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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

OFFICE OF EDUCATION

INTERVIEWS WITH: MR. JOHN SINGERHOFF AND MR. JOE KEEN OF
THE OFFICE OF EDUCATION.

Friday, 12 July 1968

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Interview with Mr. John Singerhoff

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Interview with Mr. Joe Keen

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1 VOICE: John Singerhoff, how many news branches were
2 there then and how did they function when you first came into
3 the Office of Education?

4 MR. SINGERHOFF: As such, there was not a news
5 branch. There was an Office of Public Information. If I re-
6 member correctly, it had four persons in the office and they
7 handled the public information for the whole Office of Educa-
8 tion.

9 Individual bureaus had persons working there called
10 public information specialists but usually they were aides to
11 their employers, their supervisors. They wrote speeches, oh,
12 answered inquiries, but generally were wholly ineffective as
13 far as media or magazine or television information was concern-
14 ed.

15 The Office of Information as it was set up did about
16 the same thing for the Commissioner and his deputy and the
17 staff offices. They wrote speeches, not many, and they weren't
18 very good.

19 Generally tried to put out information about the pro-
20 grams that the office administered, but really, in 1963, the
21 office, although it had been in existence, oh, 90 some years,
22 didn't have the umph and the number of programs and the glamor-
23 ous programs and the really frantic programs that it now has.

24 So it was sort of a nice country club atmosphere.
25 Everybody enjoyed coming to work because they didn't have to

1 do very much and took nice long lunches anywhere from an hour
2 to two or three and the secretaries used to have their hair
3 done, and things like this.

4 Well, when Mr. Kennedy became the President, all this
5 changed and it changed dramatically and suddenly. John Ken-
6 nedy had started even before he entered the White House and
7 drafting what later was to be an omnibus education bill.

8 And one of the persons who helped him with this was
9 Francis Keppel, who was Dean of the Graduate School of Educa-
10 tion of Harvard, who became the Commissioner of Education.
11 They drafted what they thought was a bill for the Congress that
12 would sort of cure some of the educational ills of the United
13 States. This was a long package. And it has taken the Con-
14 gress virtually this long to pass it all -- it's so mammoth.

15 This -- the first two pieces, as I recall it, came
16 out of the Congress where the higher education facilities are.
17 And the Vocational Education Act. These were both signed in
18 1963. And they were multi-million-dollar programs.

19 One for the construction of college laboratories,
20 libraries and classrooms. No dormitories. The Office of Edu-
21 cation wasn't doing bedrooms. They were building learning
22 facilities.

23 The other one was to do something about the education
24 for the world work.

25 Well, they started gearing up with people. Start

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1 hiring. The pace quickened. Well, the public had to know
2 about these programs and there was only one real way to tell
3 them about it and that was through the daily newspapers,
4 through radio, through television, through the national maga-
5 zines.

6 Now, mind you, at this point, the Office of Informa-
7 tion had four or five people who really didn't respond to any
8 of this. They didn't generate anything. They just responded
9 to inquiries. And if a reporter called, they'd try to answer.
10 Most times the Office of Information didn't have any answers
11 and would have to transfer the reporter some place else.

12 Well, as a consequence over the years, reporters
13 stopped calling the Office of Education, because it was fu-
14 tile. They didn't get any information.

15 Well, Mr. Keppel was smart enough to know that the
16 Office of Education was going to be a agency that was going to
17 be heard from and should be heard from. So he went into the
18 market to find a man who could assemble an effective public
19 information staff. And he hired a man named John Nesbitt.

20 Nesbitt was the public relations director for the
21 National Safety Council. And he came to Washington in the
22 Office of Education with Frank Keppel to start gearing up for
23 this tremendous information job.

24 Nesbitt started looking around for people -- I had
25 been in the Washington newspaper business for a long time and

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1 had left the newspapers to go to trade journalism -- I got a
2 little bit disenchanted in an attempt to put out a news maga-
3 zine in Washington. So coming to work in the Office of Educa-
4 tion, although I knew very little about it at the time, the
5 Office of Education seemed to be a challenge so I came in to
6 try to do something with the news operation.

7 I knew from the times or the years that I was in the
8 newspaper business that Washington newspapers knew very little
9 about the Office of Education and paid very little attention
10 to the Office of Education. It just wasn't any news hardly
11 ever from the Office of Education.

12 So with this in mind, I felt that two things were
13 necessary immediately. One, I had to inform myself about the
14 Office of Education and what was going on there. Two, I had
15 to inform the news media that there was a new deal in the Of-
16 fice of Education. And that there was going to be some news
17 from Office of Education. There was going to be a lot of news
18 and they'd better plan on covering the place as a best. Be-
19 cause not to do so was going to be a hardship on them and
20 their readers were going to lose an awful lot of information.

21 Well, anyway, we proceeded along these lines. I
22 learned something about the Office of Education and the Con-
23 gress started signing and passing legislative. And the Higher
24 Education Facilities Act came along and the Higher Education
25 these generated lots and lots of stories and in time we had to

1 hire additional people.

2 Then -- well, to give you some idea of how inadequate
3 the news operation was in the Office of Education at that
4 time. When the President was shot, there was not even an
5 original news source in the Office of Education. For instance,
6 there no news takers, there was no source of information. We
7 depended at that time for office boys to bring news dispatches
8 to us from the headquarters of the Department of Health, Educa-
9 tion and Welfare.

10 Well, the time when the President of the United
11 States has been shot, this is a wholly inadequate source of
12 information. So I determined at that moment, that one of
13 the things we needed was a source of outside information as
14 well as people gathering information inside.

15 So we put teletypes into the news room. Well, this
16 almost magically informed people throughout the building that
17 there was a news operation and that it was gearing up to act
18 like one in the Office of Education because they saw tele-
19 types, news tickers -- this was just revolutionary in the Of-
20 fice of Education.

21 One thing I noticed right off the bat, major sports
22 events have always attracted people to news tickers -- didn't
23 attract people in the Office of Education. They were all
24 scholars. They didn't care who was winning the World Series
25 games. Things like that. This is just a little aside to

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1 show you that these people were really interested in education
2 and hardly anything else.

3 As we geared up, we did put out news releases. We
4 doubled and tripled and quadrupled the number of news releases
5 that were turned out from the Office of Education. We begin
6 hitting the national magazines with the tremendous momentum of
7 the office. The Commissioner of Education was a tremendously
8 forceful individual. He was making speeches all over the
9 nation about what we were trying to do and what the Congress
10 was trying to do.

11 People began to hear more about the Office of Educa-
12 tion than they had ever heard about before. And this was good
13 because it made parents aware that there problems in education.
14 They made their Congressmen aware of their interest, PTA school
15 Board Members became aware of what was going on in Washington
16 like they had never been made aware before. This has been a
17 continuing snowball type of operation.

18 It's grown, it's continuing to grow. Budget in the
19 U. S. Office of Education in fiscal 1964 was \$701 million. The
20 budget this past fiscal year, 1968, is \$4 billion. So this
21 gives you some idea of the tremendous growth. We think the
22 information program has grown along with all the programs;
23 we now administer close to a hundred programs that aid children
24 across the board in education.

25 Pre-schoolers now through graduate school and college

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1 we help vocational education. We help adults who unfortunate-
2 ly had no education. They are illiterate even though they are
3 adult, we are trying to train them for the world of work to
4 give them a basic literacy so that they can at least read job
5 applications, which they were unable to do before.

6 We still got big jobs to do and I guess the Congress
7 will continue to pass legislation and we'll try to continue to
8 tell the world about it. And that's about the story.

9 VOICE: Well, John Singerhoff, you mentioned the
10 news releases. Let's get into the periodicals. What was it
11 when you first came in here?

12 MR. SINGERHOFF: The Office of Education had two
13 periodicals. One was called; Higher Education; the other one
14 was School Life.

15 School Life covered education through the elementary
16 grades, Higher Education did just what its title denotes. It
17 covered higher education. In other words, we split education
18 into two factions. Those before college and those during and
19 after college. Well, we abolished that and decided that edu-
20 cation was education across the board and the two publications
21 had circulation had, together, of less than 10,000. They had
22 a staff of three or four people. They were colorless, they
23 lacked any pep or vitality. We, of course within government
24 would have to justify any kind of a new periodical.

25 And so we planned to package a new publication that

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1 would combine the two of these, we hoped, into greater circu-
2 lation with more readership. We designed a dummy package and
3 went to the Bureau of the Budget and we made a case for a mag-
4 azine that we called American Education, which we put out once
5 a month.

6 Its circulation is three times what the combined cir-
7 culation of the other two magazines was. We publish this.
8 It's quite an elaborate -- it's a slick book. It comes to the
9 attention of school people because it's a professionally pro-
10 duced and designed magazine. It's written by professional
11 writers. It covers the whole gamut of education from the kid
12 in pre-school, the Head Start Programs all the way through the
13 graduate programs.

14 In addition to American Education, we try to rede-
15 sign most of the other publications. Incidentally, the Office
16 of Education has about 300 other publications now. And we
17 try to make them attractive. We try to write them so that
18 they will reach a more general audience than pure educator
19 type. I think we've been successful in some measure in this,
20 but a lot still has to be done.

21 I guess that takes care of most of the periodicals.
22 Well, where do we go from here, boy?

23 VOICE: Well.

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2 since October 1965. What are your remembrances of those days?

3 MR. KEENEY: Well, when I first arrived in the Office
4 of Education on November 1, 1965, my first task at 9:00 was to
5 attend a budget hearing at the Bureau of the Budget, on the
6 1967 appropriations. I had previously been in the Department
7 of Commerce with a small budget of some \$25 to \$26 million.

8 It was almost above any comprehension that we were
9 having a hearing with the Bureau of the Budget on the \$6 billion
10 educational program. Most of the programs that we were having
11 hearings on had just been passed by the Congress and the first
12 year's funding of 1966 had been passed by the Congress and the
13 agency was still waiting on the Bureau of the Budget's appro-
14 vals for the 1966 Fiscal Year which had started July 1. This
15 being the 1st of November, the educational community were
16 clamoring for their funds on these recently repassed educational
17 programs, particularly the Higher Education Act of 1965 and
18 the Elementary-Secondary Education Act of 1965.

19 The first few months in the office, most of our time
20 was devoted -- or my time was devoted -- to getting allocations
21 out to the States to the colleges and universities on recently
22 passed legislation. There was many legal problems to be
23 solved _____, regulations to go out. School districts
24 under Title I were receiving funds for the first time and
25 there were some 17,000 of these school districts who had never

1 in the past ever dealt with the Federal government.

2 The first few months an undue amount of correspondence,
3 telephone conversations with locals -- local school districts,
4 naturally came to the agency.

5 What could we do; what kind of a project could we
6 approve; what would be the outlook for the following year;
7 could we plan that it would be continued at the same level or
8 higher levels?

9 We finally, in Fiscal Year '66, we were able to get the
10 huge Title I of some billion dollars distributed to the school
11 districts. Since the school year had been going along for
12 some four months, naturally with a year's funding to be spent
13 in another four and a half or five months the schools and
14 school districts and State Departments of Education constantly
15 were in contact with the agency as to the availability of Title
16 I for construction, equipment, with the thought that the
17 following year that they would go into more -- into service
18 programs.

19 VOICE: These were frantic times, then, Mr. Keene?

20 MR. KEENE: They were very frantic times. The agency
21 was very much understaffed and there were some 1,700 people
22 on board at the time to run a \$6 billion program. Without
23 exception, my recollection of those years, the agency as a
24 whole was one of the most dedicated group of people that I had
25 ever had the pleasure to work with. They worked long hours

1 Saturdays and Sundays, lost vacation time, but everybody seemed
2 to have a sense of purpose; that we for the first time were
3 really trying to do something to make a better life for all
4 Americans.

5 I think the President's basic -- President Johnson's
6 basic broad guideline or objective in education laid stress
7 that every American should be educated to his or her ability.

8 VOICE: While there were many queries from the community,
9 and many problems for the legal staff of the Office of Education,
10 was there any specific problem that you remember from those
11 days that would perhaps best exemplify the problems of all or
12 was it just a great mass of people clamoring for assistance
13 and for help?

14 MR. KEENE: Well, there was a great mass of people
15 clamoring for assistance and help, and with the Office trying
16 to administer \$6 billion -- or about a \$4 billion budget at
17 the time, with 1,700 people, I think we all felt at the time
18 that we were just covering the surface of the problems. We
19 could not be completely responsive to all 17,000 school dis-
20 tricts and 3,000 colleges and universities, all of the techni-
21 cal institutes all over the country, and the new
22 being funded for the first time, the Higher Education Facility
23 Act which was passed in '63 was funded really at a very high
24 level in '66; and at the same time the Congress was working on
25 new pieces of legislation that affected education.

1 We had to be very responsive to the Congressional
2 Committees. They were asking all kinds of questions and
3 wanting all kinds of State tables, different methods of allo-
4 cation of funds, our recommendations on how they should be
5 made.

6 VOICE: Mr. Keene, do you find any resentment now that
7 you look back since 1965 among people that perhaps didn't get
8 as much money as they thought that they should or do you find
9 a feeling of gloat from the people who were receiving monies
10 from the Office of Education?

11 MR. KEENE: Well, I personally feel that in the educa-
12 tional field the funding has not been adequate to fullfill the
13 desires of all people concerned. It is a step forward and I
14 think the sad part about most of our programs, the news media,
15 both newspaper, television and radio, have not looked at the
16 good that is being done. They will single out one bad project
17 out of thousands and make a big to-do over a type of a program
18 that didn't work; but they have not put forth to the American
19 people the thousands and thousands of projects that have been
20 funded through the Office of Education that have been success-
21 ful, that have accomplished the basic missions.

22 This to me is a very sad thing, but it seems to be what
23 is going on in the country today; that the bad things always
24 get publicized and the good things go by the board.

25 VOICE: How would you go about changing _____ in times
past as far as the bad _____ for say one in _____ usands?

1 MR. KEENE: Well, I think one of the things -- and the
2 Congress last year in the Elementary and Secondary Amendments
3 of '67 incorporated in the legislation the program for dissemin-
4 ation of information. At the present time this program hasn't
5 been funded, but to get across to the educational community and
6 the general public I think it is very essential that this pro-
7 gram be funded so that the complete story can get across to the
8 educational community and to the people that make the decisions
9 for the educational community, the local politicians, both at
10 the local level and at the State level as to what really is
11 happening.

12 VOICE: You feel that they don't know what is happening?

13 MR. KEENE: I don't think that it is disseminated in the
14 manner that it should be. I think, that as I said earlier,
15 the bad project gets a lot of publicity; a good project gets
16 very little.

17 VOICE: How has the _____ of the Office of Education
18 changed since you came aboard in 1965?

19 MR. KEENE: Well, I personally think that it has im-
20 proved tremendously. It still has a long way to go. The
21 local educational people still are doing a lot of talking about
22 Federal control. The agency has been very cautious on all of
23 the guidelines; the laws that the Congress passed have been
24 very cautious to prevent Federal control, and I think that this
25 is a gross overstatement that there is any indication of

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1 Federal control.

2 When people from the local educational community talk
3 about Federal control. I think that it is nothing more than
4 right when we give money to the States and the local educational
5 agencies or universities that a certain amount of reporting
6 should be required, because we are spending taxpayers' money
7 and I think that when money goes to locals -- or I mean, when
8 a grant is awarded that the general public who through their
9 tax dollars are paying for these programs have a perfect right
10 to know what these dollars are going for.

11 VOICE: Well, how would you say that the image has
12 changed, actually, in the past few years? Do you feel that
13 people are more and more for Federal control; do you feel that
14 we're involved with Federal control in civil rights, for
15 example; we are telling the States too much what to do?

16 MR. KEENE: No, I do not think that we're trying to
17 tell the States what they should do. And in the case of civil
18 rights the only thing that we have done, as the Office of
19 Education, in connection with civil rights is to carry out
20 the law of the land and regardless of who would have been in
21 the Office of Education, who would have been putting out
22 grants, there is nothing more in order to carry out the Civil
23 Rights Act; anyone administering the program would have had
24 to have done the same thing.

25 VOICE: Is there anything else that you'd care to add

1 Mr. Keene, that we haven't discussed regarding the budget,
2 regarding law?

3 MR. KEENE: Well, I can really think of nothing other
4 than the Office -- I have worked for the Federal government,
5 military service and as a civilian, for about 28 years; and
6 the job in the Office of Education is one of the most rewarding
7 that I have ever been connected with because you can really
8 see through the educational programs what is happening.

9 The youth of America is being educated. They are being
10 given opportunities that they have never in the history of our
11 country been given before. The higher education loan programs
12 for students; the opportunity grants for study programs are
13 given; people in low-income families are giving their children
14 the opportunity to go to college,

15 And this, again, as I say, is not the type of thing
16 that gets publicized, the ones that are going to college, the
17 ones that are getting the opportunities. We have over a million
18 students a year that we're helping through one of the many
19 different types of programs in higher education that have
20 given children that would have never dreamed ten years ago
21 that it would be possible for them to go on to higher education.

22 VOICE: This brings me to a series of questions, Mr.
23 Keene. How do you think on the basis of the past will the O.E.
24 change in the future?

25 MR. KEENE: Well, I think in the very near future as a

1 result of our innovative programs under Title III, our demon-
2 stration programs and our research and training areas, our
3 special programs in adult basic education, our planning pro-
4 grams in the higher education area and the evaluation of the
5 existing programs that we will be able to disseminate through-
6 out the country the real successful programs which will bene-
7 fit all students of all ages from Head Start through the
8 graduate schools.

9 We will be able to use the funds available to the best
10 advantage for all types of education.

11 VOICE: Do you foresee the time, Mr. Keene, that there
12 will be a change so that you will be able to put money into
13 certain areas more than other areas, or will legislation be
14 such that you won't be able to change it from what the Congress
15 intends and says?

16 MR. KEENE: Well, from all indications, the Congress
17 today is taking a good hard look at all of our subsidy legi-
18 slation and is in the process of modifying and liberalizing
19 to meet current needs. Each piece of legislation that has
20 been passed has had tremendous impact on the education of the
21 youth of America. Certain legislation has outlived its use-
22 fulness. But the Congress is taking steps to combine and to
23 make it more liberal and I think we will continue to see this
24 in the next ten years.
25