P.S. to the NEWS

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ANOTHER "F" FOR U.S. SCHOOLS

Can it be statistically proven that the more the federal government spends on education, the worse is the product our schools turn out? Maybe not; but the burden to prove that this is NOT so is on the advocates of federal spending because the rise in federal spending on education correlates exactly with the decline in educational skills schoolchildren possess.

Scholastic Aptitude Tests (S.A.T.) scores of high school seniors fell again this year, continuing their trend downward that began two decades ago (when the federal government started its aid to education programs). So Congress and President Carter immediately opted for a bigger and more costly educational bureaucracy called the Department of Education.

The same issue of the Washington Post which carried the news of the final Congressional passage of the bill to create the new Department of Education, with an annual budget of $14 billion, also included an editorial citing dreary examples of illiterate teachers, including one tenth grade teacher in a District high school who misspelled "civille right" on the blackboard. None of the 18,000 federal employees to be hired by the Department of Education will teach one teacher or child to read or spell, any more than any of the 20,000 employees of the Department of Energy have produced one barrel of oil or one kilowatt of energy.

The average S.A.T. verbal score this year fell two points to 427. This is a drop in verbal S.A.T. scores from 463 in 1969 and from 477 in 1959, a 50 point drop in 20 years. Originally, 500 was supposed to be average.

The increasing numbers of minority students taking the test could account for some of the drop before 1970, but not since. A 1977 College Board study tried to blame the drop on a variety of nonacademic causes including the Vietnam War and

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Watergate. That's scraping the bottom of the barrel of excuses to explain the dramatic failure to teach reading and writing; those skills should be learned in elementary schools.

The Ford Foundation concluded in a recent study that federal programs of the 1960s aimed at wiping out illiteracy have failed. It said that 64 million Americans may lack the reading and writing abilities needed for today's technologies, and in nine states more than half the adults have not completed high school.

S.A.T. math scores have dropped from 493 in 1969 to 467 today. The National Assessment of Educational Progress corroborated this with a report that math skills have declined in the past five years among students age 9, 13, and 17.

Even if students learn the computations, they cannot apply them to everyday problems. You can confirm this yourself by observing the difficulty young people have making change at a cash register. No doubt this is why so many stores have installed machines which do all the subtraction for the cashiers.

Even before the S.A.T. scores provided a report card on the schools, danger signs were showing up. In the early 1960s, Vice Admiral H. G. Rickover's books and congressional testimony provided extensive unfavorable comparisons between our schools and those of the Swiss and the British.

He deplored the way that "the generous desire of the American people to educate all children has foundered on an impoverished logic in whose eyes everything is equal," and has resulted in reducing education down to the lowest level. He recommended instead that our educational policy "give every child the maximum education he is capable of absorbing." That's still good advice.

President Carter called the passage of the new Department of Education bill "a significant milestone in my effort to make the federal government more effective." Translated, that means "a significant milestone in his effort to be reelected." Passage was a payoff of a campaign pledge to the National Education Association which endorsed Carter in 1976, and promptly endorsed him again right after the vote.

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