do you believe this goes beyond the intent of Congress in any civil rights bills passed thus far?

Colmer: Dick, unquestionably it does. I think maybe I should explain what the Rules Committee was doing in this field. As you understand, the Rules Committee is the clearinghouse, it's not a legislative committee. It clears the legislation from all other committees. But this abuse of the power that this man, Dr. Howe, has used was so flagrant and so violent, and the Judiciary Committee and the Education Committee which have primary responsibilities for looking after these things were not doing anything about it, so a number of resolutions were introduced, one of which was introduced by my good

friend and colleague here, Congressman Whitten, and referred to my committee. And upon the basis of these resolutions which had for their purpose the setting up of a select committee to study the abuse of the law and the misinterpretation of the law and the willful maladministration, in our judgment, brought about hearings by my committee. My committee ordinarily only hears members of Congress but in this particular case we exercised authority that we rarely use to bring in this federal official and ask him, interrogate him, and expose some of this maladministration.

Morphew: In a recent syndicated column, David Lawrence said that the country as a whole is not yet informed about the significance of this question because this whole matter means 'that the national government by the use of federal funds can control almost any action of the local governments and threaten the withholding and deferment of such funds until there is so called compliance with the wishes of a department in Washington'...he also says that this is going to lead to complete control in Washington of the educational system...to Whitten, do you see that this danger actually exists at the present time?

Whitten: I certainly do. It's been pointed out by my colleague Bill Colmer, Mr. Howe is kind of adamant in his attitude about what he plans to do. The regulations that he has issued go far beyond the law which authorizes the regulations and he wants to enlarge on Supreme Court decisions and enlarge on the statute. And there's one thing about it, if you've got the money and don't release it the fact that you're acting wrong still leaves them without the money. Of course, behind all of this and one of the reasons why they look so much to the federal government, the federal government's moved in on income taxes to the point that it's hard to finance many of your local problems from ordinary sources of taxes. So that very need is adding to the power of a fellow like Howe to take the bit in his own teeth, so to speak, and do what he pleases and to make it awfully difficult to shake him loose. And I think I should say here that Judge Smith and Bill Colmer and the others on the Rules Committee deserve great credit for having brought this to the attention, I think you saw on the floor of the House the reaction that it's had in the Congress, and of course behind that was the reaction with the American people. I think the people are catching on and I think it's going to have some beneficial effects before it's over.

Morphew: In a recent appearance on this program, Governor Wallace pointed out the irony of the present situation that a school district which is operating under a federal court integration order probably can do less and still receive its federal funds than in a district where there is no court order but that is trying to deal with Howe and HEW

Whitten: Well, there's lots of other things in this that are ironical. Last fall I was in a school in Detroit, Michigan. Of something over 1300 students, they had four white students in the whole school. You don't see anything about that. Howe attempted to impose on the city of Chicago certain things that he imposed for our area and you'll recall that that didn't last very long. So this man, with all the things he's trying to do, he's trying to pinpoint it to those places where for one reason or another they haven't been able to take care of themselves to the same degree that your big cities have.

Morphew: To Colmer...for many years you have said that the South has been the nation's whipping boy and as long as these guidelines were being imposed primarily in the South perhaps people in the other parts of the country weren't going to become too concerned about it, but now that it is reaching up North through busing and relocating schools and district lines, do you think this is going to have some political impact?

Whitten: Well, I don't think there's any question about it, Dick. As you have intimated if not said, for a long time all this so called civil rights which some of us are inclined to call civil wrongs was aimed like a loaded pistol at the South. The 1966 version, which was killed finally, was like a scattergun that was aimed at the whole nation and these people in the so called North now are awakening to the real situation that exists and the thing that the South has known all these years. So when they begin to talk about open housing and busing children clear across the city limits from one end of the city to the other it's getting close to home, and they have become very conscious of it and I think it's going to result in a different picture come the next Congress, particularly if we get a few more conservatives to replace these pseudo-liberals. But Dick, I just want to say this in furtherance of what Jamie had to say there and which you have said, the thing that the people of this country apparently don't realize and the thing that some of us have been trying to point out for years is that the federal control is going to follow that federal dollar and this is exactly what's going on in the educational field as it has in other aspects of our economy and social life. When you get a man like Dr. Howe who has a philosophy that is contrary to that of the great majority of these people, who is a zealot for remaking America after the lines of the Old World, getting back to what our forefathers fled from to come over here to establish a new form of government in the New World, when you get this type of man in control of one of your great institutions like the education department of this government you've got a sad situation. Now it can only lead, in the final analysis, to the abolition of your neighborhood schools, the centralization of power in the federal government in the field of education. And I predicted in the committee the other day and I repeat here now, it's just a question of a few years, if this thing is permitted to go on, before they will be prescribing up here in Washington the textbooks that will be used in the public schools of Mississippi, New York, and other states of the Union. Jamie, pardon me for going on so long.

Whitten: Well, you've worked with this for a long time, Bill, and we all appreciate it on the committee. I might mention here that the bills that you are considering, I did join with George Andrews in introducing the bill, a facet of it that hasn't been touched on here, the bill's call for holding up the enforcement of these regulations pending the study by a select committee which would be authorized under the terms of the measure.

Morphew: To Whitten, do you public reaction against these arbitrary government decisions is increasing?

Whitten: No question about it. The action of the House of Representatives on the Fountain Amendment and later on, the O'Hara Amendment, quite clearly show how strong the feeling is. I believe the O'Hara Amendment, they had a tele-vote where the

names weren't recorded and I believe it carried with only five votes opposed to it, which is an indication, not that those amendments were as strong as my colleague would have liked them, but at least it was a step in the right direction and they had only five votes in opposition.