

Fax for Curt Johnson  
Three pages

7-1-92

A few notes from the national meeting of the 'alternative educators', and discussions in Washington.

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A few Minnesotans were there; from the MDE and from districts. I had a chance to draw them out a bit about Wedl. Two reactions. First, he stands well within the department. Second, he is unusual in his ability and his willingness to work with other departments. Apparently not a lot of people do that well, or do it at all.

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If the governor means it about wanting to see the charter school for deaf kids approved that will be very important, because the expectation inside the MDE is that the commissioner will recommend against it.

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I handed out a lot of my memos about "The Charter Schools Idea" and came away with rosters from the 'alternative' movement in all the states. If you could ever use these names, let me know.

The MN alternative network could be helpful re: any legislation about charter schools in '93. It contains some old bureaucrats, for sure, but a lot of folks like those in Mounds View who are looking for greater independence. I really liked June Long, from Osseo, who is I believe on her way to being the new state president (and is close to the Mounds View group).

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There is a meeting 7/2 to talk through with the deaf-school people and one other charter-school group the option for teachers in a school not to be employed; and therefore to avoid getting tied up in the whole question about representation and bargaining. I'll let you know how this comes out.

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I had breakfast in Washington Friday with a staff person at the AFT. The story is the same one I heard from another AFT guy recently, in Boston. Please treat it as confidential.

The Executive Council has pulled back from most all 'reform' and restructuring activity, to focus on bread-and-butter issues. This means that for the moment the AFT is pretty much out of the

policy discussion; except for Shanker's current effort to push 'standards'.

Partly it's the recession. But partly it's that the locals out in the field are starting to worry as bills and other proposals -- for vouchers, contracting, charter schools, whatever -- keep appearing . . . and are reacting by opposing all proposals for change. This person knows that is not smart . . . and says Shanker knows it is not smart: Public education is not going to be saved by not changing it. But the reality is that the mind-set among folks in the AFT locals is that they are going to fight everything.

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I told him about the interest here in setting up charter schools so that the teachers would work in a professional group, without bargaining. He said he would definitely urge teachers to do that . . . would urge them not to be employed. He said flatly he thinks the charter idea is the best idea to come along; potentially the winning idea.

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This guy also says they are sensing major dissatisfaction in the business community in a number of cities about the way the school district is being run. This is not an interest in vouchers or in private schools: It is an interest in competent and honest management. "There is a market out there for what Education Alternatives is trying to do"; is the way he put it.

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The NEA will vote at its national meeting this summer on a proposal to withdraw the prohibition against the NEA belonging to the national AFL-CIO. This is a key step in clearing the way for merger with the AFT. Relations between the two are now very cordial.

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I talked with folks (Republicans) in the Department and with others (Democrats) around Congress. The whole idea of having anybody in the national government try to take the lead on the charter schools idea scares me. They are very timid; terribly frightened of the interest groups. They think in terms of doing things through federal legislation. There is relatively little to be gained from anything Congress might realistically do; and the risk is high that the interest-groups could just tie it up in knots. I came away wishing Washington would just stay out of it.

In my session at the US Department the final question was what did I think of their GI Bill initiative last week. I said I think the problem is in state law and that the power of the presidency ought to be faced toward the states, making proposals

for changes in state law. Having Bush send proposals to Congress is just a distraction. I'm not sure I will be invited back.

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What will the Governor say at the NGA meeting at Princeton (Univ) August 2? From what I've seen of the agenda (see enclosed) it is mainly a follow-up on education reform, post the '89 'summit'.

Is he going? Are you going with him?

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The national group of university-based folk who study education policy -- the Politics of Education Association -- is coming to Minnesota October 29-30 for its annual conference . . . specifically to look (as the program says) at what happens when our state initiatives meet local districts. The program is being arranged by Ellen Goldring at Vanderbilt. I'm on a panel. Unk who else.

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About Aug. 1, too, all the media will start working on their back-to-school stories.

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It's good to see Swain heading the HealthRight commission. What a crew that is, that the law requires be involved!

Are you inclined to fit Harry Sutton in? It will be important to have good numbers.

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What's new?

TK  
7/1