

## **Themes and Discussion points from A Nation at Risk summit April 3, 1998**

In 1983 A Nation at Risk awoke the nation, but its vision remains clouded and it's not clear about what action to take. The summit plans to whip together a stiff education espresso in the form of a manifesto.

We have lost enough kids, damn it, and it's time to express a clear, strong and driven message. We must realize equity through equality and develop equality through pluralism, competition, and choice. Tight about the ends, loose about the means.

### ***A Nation At Risk Authors:***

(Note, Uncle Tom's Cabin is fiction. A Nation at Risk is not fiction.)

**Intentions:** Hoped to start a conflict and they chose the war analogy to do just that.

What did you hope would happen?

Albert Quie, "We did intend to start the war...What I expected was tremendous improvement...But at that time I had no idea that the system was so reluctant to change. Or that within the education system there was animosity to change and how clever people are at preventing change."

Jay Sommer, "Intent was to send out a clarion call...We wanted to awaken America to the problem that we have had...and that we've been asleep all along...I wish we had said more. We wanted to reach all educators. Some of us in the classroom are still asleep."

Emeral Crosby, "We were trying to electrify the community. We used terms that were as negative as we could think of, so we used war. The next negative thing when you think of quality is mediocrity, so that is in there.... The future of this country depends upon what we are doing for our young people. That is the future, and if we don't do something about our future we're going to lose it and someone else is going to determine the future...We expected to find the best practices and share them. We also expected to elevate teaching and we expected technology to move from the plants and factories into the classrooms. ...We expected that the standards would be raised, greater demands upon our students and teachers. We expected the public to demand that our decision makers and legislators...would now turn on and say education is a top priority, let's go for it."

Milt Goldberg, "Didn't expect that so many people would think of it as a plot...It's one of the great disgraces of academia today that there are people parading around the country saying such things. We all expected major changes

in state policy... We thought there would be a quick turnaround...We thought there would be a public outcry that would be constant enough to see changes in our public school...This is a report that used data and observation in public schools to make its case...We wanted to see more pronouncements of about American social policy would be made on the basis of data, not intuition.

### **Biggest Disappointment?**

There has not been much increase in time.

Crosby: It's amazing that American's are the only ones that believe that their kids cannot learn in June, July, and Aug. We are still spending so much time holding the kids available for harvesting crops. There are no crops to be harvested on the street of Detroit, NY and Chicago, and yet we hold them out... As we have raise graduation requirements we have not prepared our young people to come in and teach classes. They can almost get a scholarships for anything but teaching. Industry keep hiring our teachers and we will not raise the amount of money in order to hire them and yet we expect our kids to be number one in math and science."

Jay Sommer, "The clarion called worked, we awakened America, but the problem is that America did not know what to do when it was awake. People do respond to a report like this and we are still seeing quotes from the quotes. We have an important function here to do something about awakening America because it can be awakened."

Bennett, "I think it is [the report] the most important thing every done by the Department of Education or by any secretary of education."

Golberg: (?) "Our problem is the same thing as the Soviet Union faced after the cold war, to get rid of the whole monolithic system." (END OF SIDE 1.)

**Expectations:** They expected surprise and outrage. They found outrage and resistance. It's a disgrace that US academia believed this was a subversive plot. The authors were surprised to find such resistance.

### **Need to Explode the Myth:**

- (Tape 3 Side 1 -- t3s1, Timer: 491) Jay, "we have to find a way to value our teacher better than we have done in the past...At the core we have to show and inspire teachers...we have to find a way to motivate teachers... 'what am I doing? I am improving the world, I am improving America."
- Al Quie (t3s1, 735), "World view does change, we see it in smoking, we see it in the environment we saw it in Vietnam, world view does change, it takes a period of time. Is this has been discussed now for 40 years then maybe the time is ripe."

**What has come of the work:** A shameful acceptance of mediocrity and a “whatever attitude” that has made poor achievement and instruction commonplace. The resistance to change and accountability is strong and clever. The clever ways to maintain the current practices has overcome the important message of A Nation at Risk.

- Paul Gross, “[academia explaining away] this a manufactured crisis. Let’s try to restate it...with us things get worse over time...Education is cumulative. What happens over time is that value is added, intellectual value is added to a student’s equipment over time... We are failing at adding value at the rate at which it is valued in other educational systems.” (t2s1, 4965)

### Conversation themes:

#### TIMSS results:

- Ravitch, “There has been an amazing barrage on the part of critics who say who cares, the economy is good what difference does it make... We can always buy brains from over seas...In some way this is a full circle response to the Nation at Risk. And a lot of pent up anger. I went back to his first article in PDK. In his first Bracey report...Over education poses...(p. 111)...must continue to produce an uneducated working class -- the Nigger class. In this letter [to me] he writes that ‘There will come a time when all of you people [of a nation at risk] will get together and meet and agree that all children are not educible.’ ...This is the challenge, can we be equal and excellent too, I’ve always contended that you can’t have equality unless you provide excellence for all children. Underpinning so much of the attack on TIMSS and a Nation at Risk is the view that there is a natural inequality and the schools must go with the flow.”
- Pat Forgoine, “Today I stand before you as the commissioner and say in no uncertain terms that we have data that can tell us about America’s improvement and the progress we are making...”

“How could we be making a little bit of progress in the math frameworks and yet not showing it comparatively. Let me give you the answer, we are on an escalator going at a certain pace, these other countries are at a faster pace, folks, that’s why you need to bench mark yourself. Even though you are making progress, that does not mean you are being competitive.”

(T2S1, 1167) "Some people point out that we have a deeper bottom, we have a more diverse population. It isn't true, folks...All of our children aren't performing well, and that's the problem."

(1454) "So there is something about our curriculum where our expectations are not as rigorous as our competitors."

"We tried to out this question [teacher have a major or minor in their subject] in the TIMSS questionnaire, and they were offended that you could even hire someone who did not have a subject matter...it seemed to be a different set of expectations, especially at the secondary level.

(1880) "They [the Japanese] are teaching with more depth and more often."

[in the US videos] "We found almost no rigorous content, and we found 8 out of 10 concepts stated but not developed. So it's not just a curriculum issue, folks, it's a pedagogical content issue."

(2220) "Kids have gotten the message...they want to do it...the question is do they have the competitive skills?"

#### **Students:**

Results: As US students progress through the system they get more stupid. This is especially noticeable in the middle school years, when they need quality education and structure the most.

The effects upon the economy: The economy is still doing well, but who is reaping the benefits and we must distinguish the changing demands of the economy. Certainly, there are many diverse factors that create a successful economy, including individual innovation, but this does not infringe upon the need for facts. Knowledge does not reduce creativity. To argue this is absurd.

- Floyd Kvamme: "In Silicon Valley, estimates are that 23% of our workers are immigrants. I sit on the board of 10 high tech companies 5 are headed by immigrant CEOs...We have depended on immigrants and as our industries become a larger percent of economy, the shortages will be more obvious. We [technology sector] just achieved to double digits percent of the economy. Going above that we will need more folks that principally can read."
- Murray Dickman, "In low end manufacturing places in Philadelphia where companies have been in business for 100 years companies

cannot find people that can read a scale. This is a high tech and a low tech problem."

- Ravitch, (t2s1, 3411) "[President Clinton remarked that] he was under a great deal of pressure to increase immigration quota for computer specialists. There are close to 400,000 high paying jobs that can't be filled by Americans."
- Bennett, "American kids are not in on the rewards"
- Mike D OE, "The pay gap in the knowledge based economy is increasing." (t2s1, 3770)
- Doyle, "Least flexible part of the American economy is education, elementary and secondary, it is the most credential ridden high bound, administrative and rule driven system in the country. And the most flexible economy is the American private sector which is the envy of the world. " (t2s1, 4600)

Expectations: Public policy must assume all children can learn. We can realize equality through equity. Past efforts that do not assume equity have put the nation into a stratified quandary. Through misguided efforts at equity we have maintained a dual system that sabotages equality and where the worst cases are academically shameful and the best is poor when compared internationally.

- Ray Jackson, (t2s2, 5470) "What we have to focus on is students first.... All children can learn...All students want to learn, achieve, and be successful. You get students to understand why they come to school...Most of them can't give you a definitive answer. Kids at my school tell you they come to learn how to learn...My students wear uniforms. It makes a difference in the school."

"Students rise to expectations. Teachers, if you don't have teaching in the heart, the kids don't care until they see you care..."

## Teachers

Qualifications: Our teachers are poorly qualified. The focus on teacher as a labor party and the emphasis on pedagogy and certification/licensing (that has little to do with academic quality) must be abandoned and re-orientated.

Ravitch:

- "There are silver bullets." (T2S1, 2444) "We have a critical problem in terms of out of field teaching...[and] the incredible amount of 12<sup>th</sup>

graders that have, virtually, full time jobs. This indicates that children are not taking school very seriously."

"Not fair to compare them to us since their kids take tests seriously and ours don't?"

Attitudinal insights "We've once again won the self esteem award"

Salary: Develop a merit based system that operates in conjunction with increased competition and consumer choice.

- Larry: "There was a push in the late 80s for merit pay...a-lot of those efforts have petered out... Why didn't that stick and expand? (440, side 2 counter)

"After this report teacher salaries went up in real dollar terms and in comparison to other occupations, especially in the south where teacher salaries were particularly low. What didn't happen was in differential salaries or trying to relate salaries to critical needs such as science and math." (719 T1S2)

- Bennett, "The largest percentage of unprepared teachers are in the worst years. [middles school years]" (t2s1, 4270)

Career incentives.

Teacher colleges: Higher standards for admission and more academic focus, less pedagogy. Also, get them in tune with the American public.

- (t2s2, 350) Linda Schrenko, "Part of the problem at the middle grades level, at least in GA, is by educational design. We set it up the middle school program and we said to teachers to be certified in content, we want you to be certified in developmental appropriate practices. As a result of that our scores have bottomed out. Now that is entrenched in teacher colleges, how do we get that out?"

"This is not happening in the same way to a lot of our kids...The fact that economy is doing well has not reached them...What is it about the nature of the institution that needs to be changed?"

- Carol Gambill, "I've taught for 30 years. It's a passion for me...In the middle schools, now that progressive schools of education have starting impacting, if you are a teacher that has a passion for your subject you are driven out...The brightest and the best [teachers] are leaving."

- T. Lott, "The individual school districts are not user friendly...[curriculum/standards]"
- Leah Vukmir, (t2s2, 4117) "We have been hearing from parents across the country and have been hearing the same thing over and over again. Most of the comments seem to relate to changes to be made in teacher preparation. "

"There has been such an incredible role reversal. The parents are teaching academics at home and the schools are teaching the values. And that is very frustrating as parents. And this comes back to entrenched ideologies at teacher colleges and when...I say these things in front of educators I am told I am just a parent, what do you know, I am just a parent. It boils down to accountability for teachers and kids."

(t2s2) (4690)LV, "I can teach at Marquette University, I can teach graduate students and undergraduate students...But with my science background I cannot go into a high school and teach HS kids. I would have to take X number of credits. I would have to go through a whole exercise in order to get credited by the department of public instruction."

### **Power Structure**

Financing: Who controls the money. System centered or child centered. This issue is a tremendous union position that they will hold.

- Mike D OE, "There is a problem and problems create opportunities. 1) the money area...not another service industry where 1/2 of the money is being spent outside the services being rendered 2) In the area of education technology...first we need to get to the 20th century...3) assessment, if you can't measure it you can't manage it." (t2s2)
- Dwight Evans, "How do you translate that to John and Jane Q PA in the classroom?...Changing the relationships, we really don't talk about it. We discuss how things are funded...That's how things were measured...Local school board and superintendents said leaves us alone, just gives us the money don't have any discussion of this nature cause if you talk about this you just don't have any idea what you are talking about."

"If an individual has money and options, they will leave."

- Fuller, "It does not translate into fundamental changes in the public schools systems in America."
- (t2s2, 3199) Flake, "There are dual standards. There is a standard that demands at the upper tier a kind of qualitative educational experience to which student respond and parents respond. At the next tier there is a lowering of standard...with a limited expectancy because of sociological factors,... so that a kid like me coming out of a 13 member family with 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade educated parent would be out in a tier where a standards is low and since the standard is low that child never has the opportunity to even know that there is another standards... Our expectancy level is so low. " "If you start out with low expectancy you will never solve the problem of the at risk child. Many of them have the capability, they just don't have the school system that demands of them a degree of excellence and they have placed a premium in mediocrity."

Strap the cash to the child. Child-centered education will create pluralism and foster competition.

Charter schools proving the possible

Unions: Dealing with them at the national and local level are 2 different things. Know whom you are dealing with.

- Scott Hamilton, (t2s2, 4970) "What's become extremely clear is that the teacher unions are resistant to any significant change."

"Some of the charter schools in MA are demonstrating the possible through the actual."

- Emerald Crosby, (t3s1, 1044), "You mention consequences, everything now that concerns our society is asked of our schools. I'm totally responsible now for the immunization of this country. The schools are responsible for the immunization of this country. Our elementary school got to be totally involved, not the medical profession, not the parents, the schools....The classrooms are sacred in some countries, in America it is not sacred. Immunization: we gotta teach about aids, we gotta teach about drugs, we gotta teach about smoking, we gotta send notices to the parents...If I don't teach against smoking I am subject to 90 days in jail, a 500 fine or termination, if I don't deal with drugs and child abuse. I have to check the kids every day to see if there is a bruise on him and the person that inflicted the bruise is not held accountable...If I am going to be responsible for that and if reading is



one of the comments and there is no penalty for that, which one am I going to deal with. I am going to deal with the one society says is most important.

"If you're going to spend 90% of the time dealing with things that are not academic, then when are we going to improve?"

- Kvamme, (t3s1) "If we miss putting competitive elements into the education system we are missing a huge American solution to the problem."
- Fuller(t3s1), "If you don't have something powerful to make them change then all of the discussion means nothing...In my view the thing that make people change is who is in control of the allocation, the distribution of the money. And these people understand that...This is not about the children, this is about control of resources."

"I admit this system works well for a-lot f kids, but the problem is that is does not work well for a whole lot of kids."

### Standards

National standards versus local standards. What is the optimal combination of the two and who should oversee the process? Who decides what the standards will include and what assessments will be used?

- Matt Gandal, "I'm concerned about the relativism of the standards out there now...There is not enough of an ability for those places to understand how that matches up."  
"Reacting to privatizing standards and test, there are a handful of companies that control standards and tests across the country."

What are the consequences of standards. Much of this can be resolved through pluralism, competition, and choice. But there is the issue of relativism that must be resolved.

- Paul gross (Teacher colleges, t3s1, 1412), "There is a central problem with these institutions...If we have agreed that there isn't anything such as knowledge, but knowledges...then we get to the addle brained relativism that has characterized the education establishment for 40 years...This epistemological/ philosophical issue, how do we know what is true is what is different between our teacher schools and those abroad."

Clarity for teachers and students and parents. Do they standards are clear expectations for learning and teaching. Do they clearly identify what is information and concepts are important to the students, teachers, parents, test-developers, and text authors.

Curriculum: What to teach and when? The middle schools years are very important and they have been overlooked.

**Parents:**

Access to information: A sure sign of monopoly and oligopoly is lack of consumer information. Choice makes them better consumers. They are better consumers because they are valued as customers.

- Doyle: privatize Title I
- Leah Vukmir, (t2s2, 4117) "We have been hearing from parents across the country and have been hearing the same thing over and over again. Most of the comments seem to relate to changes to be made in teacher preparation. "

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