

Bell comments on U.S. colleges

WASHINGTON — Education Secretary T.H. Bell said today a study by a team of scholars shows "American higher education has the sniffles" and needs prompt action to avoid "a bad cold or even pneumonia."

But Bell, at a news conference after briefing educators on the report commissioned by his National Institute of Education, said colleges have not fallen as far behind as elementary and secondary schools.

The education secretary said he had expected the scholars to render an even harsher verdict on the quality of the nation's nearly 3,300 colleges and universities than they did.

"American higher education has the sniffles. It might come down with a bad cold or even

pneumonia if we don't do something about it," he told reporters.

Earlier, he told 150 educators, lobbyists and congressional staff members, "We have the finest and the most advanced and emulated system of higher education in the world. Our justifiable pride ought to be tempered with a bit of apprehension."

But "no one should conclude we are poorly served" by the nation's colleges, he said.

The report was written by a panel of seven scholars, chaired by Pennsylvania State University professor and administrator Kenneth Mortimer. It makes 27 recommendations to improve undergraduate education, including the proposal that all students take at least two years of liberal arts courses, even if that forces them to spend more

than four years getting a bachelor's degree in business, nursing or other fields.

Mortimer called it "a report written by insiders about the enterprise to which they have all devoted their lives." He said the nation's debate about educational excellence has now advanced to colleges, which have "the opportunity and indeed the obligation to concentrate on qualitative rather than quantitative growth."

Bell said, "We need to act promptly to maintain the traditional excellence in our higher education system. Some 'warning signs and trouble spots' identified in the report will require the prompt attention of the higher education community if we are to avoid some of the difficulties that have affected our elementary and secondary schools."

Polish church fears for cleric

WARSAW, Poland — Poland's Roman Catholic Church said Monday that it feared for the life of a kidnapped pro-Solidarity priest, and government spokesman Jerzy Urban asserted that the abduction was aimed at undermining the authorities.

The church also said there were indications the kidnapers had political motives.

The whereabouts or condition of the Rev. Jerzy Popieluszko were not known and no one had claimed responsibility for his abduction, which occurred Friday in northern Poland.

Keston College, an institution near London that monitors religious affairs in Eastern Europe, reported Monday that Popieluszko had received

numerous death threats in recent weeks. Solidarity leaders confirmed the report.

The Catholic episcopate, in its first comment on the priest's disappearance, said it "brings deep concern."

"On the one hand there is fear about his life and on the other there is fear that kidnapping may become a method of political strife in our country," said a statement issued by the episcopate in Warsaw. "The information we have about the circumstances of the kidnapping indicate that the culprits acted for political motives."

The statement did not elaborate.

Popieluszko, 37, is one of the Polish clergy's most outspoken advocates of the now-outlawed Solidarity labor union and had been the target of frequent government attacks for his pro-Solidarity sermons.

In Washington, State Department spokesman John Hughes voiced concern over the kidnapping and expressed "the strong hope that the Polish government will ensure Popieluszko's speedy release."

Polish government spokesman Jerzy Urban said police had received "signals from the population" that Popieluszko was seen alive after the kidnapping, but had not been able to establish the identity of the kidnapers or to determine Popieluszko's whereabouts.

Urban, who said he was speaking in an unofficial capacity, dismissed as "sensational" allegations that the authorities had been involved in the disappearance of Popieluszko.

The kidnapping "is a carefully timed provocation aimed against us," Urban said.

The priest's disappearance came at an awkward moment for Polish leader Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, who welcomed Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu of Greece to Warsaw on Monday in the first visit by a leader of a NATO country since the Dec. 13, 1981, imposition of martial law that crushed Solidarity.

Solidarity activists said they would press authorities to explain the priest's disappearance. They organized daily prayer sessions at factories and a round-the-clock vigil at St. Stanislaw Kostka Church in Warsaw, where Popieluszko served.

A senior Solidarity adviser said the kidnapping was similar to at least three other abductions in the Torun area this year, and confirmed reports that an anti-Solidarity "terrorist group" had been operating in the region.



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