



Remarks by Allan Kullen
President, People of America Foundation
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Good morning.

We're here today to talk about the connection between education and democracy and to propose a way to ensure our children are prepared to guide our nation in the years ahead. Our motivation is the appropriate education of our young people, because they are clearly the key to America's future growth and prosperity.

There is little doubt that most Americans want children to succeed, if for no other reason than to take care of us when we get old. A poll released in September 2003 by the Committee for Education Funding found that 80 percent of American adults want today's students, from preschool through college, to have the same or better opportunities as previous generations. Almost 40 percent of the respondents believe that, after military and homeland security, education is the most important federal spending priority. Education ranked 10 points higher than prescription drug benefits and 22 points higher than tax cuts.

The same poll found that 81 percent of respondents think the federal government, even in this era of shrinking resources, should increase funding for education programs. The federal budget currently allocates only 2.8 cents of every dollar to education, and 85 percent of the poll participants believe this investment should be doubled.

In response to this and other polls, the federal government has increased its involvement in education. A few years ago, Congress passed, and the president signed into law, the landmark, bipartisan *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). School districts across the nation are now beginning to feel the legislation's effects. And the effects are not all good.

The government expects a lot from NCLB which emphasizes the teaching of math, reading and science, the skills that Secretary Ron Paige is quoted as saying "students will need for success in higher education or the world of work." Yet what we have to ask ourselves today, as we consider the crucial link between education and democracy, is whether that focus is enough to protect our nation and ensure our leadership in a world filled with one-unimaginable challenges.

For reasons many of us cannot understand, the federal government has decided not to include, within the current scope of NCLB, subjects such as history, civics, economics and geography—key elements of the social sciences that are critical to developing citizens fully prepared to participate in a democratic society.

Our democracy is the greatest form of government the world has ever seen. However, because most of us were born into it, or know of people giving up everything—including risking their lives—to be part of it, we have come to take democracy for granted.

Democracy is an extraordinarily complex and abstract concept, and we must be vigilant in our teaching of it to be certain it endures. It's a lot like creating a garden. You clear away the rocks, fertilize the soil and plant some seeds. And, with a little tending, your garden grows. Yet if you leave it alone, the weeds will take over and the plants will die.

There's a lesson here: You cannot take your environment for granted. Think of a fish. After birth, it quickly learns to eat and to survive by steering clear of predators. The very last thing it comes to appreciate is its environment. Only when it's being hauled to the surface at the end of a line is it clear to the fish that it needs water to exist.

Democracy is also a demanding environment, like a garden—it requires constant care and attention. That's why math, reading and science instruction, even with qualified teachers, good test scores and accountable schools, will not by themselves prepare our youth to become participants in the type of society that many of our ancestors died to create and protect.

Under the federal government's plan, social studies—history, civics, economics and geography—does not become part of NCLB for another decade. By that time, 25 million students, half of our current school-age population—many of them new citizens with no history of democratic traditions to fall back on—may not receive enough civics education to adequately exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. Teaching young people the importance of voting, for example, is critical to maintaining a democratic society.

What makes this situation even critical is that our population is becoming increasingly more diverse each year. By 2020 non-Hispanic whites will comprise only 49 percent of the nation's student population, and the majority will be composed of new citizens who do not have a history steeped in the democratic tradition. This means moms, dads and especially grandparents cannot help these students learn about the importance of democracy or what happens when it dissolves.

In addition, ours is an increasingly diverse and interdependent world, one in which borders once marked by oceans and mountains are seamless and unprotected. Success and even survival in this world now demand a high level of understanding of differences

among peoples and cultures to prevent social conflict. To ignore the lessons of the past is to court disaster; to ignore history, civics, economics and geography in favor of only math, reading and science is like treating an injury with medicine but ignoring physical rehabilitation.

I agree with much of the intent of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. I believe in the importance of teaching math, reading and science. I think it's essential to have qualified teachers and accountable schools. However, I do not support this intent when it poses a serious threat to our democracy, no matter how unintentional, by denying our youth access to civics education or knowledge of their role in its creation.

And I am extremely disturbed that we are losing sight of important education issues in the contentious debate over federal funding for NCLB and in the statistical gamesmanship schools are accused of using to comply with its implementation. Getting lost in all of this is the need to consider changes in education philosophy, priorities and resources, and that must be done if we truly want all students to have an opportunity to succeed. Although the Foundation's main focus is to ensure that students and teachers have to the data needed to create an appropriate curriculum that appreciates our diversity and democratic traditions, let's also consider the following point.

The current legislation's mandate that no child will fail will be difficult to achieve within the government's timeframe and available financial resources. Laws such as NCLB cannot achieve all their goals, because they discount the human element. The situation is akin to blaming an auto repair shop for its failure to repair a car engine that its owner has driven hard for years without adding any oil or changing filters.

Today, we have about 50 million students to educate. With such a staggering mandate, our schools necessarily operate under the rules of "game theory." Numbers and time drive the process and, when you require the use of statistics and clocks, the system becomes a game; and games, by definition, produce winners and losers. Like football, it is not always the team with the best record that wins; but the one scoring the most points in the allotted 60 minutes of play. In many cases, if the clock were to run two minutes longer or shorter, the results would be very different.

In our schools, we measure performance by numbers and set time limits on activities. As a result, young people with promising futures are bound to fall through the cracks. Here's how: Let's suppose a 45-minute exam has 10 questions. Let's consider that a student is slower than average in understanding the questions or writing down the answers, a good possibility given today's student demographics. Say this student only has time to answer six questions. He answers questions 1 through 5 perfectly and completes about 90 percent of the sixth question before the clock runs out. He receives a failing grade. My guess is that with an extra 30 minutes, he would have aced the test. Yet in today's system, the student has failed.

Who is at fault? The student? The teacher? Or does the problem lie in an undiagnosed flaw in the system? Many times, students do not fail because of a lack of ability or inadequate instruction. They fail because the system does not afford them the opportunity to succeed. And a large percentage of these students are very employable.

Under the pressures of complying with NCLB, who is going to identify this system flaw, develop a plan to fix it, and find the funding to implement the necessary changes? And without outside help, how are our schools going to obtain the resources they need to truly prepare our children to succeed? So what do we do from here?

Well, we don't think it has to be this way. If students are tested in reading, they can read history and civics. We need you to send that message to your elected officials in Congress. They need to know that you will hold them accountable if they take actions that hurt children's chances of success and thus the future of our democracy.

And let them know that there is a way to augment NCLB to ensure our children get the education they need and deserve. Unified School District 259 here in Wichita and school districts across the nation have used our Americans All® National Education Program to make sure students understand their country's history and learn about their democracy.

Most importantly, we need you to make sure your schools register on our Web site at www.americansall.com. Schools that do so will be acknowledging that it is critical to return social studies to the curriculum to sustain our democracy and will be supporting our plan to do so. Registration is free to schools and only takes a few minutes.

These school registrations are vital. The best part of our program is that it is a business-education partnership; it will be privately funded and free to all K–12 public and private schools nationwide. The school registrations document the grassroots support we need to lock in corporate funding. The business sector has a vested interest in ensuring our young people are educated appropriately, because schools produce the future employees and consumers that companies need to succeed. Companies also welcome the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the communities in which they operate. So programs such as Americans All® work well for them.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss this important education program with you.



Allan S. Kullen

President,
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Allan S. Kullen, businessman and entrepreneur, coordinated the development and organization of the People of America Foundation that runs the Americans All® program. As the program's national co-director, an unpaid position, he compiled *The Peopling of America: A Timeline of Events That Helped Shape Our Nation* and was responsible for the research component that led to the program's poster and photograph collections.

Earlier in his career, Mr. Kullen served as executive editor of the *New American Encyclopedia* and production manager for the *International Library of Negro Life and History*, now called the *International Library of Afro-American Life and History*. He has taught in the adult education program at The Catholic University of America. A charter member and major funder of The Coordinating Committee for Ellis Island, Inc., the 501(c)(3) education organization that created the Americans All® program, he has also served on many local boards in the Washington, D.C., area.

Mr. Kullen is president of Todd Allan Printing Co., Inc., a modern, three-shift commercial printing facility with more than 100 full- and part-time employees that has served the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area for more than 29 years. To meet both marketing and public service objectives, he developed and coordinated the production of a 700-page graphic arts guide. He has had numerous articles published on the printing process and holds a patent on a significant change in the art-lithographic process. In 1995 the Prince George's County (Maryland) Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities honored Todd Allan Printing as its small business Employer of the Year.

Mr. Kullen earned his bachelor's degree in printing management from the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University).

Meetings