

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH SECRETARY JOHN B. KING, JR.

SUBJECT: PREPARING CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE CITIZENS

MODERATOR: JEFF BALLOU, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**JEFF BALLOU:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. I'm Jeff Ballou, news editor for the Americas with Al Jazeera English here in Washington, D. C, and the 109<sup>th</sup> Vice President of the National Press Club. Our guest today is Dr. John B. King, Jr., the 10<sup>th</sup> U. S. Secretary of Education. I would welcome our public radio and C-SPAN audiences and I want to remind you that you can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLive. That's hashtag NPCLive. This will be, again, a great time for you to turn off or at least silence your cell phones so it doesn't disrupt our program. And again, if you have any questions for our speaker, you can write them on the cards that are at your table, pass them up to the head table and we will try to get through as many of them as time permits. Or you can Tweet them to the hashtag NPCLive.

Now's the time to introduce our head table guests. On your right looking at us, and on my far left, Dakarai Aarons, Vice President of Strategic Communications at the Data Quality Campaign and Vice President of the Education Writers Association; Tejinder Singh, editor of India America Today, and White House correspondent; Emily Wilkins, education and labor reporter at CQ Roll Call; Amy McIntosh, Assistant Secretary at the U. S. Department of Education; Carole Feldman, Director of News Operations and Finance at the Associated Press, and also education editor at the Associated Press; Jahana Hayes, the 2016 National Teacher of the Year; Kasia Klimasinska, reporter for Bloomberg News and Chair of the National Press Club Speakers Committee.

Skipping over our speaker for the moment, Lisa Matthews, Vice President at Hager Sharp and the National Press Club Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon. Thank you, Lisa. Emma Vadehra, Chief of Staff to the Secretary of Education; Jamaal Abdul-Alim, senior staff writer for Diverse Issues in Higher Education; Candace Smith, Executive Director of Media Relations at George Washington University; Aileen Roberta Schlef, President of the Creative Alliance Communications, and was involved in the 1979 transition team for the then-new U. S. Department of Education, which was established in 1980. (Applause)

It was just seven months ago that our guess was confirmed as Secretary of Education. But Dr. John B. King, Jr., has been involved in public education all his life. King, a former social studies teacher from New York, is known for crediting the public school system with his very life. King had a difficult childhood. By the age of 12, both of his parents, who were public school teachers, had died. It was a rough and tumble time, but after that, school was a sanctuary. Years later, Dr. King would go on to lead the New York State Education Department from 2011 to 2014, before joining the Department of Education.

Despite his emphasis on making sure all students are receiving the same level of education, regardless of race or zip code, King's tactics have been criticized on all sides; in school districts, at the PTA meetings, Congress. At the same time, he has been praised for understanding the importance of a diverse, rich, well rounded education. Dr. King supported the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which replaced No Child Left Behind. He has urged states to use the new federal election law-- excuse me, education law-- that's what I get for covering elections for so long, sorry-- to expand and focus more on science, social studies, arts and world languages. I like that last one.

Dr. King has also pushed for higher standards as a stepping stone that insures that all students are ready for what's next. Today, he returns to his roots as a social studies teacher to speak with us here at the National Press Club about the role of schools in prepping students to be active citizens. Please welcome to the National Press Club podium, Dr. John B. King, Jr., Secretary of Education. (Applause)

**SECRETARY KING:** Good afternoon. Thank you so much, Jeff, for the introduction, and thank you to the Press Club for inviting me here to speak with you today about a topic about which I am passionate, both as a former social studies teacher, and as an American; the importance of civic education as part of a well-rounded education. I've spoken about well-rounded education many times before, and I often speak about Mr. Osterweiler, who was my teacher in fourth, fifth and sixth grade at P. S. 276 in Canarsie, Brooklyn. He made a huge difference in my life after my mom passed away. He made school a place that was engaging, compelling, and nurturing.

We read and discussed the *New York Times* every day in his class. We performed Shakespeare, we went to the Met and to the Museum of Natural History and to other cultural institutions. And wherever we went, whatever we were doing, he would really

listen and respond to our questions and our observations. He made each of us feel valued and unique.

Last December, the President, President Obama, signed the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, which states are working hard to prepare to implement in the coming years. ESSA creates an opportunity for states and schools to reclaim the promise of a high quality, well rounded education like the one I had thanks to great New York City public school teachers. An education that prepares every student, regardless of their background, to succeed in college and careers.

Later this week, the Department of Education will release non-regulatory guidance on one part of ESSA, a new grant program designed to help schools and communities provide students with access to a well-rounded education, to create safe and supportive school environments, and to improve the use of technology. We owe it to every child in this country to provide them with access to music and the arts, world languages, physics, chemistry and biology, physical education and health, coding and computer science. And social studies, geography, government and civics. These are not luxuries, they are essential for preparing our students to thrive in the world they will experience beyond high school.

Today, I want to focus on the importance of civic education and what that might look like in schools and colleges. When we think about the responsibilities of citizens, we often think primarily about voting. And voting is unquestionably the cornerstone of freedom. The right to vote undergirds all our other rights. To not vote is to turn your back on your neighbors and your community and your country. And throughout our history, people have fought and even died to be treated as full citizens and to be able to cast a ballot.

It was 132 years after the ratification of the Constitution before women were allowed to vote, thanks to the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment. It wasn't until 1965 and the passage of the Voting Rights Act that African Americans were truly, finally guaranteed the right to vote despite the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment having been added to the Constitution nearly a hundred years earlier.

It's not ancient history, 1965. Congressman John Lewis was among many who were beaten and who suffered as part of that struggle. And some older African American voters today can still remember having to take literacy tests before being allowed to register and vote.

We need to continue to be ever-vigilant to make sure that this right is not taken away. However, as I would tell my students when I was teaching, voting, as important as it is, is only one responsibility of citizenship. The strength of our democracy depends on all of us as Americans understanding our history and the Constitution and how the government works at every level. Becoming informed and thoughtful about local, state and national issues, getting involved in solving problems in our schools, communities,

states and nationally. Recognizing that solutions to the complex issues our nation faces today all require compromise.

Being willing to think beyond our own needs and wants and to embrace our obligations to the greater good. Finally, I would argue that our democracy, our communities and our nation would be stronger if all of us volunteered on behalf of others. None of this will occur automatically. As Americans, we celebrate our individualism and our differences. But to remain a functioning society and democracy, we also have to recognize that we are dependent on society and society depends on us, all of us; parents, elected officials, educators, journalists, and everyone else, must set a good example for our children and for newcomers to this country and work to make this, in Lincoln's words, a more perfect union.

But today, I want to argue that our schools and colleges have a special responsibility to prepare their students to do so. Educating students about their role in democracy was one of the original goals of public education in this country and it should remain so today as our nation becomes more and more diverse. And right now, it is clear that our schools and colleges must do more to meet that goal.

The nation's report card shows that only one in five eighth graders and twelfth graders have a working knowledge of the Constitution, the presidency, Congress, the courts and how laws are made. Not surprisingly, we're failing even more of our children of color and children from low income families. Only about one in ten, one in ten, African American, Hispanic and low income students have a working knowledge of how government functions. Only a third of Americans, even know that Joe Biden is Vice President, can name a single Supreme Court justice. Those of us who work in Washington may think how could this be? But, it is the reality.

Today, all 50 states and the District of Columbia make some civics instruction a graduation requirement. Over the past couple of years, 14 states have also begun requiring students to pass a version of the citizenship exam to get a diploma. That could be a good start, but it is civics light. Knowing the first three words of the preamble to the Constitution, or being able to identify at least one branch of government, is worthwhile, but it's not enough to equip people to carry out the duties of citizenship.

Everyone above a certain age who watched Saturday morning cartoons remembers "How a Bill Becomes a Law" from "Schoolhouse Rock." But that doesn't help them evaluate different positions on issues such as immigration, or climate change or taxation. So today, I ask our nation's schools and colleges to be bold and creative in educating for citizenship. Make preparing your students for their civic duties just as much a priority as preparing them to succeed in college and in their careers.

And I ask educators to work from the broader definition of civic duty that I have described. And ask teachers and principals and superintendents to help your students learn to be problem solvers who can grapple with challenging issues such as how to improve their schools, homelessness, air and water pollution or the tensions between

police and communities of color. It is also critical that these conversations not be partisan. Civic education and engagement is not a Democratic Party or a Republican Party issue. Solutions to problems can and should be rooted in different philosophies of government. We have to make sure classrooms welcome and celebrate these different perspectives.

I recognize that this could lead to uncomfortable conversations and that teachers will need support and training to foster these conversations in productive ways. Principals will need to be courageous and back their teachers up. Superintendents and school boards will need to make sure their communities understand what they are trying to accomplish.

I know from personal experience that these issues are not always easy to talk about. I have two daughters; one in elementary school and one in middle school. Over the past year, we've had to talk to them a lot about the fact that the vast majority of police officers are dedicated public servants who are doing their best to keep people safe. And at the same time, the reality that we've got to talk as a country about systemic issues of racism, prejudice and bias and how they affect the relationship between police and communities.

Also made the same point when I was in St. Paul, Minnesota earlier this year meeting with families and staff members at the school where Philando Castile worked. Philando Castile was a man who worked at a school in St. Paul. He was a cafeteria supervisor, he was beloved by the faculty and kids and parents at the school. And he was killed in an interaction with police officers in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. And I went to mourn with the families and talk with the families, talk with the reality that Philando Castile was stopped more than 40 times by police before the incident where he was killed. I urged the parents and educators I met with not to sink into despair, but instead to work with others in the community to make sure that an event like that would never happen again.

I wanted them to act on the same belief that I want my daughters to understand; that these issues can be resolved but that it will take concerted efforts at all levels of government; national, state and local. Because the reality is that for many of the biggest issues, including tensions between police and communities of color, they're not going to be settled solely by decision by the President or Congress or even a bill passed in a state legislature.

The Department of Justice can monitor policing, can identify violations of civil rights and can order changes in practices and policies to prevent these violations. That's a start. But what's also needed are citizens who will work with others and vote strategically to demand changes in police training to include bias, cultural competencies and ways to diffuse tense situations in their police interactions. An end to racial profiling, to demand an end to discriminatory practices by prosecutors and courts that have a dire impact on poor people.

The same activism, beginning at the local level, can make a difference in the creation of jobs, better housing, improved mass transit, and so many other issues. But this won't happen unless people have the knowledge, skills and inclination to get involved that can be learned in school. I know there are schools around the country doing a good job of this, add there are also nonprofit, research and advocacy groups such as iCivics, which was started by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, that are working to get more schools involved in civic education. And I want to applaud those efforts.

One organization that's helping to make this happen is the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation, which was established by Congress in 1986. When I was a teacher, I was fortunate to be a Madison fellow, which allowed me to take classes on effective teaching of the history of the Constitution, and to participate in a community of talented and passionate secondary social studies educators. Generations of Madison fellows selected from all 50 states are in classrooms throughout the country insuring that their students have a good understanding of the foundations of American democracy.

One person who's doing this kind of work extraordinarily well is Jahana Hayes, who is a high school social studies teacher in Waterbury, Connecticut, in addition to being the 2016 National Teacher of the Year. Jahana is passionate about teaching her students at Kennedy High School about history and about the importance of community service and their obligation to improve the human condition. She's advisor to the Schools Helping People out Everywhere Club, she and her students participate in the annual Walk for Autism and Rally for Life, and have raised thousands of dollars toward cancer research. She points out that students want to help but they need role models to show them how. We need more teachers like Jahana and more schools and districts to support them.

So what are the elements of a robust and relevant civic education? First, students need knowledge. They need to know the Constitution and the legislative process. They also need to understand history. Our students ought to be truly familiar with the primary sources that have shaped our nation's history, with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, with Sojourner Truth's, "Ain't I a Woman" speech, and Dr. King's letter from a Birmingham jail, to name a few.

But it's not enough to be able to quote from these documents. They need to know why they remain relevant today. They need to be able to put themselves into other shoes and to appreciate the different perspectives that have shaped our nation's history. We should teach students that slavery is not just a scar on our national character erased by the Civil War. We should teach them to acknowledge and wrestle with the ways that ugly legacy continues to shape our country and helps explain the treatment of people of color in America today.

The way the new Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall tells this story is both powerful and unforgettable. When I visited, I was filled with horror as I read the bill of sale, bill of sale, for a 16 year old girl named Holly.

As I gazed upon a statue of Thomas Jefferson, with the names of the human beings he owned, inscribed on a stack of bricks behind him. And as I stood in front of what was once Emmett Till's coffin. But that's not the only story the museum tells. It also tells the story of resistance and dignity in the face of oppression. From Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass to the Tuskegee airmen. It's a wonderful, new resource for the nation and for educators.

And that story continues today. Students should understand that the Constitution protects the right of NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick to protest during the national anthem and why players across the country, including high school students, are doing the same. And they should also understand and be able to explain with evidence why some people are offended by that decision, or would choose a different way to express their views.

Civics shouldn't be an add on. It can be made a part of every class, not just social studies and history, but reading and writing, science and math. Studying climate change in science class can be broadened and made more relevant by asking students to find out whether their local government is prepared to respond. Math can be made more engaging by having students research the ratio of liquor stores to grocery stores to population in various neighborhoods. And then asking the mayor why that is the case.

Beyond knowledge, students also need civic skills. They should be able to write persuasive letters to the editor, or to the mayor, or to a member of Congress, and learn to speak at public meetings. In addition, they should have opportunities to do democracy. When I was teaching, I had my seniors do research projects tackling local problems in the community. I can recall students who worked with a local nonprofit to end the dumping of garbage in their neighborhood, to support urban agriculture projects, and to advocate for more affordable housing.

They learned that they could make a difference and that there are many ways to serve. Joining the military is certainly one way to serve, but so too is assisting the homeless or fighting sexual violence or tutoring younger children. By getting involved in real issues, students learn it's not enough just to shout about their disappointments and criticize the ideas of others. They need to offer solutions. They have to work together to advocate for those solutions. They have to push to make sure the solutions are implemented and they have to understand that change takes time.

I'm proud that we as a nation provide opportunities through AmeriCorps to support young people who want to spend a year or more giving back to a community in need. We currently have 80,000 folks serving in this program; over half supporting our public schools, and we should have far, far more.

When I was an undergrad, I taught civics one day a week in a school that served largely low income schools of color in Boston. I also tutored young people in the Mission Main public housing development in the Roxbury section of Boston and ran a summer camp there. And actually, with my fellow Harvard undergraduates, we lived for the

summer in the community, in the Mission Main housing project, which sadly at the time was rife with crime and drugs and violence. But also rich with hope and resiliency and tenacity. We learned about those challenges and those commitments in the community in a way that I will never forget. In fact, those experiences helped shape my decision to pursue a career as a teacher and a principal in the very same neighborhood where I volunteered as an undergrad.

We also want our students to learn to look beyond their own interests to their enlightened self interest in the common good. I recently visited Flint, Michigan, and while I may never live in Flint, I recognized it's in my interest to make sure that children and families in Flint and every other city in the country have safe water to drink and an opportunity to fulfill their potential. Service both helps students understand the challenges in the community, helps them understand themselves and also helps them understand the importance of the common good.

Colleges also have an important role to play in preparing young people to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens. Back in 1947, the Truman Commission on Higher Education for Democracy concluded that educating for democracy should come first among the principle goals for higher education. Should come first among the principle goals for higher education.

That is just as true today, but this goal too often has been forgotten at times. And at times, education policymakers, educators, students and families, have approached college as if its only worthwhile goal was a means of success in the competitive job market. But we know it has to be about more than that. Whether it's K-12 education or higher education, we have to see it as preparing students, yes for college and careers, and yes for civic participation, for citizenship, for caring about the common good and contributing to the common good.

The good news is that this kind of civic education that digs into challenging issues and teaches knowledge skills and inclinations to serve actually works. It changes students' behavior as adults. Research compiled by the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools shows that students who receive effective civic education are more likely to vote and discuss politics at home, four times more likely to volunteer and work on community issues, and more confident in their ability to speak publicly and communicate with elected officials.

As a bonus, this type of civic learning can actually prepare students for demanding careers in a globally competitive labor market because they will learn to think critically, to write clearly and persuasively and to work with diverse groups of people.

But the biggest and most important outcome of all is that high quality civic education prepares students to help the nation solve difficult, challenging, complex issues and make it a better, more equitable place to live with genuine opportunity for all. Civic education must be an essential part of a well-rounded education. It must be at the foundation of the future, not only of our economy but of our democracy.



Thank you for this opportunity to talk with you, and I look forward to your questions. (Applause)

**MR. BALLOU:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Even before the lunch, there was a lot of interest and there are cards coming up and there's stuff coming on Twitter as we speak, so we try to be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with our questions. First, just to tack on the end of our speech, you engage in a lot of wonderful sort of soaring write-up of where we should be in the civics space in terms of education, in terms of talking about current issues. It's one thing to talk about it, another thing to implement it. How do you implement it?

**SECRETARY KING:** Well, so three thoughts on that. One is later this week, as I mentioned, we'll put out guidance on Title IV, which is a funding stream that's part of the Every Student Succeeds Act that states and districts could use in support of civic education, social studies education, to provide professional development to teachers to create communities of practice around issues of civic education.

Two is schools and districts need to make the decision that this is a priority. And one of our challenges during the No Child Left Behind era was that in some schools and districts, the focus on English and math was so narrow that it crowded out social studies, science, computer science, and we've got an opportunity with Every Student Succeeds Act for states and districts to revisit that and to think about what is an excellent education and to insure that that includes social studies and civic education.

And the third piece is to lift up teacher leaders like Jahana. All over the country, there are great--

**MR. BALLOU:** She's blushing.

**SECRETARY KING:** --there are great-- it's well deserved-- there are great social studies educators, there are great civic educators. Sometimes they're not even teachers of social studies. Sometimes, it's a science teacher who cares immensely about issues of environmental protection. Sometimes, it's a math teacher who's deeply concerned about economic opportunity in the community. But there are educators in every school and district who could be empowered to lead within their school communities around civic education.

**MR. BALLOU:** There are a couple of follow-ups to this. Here's one, and I think this goes to current events. Tonight, of course, is the final presidential debate. There are a couple of questions on that front. Do you think there's been an increase of bullying in schools due to the tone of the race, the presidential race?

**SECRETARY KING:** You want to ask them together or you want me to just--

**MR. BALLOU:** Yeah, let me just throw one other in here. No, go ahead, that suffices.

**SECRETARY KING:** Okay. Look, I can't comment specifically on the 2016 election, but what I can say is that I worry intensely about insuring that every school is a safe and supportive environment for every child. Actually, the first thing I did on my first day as Secretary at the beginning of January, and the last thing Arne did on his last day as Secretary, at the end of December, was to sign a joint letter to school districts and school communities about the importance of creating environments of religious tolerance because there's no question that we've seen over the last few years an increase in anti-Muslim bullying in schools.

We also worry intensely about the issue of bullying of students who are immigrant students. And I think we have a challenge as educators to make sure that school is a safe place for all kids. Now, I think it is possible to have constructive conversations about issues of civic engagement and about political debates and at the same time have as a nonnegotiable principle that school has to be a safe place free from bullying.

**MR. BALLOU:** Just one quick follow-up on that, I know you can't comment on the race in depth, but have the debates and the race said anything about civic education since you dove so deeply into it? Has it sort of opened up a scar and says just what's lacking? I think you alluded to that in your speech.

**SECRETARY KING:** I think there's a danger always in this conversation about civic education to focus just on immediate events. I would say if you look broadly at where we are as a society, we've got a lot of work to do to make sure that our young people are prepared to engage as citizens. And why I raise the issue around the relationship between police and communities of color is that we've got to make sure that young people who are rightly very concerned about what they see, and scared, and parents who are scared, understand how we use the levers of government to try to tackle those challenges. That we can talk to the mayor and the city council about the kinds of training that are provided to police officers. That that's something we can impact if we engage at the local level.

So, you know, I don't know if-- there may be reasons in the current discourse there's more attention on this issue, but I think it's deeper than that. I think we've got to ask ourselves as a society how do we do better at preparing all of our students for citizenship.

**MR. BALLOU:** Just going to get into-- yesterday, the President was at a local high school here, at Banneker, and touted high graduation rates in high school and in test scores. But one thing that this questioner asks, it comes against-- excuse me, higher graduation rates but in some cases lower test scores. The questioner asks whether or not students should be more college ready when they graduated from high school. You said at the beginning of the administration that you believe high school and college career

ready standards must be a reality of students, for all students. How do you bridge that gap between these record high school graduation rates, and then some school record low test scores in critical areas like math and science and so forth?

**SECRETARY KING:** Yeah, we worry a lot about that. If you go to any community college around the country, particularly in high needs communities, you'll find 50 percent, 60 percent, 70, 80 percent of students who are entering require to take remedial courses. Essentially, high school classes while in college, for which they and their families are paying college prices.

And so we've got to figure out how we insure that graduating from high school really means ready for what's next, ready for college and careers. It is encouraging that 40-plus states have been deeply engaged in the work of raising their standards, the Every Student Succeeds Act actually requires that every state commit to college and career ready graduation standards such that their students will graduate from high school ready for credit-bearing coursework in college. Or good jobs.

So I think we've made progress over the last eight years in bringing attention to this work. And there's professional development that's happening for educators, there's work that folks are doing on teacher preparation and teacher support. But there's clearly more to do, and one of the things we've been careful to say is yes, we are very proud that the graduation rates have gone up significantly, and very proud that they've gone up significantly for African American students, for Latino students, for low income students, groups that have historically had very large high school graduation rate gaps.

But we've got to stay focused at the state level and the district level in insuring that all students graduate ready, that every student succeeds at, creates an opportunity for states to develop plans that will achieve that. And one of the things that we've tried to make clear is that states have a responsibility to make sure those plans insure opportunity for students in every community. It can't just be that in some places kids get access to college ready coursework and then others don't, it can't be that. In some places, kids get advanced placement classes or international baccalaureate classes and other places kids don't.

Some places, kids can take-- as we've seen in our civil rights data collection-- chemistry, and physics and algebra II, and in other places they can't. States have a responsibility to insure that all students have access and the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act, one measure of its success will be are we able to close those equity gaps. And states need to be vigilant about that, and the department going forward needs to be vigilant about that.

**MR. BALLOU:** This raises the, in fact, the very act you cite, recently, in fact over the summer, you've had breakfasts with various colleagues including some members of the Club here, and you're talking about new regulations that you're going to be promulgating in the coming days. This has met with some really stiff resistance. You want to have-- you want to bridge this funding gap, you want to level the playing field.

And yet, there are members of Congress who are saying you're breaking the spirit, if not the outright intent, of the brand new law that was just signed in December when you're trying to implement these regulations, trying to level the playing field. How do you answer those charges?

**SECRETARY KING:** So, as a high school social studies history, let me give you the history and the historical context on this question. So when the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was passed, it was passed as a civil rights law intended to address gaps in opportunity. And one of the things that the NAACP LDF found in the years immediately after passage of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was that districts were actually taking the money that was provided for ESCA and intended to benefit the highest needs students and using that money to backfill local and state obligations and so students in high needs schools were still getting significantly less. They were not getting the money that was intended to support them through the original ESCA.

At that time, language was added to the law around supplement, not supplant. So, this is a 50 year struggle to insure that the federal dollars are, in fact, supplemental. Are not used in a way that supplants local and state obligations.

And what we see is still today, 50 years later, there are communities where you can go, same school district, ten blocks, a school that serves affluent kids that is spending 25, 30 percent more than a school ten blocks away serving high needs students. That is clearly a violation of the very words of the law, supplement, not supplant.

And so, supplement, not supplant, is a part of the Every Student Succeeds Act. There were some changes to the language around supplement, not supplant, that require us to regulate and make clear how we are going to finally deliver on the words of the law, supplement, not supplant. And our regulations that are now out for comment are designed to do exactly that. To insure that the federal dollars are genuinely supplemental, and to insure that the resources that were intended back in 1965 to get to the highest needs students actually get there.

Now, I understand there are folks who are calling for ignoring the supplement, not supplant provision. They're saying, "No, no, don't try to insure that the law is followed." Now, on the other hand, you have Senator Murray and Congressman Scott who've been very clear that supplement, not supplant is in the law and that they see our regulations as implementing the very words of the law.

And so we're taking public comment, we will respond to that public comment in a final rule, but we're clear that the purpose of this law is to get resources to the highest needs students.

**MR. BALLOU:** So you're not over-regulating, in your view? You're upholding the law, in your view?

**SECRETARY KING:** Upholding the law, exactly right.

**MR. BALLOU:** Let's see. Speaking of inequality, how should educators address the-- tackle the issue of growing economic inequality in the United States and what's the role of financial literacy?

**SECRETARY KING:** One of the most encouraging things about the improvement in graduation rates is that we know that students who graduate with a high school diploma are much better positioned for the economy. But the reality is that the fastest growing areas of our economy require postsecondary education. So the one thing that the education sector can do to address income inequality is to insure that more students are prepared for college or careers that provide family sustaining wages. And insure that students don't just get to college, but through college. And that's an obligation on both K-12 in terms of preparation and higher education in terms of the support that students need to actually finish while they're there.

And so, from the beginning, when the President was working on the stimulus and responding to the economic crisis that he found when he arrived as President, from the beginning the President was clear that we needed to take emergency steps to try to get the economy back on track, but we also needed to make smart, long-term investments in our future and that education was central to that. That's the reason behind Race to the Top, it's the reason behind the very large investment we made in school improvement grants, improved performance in our struggling high schools in particular, and struggling schools generally.

So we believe that improving the quality of education is inextricably linked to improving our economy and insuring opportunity for all people. The other thing I'd add is the President's proposed something called preschool for all, the idea that we would insure that all four year olds would have access to pre-K from low income and moderate income families. We've got to acknowledge that given the brain science, a lot of learning takes place in zero to four and our failure to invest in universal access to pre-K, ultimately I hope for three year olds as well as four year olds, that failure is a failure to invest in our long-term success.

So we've got to continue the work to strengthen K-12 and higher education, but it's also time for an investment, a big investment, in early learning because we know it will have a long and large long-term return.

**MR. BALLOU:** That raises an interesting follow-up. You want universal preschool. In fact, I believe you were at a forum earlier this week where you talked to my colleague, Melissa Harris Perry about this, but if you want more funding for schooling, how does that work when you're trying to put forward these new regulations which are basically upsetting Congress who's holding the purse strings? It's going to blow back at you. How do you deal with it?

**SECRETARY KING:** But, you know, ultimately these things are-- you're right, they're interrelated in that at the end of the day, we've got to realize as a society and this is true for all of our elected officials, that we have a stake in the success of other people's children, that we have a stake, each of us, in the success of the kid in the neighborhood down the road, in the city down the road, in the rural community down the road, living on North American reservation the next state over. We have a stake in the success of every child.

So when we say we want to continue to direct resources that should be going to high needs kids to affluent kids, we are undermining our long-term future as a country. And when we say, well, we can't afford to invest in early learning, we're actually making a very shortsighted decision because the research evidence shows that early learning has an 8:1, 9:1 return on investment if it's high quality.

And so if we invest in high quality early learning, we will save money later. We'll save money later on prisons, we'll save money later on the cost of social services that result from students not having the skills and opportunities they deserve.

**MR. BALLOU:** You mentioned prisons. You rolled out a new program trying to partner with a lot of universities with those who are incarcerated. For a long time, people could get GEDs, high school degrees, other degrees while incarcerated. What's significantly different and new about this program versus what's been available within correctional institutions for decades?

**SECRETARY KING:** So the history on this is that in the mid '90s, Congress made a terrible mistake. They banned access to Pell grants for folks who were incarcerated. And prior to that, if you were incarcerated, you were able to use Pell grants if you were eligible to support higher education. When Congress banned Pell grant access for folks who were incarcerated, many prison education programs that were providing higher education opportunities shut down around the country.

What we've done is through the President's experimental authority, the administration's experimental authority under the Higher Education Act, we launched a pilot called Second Chance Pell. We got 69 colleges and universities across 28 states that are providing now what will be 12,000 students with the opportunity to pursue a higher education while incarcerated.

We know from the research evidence that those who get an education while incarcerated are dramatically less likely to return to prison. And are better prepared to succeed when they return to the community. Rand did a study that showed a 43 percent reduction in recidivism for participation in any educational program, not necessarily in completing a credential or degree, any participation in educational programming.

So this is another place where it's a smart investment because we reap the returns in folks not going back to prison, folks leaving aside crime and focusing on supporting themselves and their families. And I've had the opportunity to visit some of these prison

education programs and what you see is that the folks will tell you-- part of how they ended up there is either the educational opportunities they didn't have, the first chance they didn't have, or the educational opportunities they didn't take advantage of. But they recognize that through higher education, through acquiring skills, they can change their lives.

And, you know, this is a place where as a country we want to undo the damage of mass incarceration. One place to start is insuring access to educational opportunity for folks who are incarcerated.

**MR. BALLOU:** But again, this goes back to funding. So, how do you navigate that congressional mine field when you're dealing with the regulations piece and preschool piece and all that? How are you going to fund this ideal program?

**SECRETARY KING:** On Second Chance Pell, we know from the history of when Pell access was available to folks who were incarcerated, it's actually a very, very small-- I think it's about one percent of, or maybe even less than one percent, of Pell spending. We currently have a Pell surplus. The President's proposed in the 2017 budget, which is a budget that respects the constraints that we need to-- given our broader fiscal challenges as a country, in his 2017 budget, he's proposed restoring Pell access for folks who are incarcerated. And we've done it within the Pell budget.

So this is a place, again, where we risk as a society being penny wise and pound foolish. We actually spend much more over the long run if a person leaves prison, commits further crimes, and returns to prison.

**MR. BALLOU:** Different subject, Common Core. Since you have addressed standards. The question is are you and the President have praised schools for achieving Common Core standards, which he did at Banneker, but school districts and politicians on both sides of the aisle have called it a punishment-driven shotgun approach to achieving high education standards. They want better testing systems, curriculum support, more helpful teacher assessment implementation formatting and data delivery timing.

In fact, some parochial schools say Common Core standards in the Catholic, for example, Catholic education, are incompatible with a Catholic education. And one think tank even called Common Core a federal overreach which is not education, but rather the training and production of workers for an economic machine. And the standards treat students as nothing more than human capital. Do your critics have a point?

**SECRETARY KING:** So let me again start with the historical context on this. So, the role of the federal government is not to tell states what their standards are. With we've said, and what ESSA actually requires, is that states have college and career ready standards, but they determine the content of those standards. Now, some states have chosen the Common Core. Those states did so after the Common Core was developed by

educators and governors and state chiefs working together to develop those standards. Those were state developed, state chosen.

And so sometimes folks get the history wrong on this. Our position has always been college and career ready standards. It's up to states what the content is of those standards. That said, adopting college and career ready standards is just a first step. States that have to follow with professional development support, with training for teachers and principals, and we're seeing many states engaged in that work. Many states have used federal resources, whether it's Race to the Top or Title I dollars to support strengthening, teacher preparation and professional development so that they can successfully teach their students to college and career ready standards.

But we've got a ways to travel and this goes back to your earlier question about how do we make sure that high school graduation means ready for what's next? Part of how we get there is insuring that the standards that students are pointed towards from K-12 actually reflects college and career readiness so that when they graduate, they're able to go on to that credit bearing coursework.

**MR. BALLOU:** And that helps close the 18 percent gap of students that are still not getting out with the proper skill sets and so forth?

**SECRETARY KING:** Well, that will help, but it's not-- there's no silver bullets in education. And so standards have to happen alongside other steps that we need to take. I mentioned early learning. We know that schools that pay attention to chronic absenteeism and the kids who because they're chronically absent we can see that something else is going on and insure that they get counseling or mental health services or supports for their families, that those schools have been able to significantly improve their graduation rates.

Bob Balfanz at Johns Hopkins doing phenomenal work on this around the country. We know, with John Britten here, we know that schools that are diverse and that are intentionally diverse, that bring together students across lines of class and race performed better. We have decades of research evidence that suggests that low income students have the opportunity to go to schools with affluent students will not only do better academically, but in many ways they and their peers are better prepared for the diverse world they will inhabit.

We just had a two-day convening on school diversity at the department. So anyone who says just change this one thing and everything will be perfect, that's clearly not right. We've got to do multiple things to close that graduation rate gap and to insure that when kids graduate, they graduate ready for what's next.

**MR. BALLOU:** Charter Schools. You've said, "What I worry most about is we have some states that have done a really great job with charter authorizing and so have generally high quality charters and have been willing to close ones that are underperforming. On the other hand, you have states who've not done as good a job,



places like Michigan. We have a history of a low bar for getting a charter and an unwillingness to hold charters to high standards. What's your view on where charter authorizing should be by the time you leave office, and how do you plan to get there? As someone who cites your own education in New York for saving your life and trajectory, and what of non-charter public schools? For some time, one of the arguments against charters was over resources about charters getting better resources than public education.

And there's actually a second question sort of tied to this. A few days ago, the NAACP's national board called for a moratorium on new charter schools until laws are revised to make charters as accountable and as transparent as public schools. Do you agree with them, that charter schools should meet the same standards of accountability as public schools? And if you do, will you stop funding new charter schools as they recommend?

**SECRETARY KING:** So, let me start with this. We are fortunate, I think, as a country to have some high performing charters that are doing a great job and providing great opportunities to students. Charters that are helping students not only perform at higher levels academically, but go on to college at much higher rates than demographically similar students and succeed there. That's good, we should have more schools like that and I think any arbitrary gap on the growth of high performing charters is a mistake in terms of our goal of trying to improve opportunity for all kids.

That said, where states are doing a bad job on charter authorizing, that has to change. You know, I've talked about the example of Michigan. We have states that have set a low bar for getting a charter, and then when charters perform poorly, they fail to take action to either improve them or close them, which is the essence of the charter school compact. Charter schools were supposed to be a compact, more autonomy in exchange for greater accountability. And yet, some states have not followed through on that compact. That is a problem.

Now, those decisions are made at the state level, they're made based on state law. What we've done in the administration over the last eight years is two things. One is we've provided resources to improve charter authorizing in states and worked with states to strengthen their practices around reviewing the quality of charters, reviewing the quality of charter applications.

And two, we've invested in increasing the supply of great high performing charters. But, to the extent that what folks are saying is they want states to do a better job on charter authorizing, I agree. But where we have states that are doing a good job on charter authorizing and we have charters that are doing great jobs for kids that want to grow, they should be able to. And I think this is an issue where we've got to put kids first. We've got to ask what's best for the students and parents. As Arne would often point out, students and parents aren't as concerned about the governance model as they are about is my child getting a quality education? We've got to be focused on that, which is one of the reasons why I think arbitrary caps don't make sense, is we shouldn't limit kids' access to great opportunities.

**MR. BALLOU:** A lot of teachers have been writing. (Laughter) What do you propose to do about the equality of pay between teachers and administrators, for example, like yourself? One teacher says, "I worked 12 hours yesterday, I didn't have time for lunch. Did you have time for lunch? I make \$47,000 a year. How much do you make," which of course is public record. "I can't go to the bathroom when I need to. Can you go to the bathroom when you need to? And please don't talk about how great teachers are. We don't need empty rhetoric. We need resources, we need policies that actually help us teach, not help profiteers." How do you-- a pretty upset teacher there.

**SECRETARY KING:** Yeah, look. I think we see across the country, we see states that have not made the investment they should in their education system. We did a report earlier this year, the department, looking at the difference in state investment in prisons versus K-12 education. And what we found is that we see over the last 30 years rate of increase in investment spending on prisons that is three times as high as the rate of increase in spending on K-12 education.

That suggests to me that as a society, we haven't put our resources where we should. So, are there states that should be spending significantly more on teacher salaries? Absolutely. And should we be paying more to teachers, especially teachers who are willing to serve in the highest needs communities and the highest needs fields where we have real demand? Absolutely. And the President's proposed that. The President proposed a billion dollars for an initiative called Best Job in the World that would support professional development, incentives, career ladders for teachers who teach in the highest needs communities.

So we agree about the need for more resources and focusing those resources on teachers. One of the places I worry most about is in early learning. We did a study on pre-K pay and found that in many communities around the country, pre-K teachers are making half what they would be making if they were working in an elementary school, which again suggests that our priorities are not right.

So this is a place where I agree with the questioner, we need to invest more resources in educators. We should pay our teachers very well because we know that teachers are essential to the future of our country. And we need to make sure the working conditions are good. It's not just a question of teacher pay. I think of a place like Detroit, you know. If the water is leaking from the ceiling and there are rodents running across the floor, those working conditions are not ones that are going to make teaching a profession that people want or a profession people will want to stay in over the long term. And so we've got to make sure that working conditions are strong.

And the final point I'd make, is this is one of the reasons that supplement, not supplant, is so important because if you consistently under-resource the highest needs schools, the result will be poor working conditions in those schools and the inability to retain the great teachers that our highest needs students need.

**MR. BALLOU:** We're running quickly out of time. Had an issue with one of your senior staff who had to resign over waste fraud and financial abuse. Have you been able to clean up the issues in the Inspector General's office?

**SECRETARY KING:** So, this is about an employee in our IT department who made mistakes and was accountable for those mistakes, chose ultimately to resign. He's no longer with the department. We have a very strong team around our IT and we are very focused, as folks are across the administration, on continuously strengthening cyber security. This is actually cyber security awareness month. Just came from a cyber security convening at the department this morning. We're very focused on making sure that our IT systems are as strong as possible, that we protect the security of data. And that we insure that we're providing good services.

So for example, [Collegescorecard.ed.gov](http://Collegescorecard.ed.gov) is a tool that we've built and through our investment in the strength of our IT systems, and work across the administration to leverage technology on behalf of taxpayers and students, [Collegescorecad.ed.gov](http://Collegescorecad.ed.gov) allows students to find information about every college, to find out about their graduation rates, how much people make who've graduated from that school, how able folks who've graduated from that school are able to repay their loans. It's a great tool that we've made available and that is continuously evolving to try to provide services.

So IT is really a strength now of the department. But as is true across-- for any employer, there are sometimes employees who make mistakes and we have systems in place to insure that that's dealt with.

**MR. BALLOU:** We're almost in the home stretch here. Before I hit the last question, a couple of announcements. Tonight's debate night, watch here at the National Press Club at 8:30 in the Reliable Source. We have an upcoming luncheon on November 21<sup>st</sup> with EPA Administrator, Gina McCarthy, and the head of Metro, general manager Paul Wiedefeld, who's been here before, so we'll definitely need an update from him on various issues that have happened in the local subway system in Washington, especially after the Nats game.

Final question: before this, before I do that, I have to present you the traditional National Press Club mug.

**SECRETARY KING:** Thank you. (Applause)

**MR. BALLOU:** And so, we're running out of time, so very quickly, what advice would you give to a 12 year old kid raised on public assistance who wants to be you?

**SECRETARY KING:** Two things. One is to have faith in what's possible. You know, I am only standing here, only alive today because of what New York City public school teachers did for me. One of the reasons the President and First Lady care so much about education is they know the difference education made in their lives and the opportunities they've been able to have. So one thing I always try to say to young people

is to have faith. Because I think sometimes as a young person, it can feel like this is the only way it could ever be.

And sometimes, you talk to young people and they don't even have a vision for what it would be like to be an adult because they see so much violence in their community, and they become hopeless about their future. So one is to have faith in what is possible and to hopefully see my example or the President's example, First Lady's example, what education can make possible.

Two is to work hard, to work hard in school. Education is the best path. Look, there's this debate in American life about, well, is it poverty that matters or schools that matter? The reality is both matter, right? Schools are embedded in communities, so schools can save lives, but schools also face all the challenges that exist in the community.

And so what I try to say to young people is school can be the difference. It can be the path. It can be the thing that gives you the skills and the opportunities to have a different life and to have life be different for you and for your family. Can't solve everything, but it can be a path. And so those would be the two things, to have faith and to work hard.

**MR. BALLOU:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary. For future information on National Press Club programs, you can go onto [www.Press.org](http://www.Press.org). We are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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