

Jesse Helms interview

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Audio Transcript

Jack Bass

Do you think politics in North Carolina, then, are more likely to revolve around personalities than parties?

Jesse Helms

No, I think they revolve around issues. And a complete disenchantment with headstrong government that intruded into the lives of every citizen, whether it be in North Carolina or otherwise. And the people basically, both consciously and subconsciously, are rejecting the kind of government that deprives them of their decision making right. They are unhappy about inflation, and why shouldn't they be? They are unhappy about forced busing. You could pull any thread from the fabric, and you can find discontent. There's just a welling up of sentiment against too much government.

Jack Bass

When you use the term forced busing, what do you refer to specifically?

Jesse Helms

Well, I am speaking, of course, of government assignment of students on the basis of race. Now, we've got discrimination in reverse now, in this forced busing. In the idea of children being assigned to schools on the other side of town, just to achieve some sort of "racial balance" that satisfies the whims or caprice of some bureaucrat or judge or both. And that's the way I'd describe forced busing.

Jack Bass

So with the Supreme Court mandate what it is at the moment, so far as school desegregation is concerned, and in urban areas where housing patterns tend to be based predominantly on race, how . . . what other means would be available to desegregate the schools?

Jesse Helms

Well, I'm not saying that desegregation is the important thing. I think education is the important thing, and one thing that everybody agrees on is that the quality of education is deteriorating. Now, I know you've seen the same polls that I've seen, that not... this is not a racial issue any longer, because black parents object to forced busing just as much as the white parents. And the hostilities in the schools and the frustration of the teacher in trying to cope with the situation, when the psychology of the classroom is just one of destruction and apathy and all the rest of it. Now, our schools are going to pot. Now, I think that my dear colleagues on the floor of the Senate are mistaking the mood of the people, and this may well affect their futures. I hope it will, because if they can't change their mind in the face of obvious fact, when they have been proved wrong, then they need to be eliminated from the Senate. If I'm wrong, they well may eliminate me. But I don't think I'm wrong.

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