

BELL, TERREL H.: PAPERS, 1981-1984 – REAGAN LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

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BELL, TERREL H.: Papers, 1981-1984 (37.9 cu. ft., 91 boxes)

Secretary of Education, 1981-1984

Biographical Note

Terrel H. "Ted" Bell (November 11, 1921-June 22, 1996) was a career-long educator and education administrator. He was the second Secretary of Education, after serving as the United States Commissioner of Education (a precursor to the Secretary of Education) from 1974-1976.

Bell was born in Lava Hot Springs, Idaho. Bell graduated from Lava Hot Springs High School and graduated from the two-year teacher's training program at Albion State Normal School in Albion, Idaho. Leaving teacher's college, Bell enrolled in the Marines in 1942 and served in the Pacific. He was discharged in 1946 as a 1st Sergeant.

Returning to his education on the G.I. Bill, Bell finished his B.A. degree at Southern Idaho College of Education in 1946. Bell then began his education career teaching high school and driving a truck to improve his modest circumstances.

Bell obtained a Master's degree from the University of Idaho in 1954 and then spent most of the rest of his education career in Utah. He was at various times an athletic coach and a science teacher. Bell also served as the superintendent of Weber School District in Utah from 1958 to 1962. In 1961 he completed his Ph.D. in Educational Administration from the University of Utah.

In the 1970s, Bell began his national education career for Republican administrations. He served as Deputy Commissioner for School Systems in the U.S. Office of Education from 1970 to 1971. He was appointed to the head of this office in 1974 and served until the end of the Ford Administration (1976) as U.S. Commissioner of Education.

Returning to Utah, Bell served as the Commissioner of Higher Education for the state of Utah.

President Ronald Reagan appointed Bell as the Secretary of Education in January 1981. His mandate from Reagan was to *close* the Department, fulfilling a Reagan campaign promise. Instead, Bell used the position to campaign and advocate for higher U.S. school standards.

Bell convinced President Reagan to recognize existing programs as a new sub-cabinet foundation, but Congress rejected this approach and the Department of Education was left intact. Bell was under constant criticism from conservative leaders in Congress and the education community as he championed spending increases. These budget appropriations saved several federal education programs such as bilingual education, federal educational research and aid to

local school programs. Under the Bell leadership, educational spending increased from \$14.8 billion in fiscal year 1981 to \$18.9 billion in fiscal year 1985. He did reduce the size of the Department from 7,000 to 5,000 employees.

While suffering criticism for keeping the Department of Education open, Bell did advocate for many popular conservative education ideas including tuition tax credits, the voucher system, tax advantaged savings accounts for tuition, local control of school prayer, and the use of the computer in the classroom. Bell also created the National Blue Ribbon schools program in 1982.

Bell's major achievement as Secretary of Education was his creation of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The Commission published a widely acclaimed report in April 1983 titled, *A Nation at Risk*. The report warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity" in U.S. schools. This report sparked a nationwide drive to raise school standards and helped reverse President Reagan's poor standing on educational issues in public opinion polls.

Bell left his post on December 31, 1984 to return to Utah to farm and teach at the University of Utah, School of Administration. In 1988, he published his memoir entitled *The Thirteenth Man: A Reagan Cabinet Memoir*. Bell was inducted into Idaho's Hall of Fame in 1987.

Bell published seven other books during his career, covering topics such as improving child intellectual development and reforming the educational process. His last book in 1993, written with his business partner Dr. Donna Elmquist at his nonprofit company T.H. Bell and Associates in Salt Lake City, made new recommendations for improving the US education system. "There are three things to emphasize in teaching: The first is motivation, the second is motivation, and the third is (you guessed it) motivation."

The Department of Education gives an award named after Bell to recognize "outstanding school leaders and the vital role they play in overcoming challenging circumstances." At the first ceremony on November 3, 2009, the award was given to eight U.S. public school principals. Concurrent with the award, the department issued a press release which stated, "The late Secretary Terrel H. Bell held education as his highest priority, trusting that all students would find it their personal key to success as he had."

Bell was married and had four sons. Bell died in his sleep at age 74 of pulmonary fibrosis at his home in Salt Lake City on June 22, 1996.

Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of papers from Dr. Bell's tenure during Ronald Reagan's first term as President. It is a duplicate of a collection that is currently housed at NARA or the Department of Education. The J. Willard Marriott Library, Manuscripts Division at the University of Utah has Dr. Bell's complete personal papers collection.

The collection consists of six series.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

SERIES I: DAILY SCHEDULE, FEBRUARY 1981-DECEMBER 1984 (24.4 cu. ft., Box 1-61)

This series consists of Dr. Bell's daily schedule of appointments; monthly calendar; meeting agendas; attendee lists; resumes and biographies of meeting participants. Included with the daily schedules are daily summaries providing a daily hour-by-hour list of Dr. Bell's appointments for each day of the years.

Also included is material regarding Dr. Bell's remarks and talking points for speaking engagements. Material covering education issues and the Department of Education include issue papers; consultant reports; newspaper articles; correspondence from subordinate offices; and agency testimony before Congress

SERIES II: SPEECHES, FEBRUARY 1981-DECEMBER 1984 (1.4 l. ft.; Box 61-65)

This series consists of Dr. Bell's speeches, his testimonies before Congress, and public hearings.

SERIES III: BIOGRAPHIC MATERIAL, 1970-1984 (0.4 l. ft.; Box 66)

This series consists of material regarding Dr. Bell's nomination for U.S. Commissioner of Education for the Nixon and Ford Administrations and for Secretary of Education for the Reagan Administration. The material also includes photographs; clippings; personal correspondence and various biographies published during Dr. Bell's career.

SERIES IV: SUBJECT FILES (0.8 l. ft., Box 67-68)

This series consists of formal reports from the Department of Education; priorities, initiatives and goal planning for the Department of Education; issue material regarding women, Indians, vocational and master teachers; and miscellaneous publications and material from the Department of Education.

SERIES V: NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION
(2. l. ft., Box 69-73)

This series consists of material relating to the establishment, functioning and running of the National Council for Excellence in Education including hearings; press releases; meeting information; briefings; reviews; reports; correspondence and papers. The series includes the final report of the Council entitled, *A Nation At Risk*.

SERIES VI: DAILY EDUCATION NEWS (7.2 l. ft.; Box 74-91)

This series consists of copies of the "Daily Education News." The "Daily Education News" was an in-house Department of Education publication consisting of a compilation of news articles from newspapers and magazines regarding education issues.

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