

A Penny for

BY JOSEPHINE MCMULLEN

His Thoughts

RICHARD W. RILEY'S 30-YEAR-OLD EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT ACT IS STILL RELEVANT TO S.C. BUSINESS TODAY

A full accounting of the life and career of Richard W. Riley would fill a shelf full of biographies. But out of his many accomplishments as Governor, Secretary of Education, and private individual, his efforts to pass the Education Improvement Act (EIA) speak volumes about the man and his passions.

In 1969, when Richard Riley was a South Carolina State Senator, Pat Conroy (then 23 years old) took a job teaching for the Beaufort County School District on Daufuskie Island.

What he found on that island shook him to the core of his being. Several of his students could not recite the alphabet. Three children could not spell their names. And 18 children thought Savannah was the largest city in the world.

Such is the educational backwater that was South Carolina when Richard Riley was elected as governor only a few years later in 1978.

While not every South Carolina school struggled to the extent that Conroy's school on Daufuskie Island did, it would be incorrect to assume that the educational system of that era was able to provide South Carolina's children with the education they needed and deserved.

In 1979, when Riley was sworn in as governor, South Carolina was ranked 49th out of 50 states in education spending. And yet when he left office eight years later, South Carolina's per-student spending had moved up to 41st out of 50 states. And the state's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores had improved significantly.

These improvements were due in large part to the passage in 1984 of the Riley-sponsored Education Improvement Act (EIA), which according to the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit global policy think tank, was the most comprehensive school reform initiative in the country. A cornerstone of the EIA was the creation of an ongoing revenue stream earmarked for funding school reform initiatives via a 25 percent (one penny) increase in the state sales tax. The resulting revenues did not go to the General Fund. Instead, they went

directly into the EIA where they were only to be used for education improvement efforts.

In his first term as governor, Riley was interested in education, but he was not as totally immersed in it as he was during his second term. According to Riley, "I told people that if they re-elected me for a second term that they might as well get ready. I was going to go all out in improving public education."

In his second-term inaugural address he focused his remarks on a single child born that very morning named John Christopher Hayes. "The whole speech was about John Christopher Hayes growing up in Cheraw and his working parents," explained Riley. "I felt like he was a good average child and I talked about how education was so critical for him and for all the children he represented that were born that day. That [speech] made very clear that education was going to be my priority."

"I knew that since South Carolina was way down the line in funding public education. I mean we were right at the bottom. It was very clear to me that if we wanted to make a major statement in education that we couldn't just dress up some good sounding measure and float it through. We really had to make a statement. To do that, we were going to have to have funding. And I insisted on that from the very word go that the people wanted all these things and we were going to have to pay for it. It was the responsible thing to do."

Passing the EIA was no easy task. When Riley first proposed the Education Improvement Act in 1983, the legislature showed little interest. Riley was undeterred. He launched a Herculean statewide campaign in support of the EIA, complete with bumper stickers and community forums. Riley was able to rally business executives, community leaders, chambers of commerce, educators, and parents, to put pressure on state legislators to pass the bill.

Riley remembered that passage of the EIA became a statewide movement. "The slogan we had was 'a penny for

"I believe that he was one of the finest governors of the last 50 years and one of the greatest cabinet secretaries this country ever had. His instinctive, intuitive understanding of human nature and human possibilities and what would work always took my breath away."

Bill Clinton, 42nd President of the United States

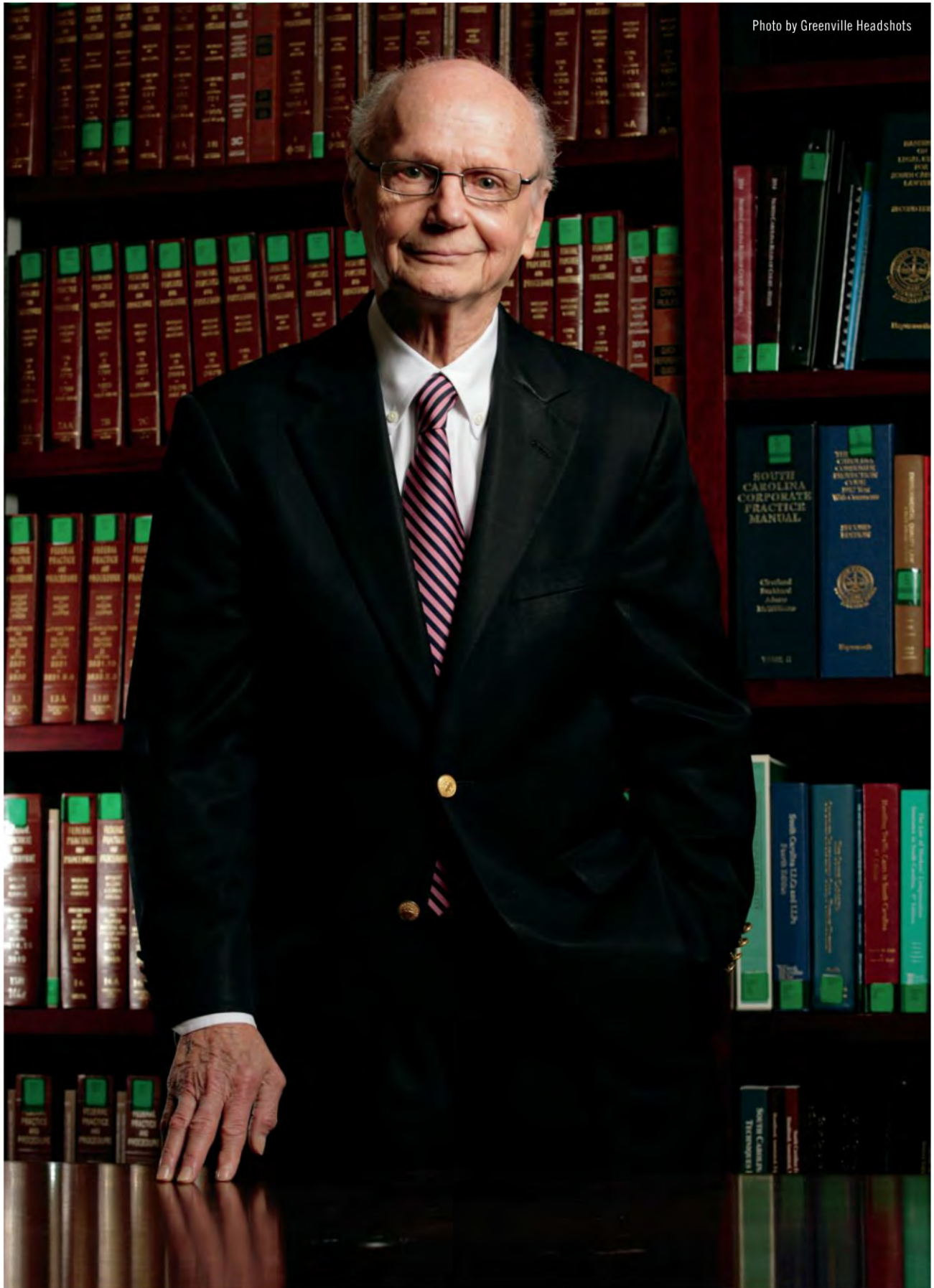


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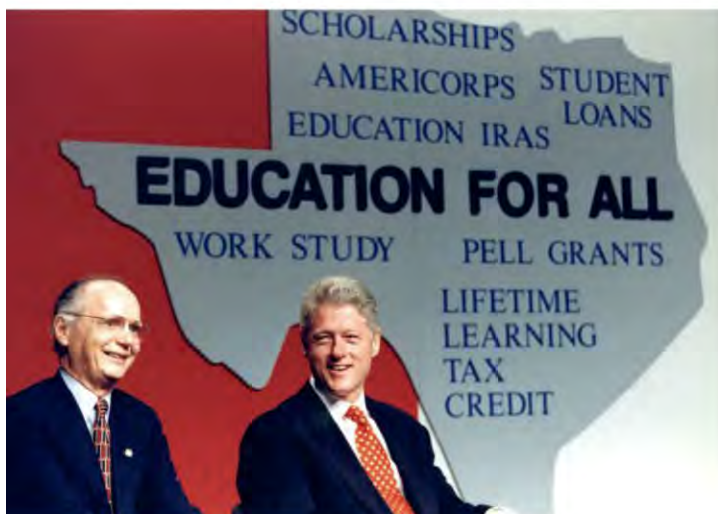
their thoughts' with 'their' underlined. 'Their,' of course, was the children. And people got into it," said Riley. ("Penny" referred to the one cent sales tax increase that was a component of the EIA.) "We had enormous groups of people at forums throughout the state. Our first forum was in Charleston and I think we had 3,000 people. We then broke up into groups of about 25-30 and we had a facilitator meeting with each of the groups that talked about what we wanted to do in education, what were the biggest concerns, and how would we pay for it."

At each of the seven forums, Riley would speak along with the state Secretary of Education, a teacher, and a business person. Citizens who couldn't attend the

forums could watch them on the statewide ETV network. Riley remembered, "We had bumper stickers. We had yard signs. We had everything else you had in a political campaign. It was what I call a 'people's movement.' And that was significant."

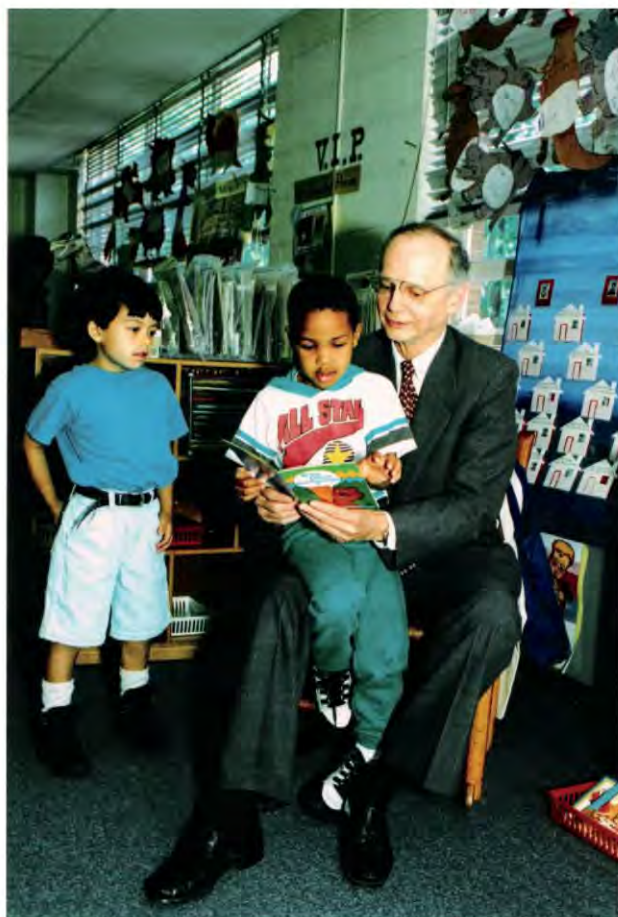
"It was the people who really got into [education reform] and they all but insisted that the legislature pass all these necessary programs and comprehensive reforms as well as a way to pay for it. What people recommended was a statewide penny on the sales tax. It was a movement."

During this grassroots campaign, Riley lured previously indifferent business leaders to his side by making what in South Carolina was the relatively novel argument



"We started in the same year in the House of Representatives: 1962. While I've served with many leaders in South Carolina, Dick Riley had the greatest knowledge of governance... probably of any leader in the nation. He had a great feel for government and how it could best benefit the majority of the people."

Nick Theodore, Former Lieutenant Governor of South Carolina



Photos taken during Riley's time as Secretary of Education.
Courtesy of South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.



Photo provided by Furman University


AT&T is Proud to Salute

Richard W. Riley and His Dedicated Service to South Carolina

Words cannot express our appreciation for Dick Riley's decades of leadership and service to South Carolina and his ongoing commitment to improving the education of our young people. Whether as U.S. Secretary of Education, Governor, State Senator or attorney, Dick Riley's distinguished life of service has provided all of us with a brightly-lit path to a better state and better quality of life for its citizens.

Thank you, Secretary Riley.

The AT&T Team

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"Riley is a man of great principle and love for South Carolina. His passionate and dedicated lifetime of service has made our state and country proud."

**Nikki Haley,
Governor of South Carolina**

that education and economic development were inextricably linked. Riley was able to convince them that to attract industry to the state, a sound public school system was required.

Riley explained, "I would say from a very young age that it became very clear to me that especially in South Carolina (but everywhere really) that public policy works best when the business community supports it.

"[Education] is very critical for big and small business in hiring people. They want [people] to be well-educated and well-qualified to do the work. It's also about sustainability. If you have something that business is basically opposed to, then you're going to have a very hard time keeping it going.

"When I used to go around the country (or even the world) to support industry moving into South Carolina, everyone always wanted to talk about South Carolina's education system. That's what the business leaders of other countries [and states] were interested in."

Many of the education reforms Riley put into place were sustained long after he left the governor's mansion. Riley speculated on why this was so:

"The whole design of the EIA was to have citizens involved that were appointed by the governor. These citizens would evaluate each of the programs at the end of the year, and they'd show what happened, and whether assessment levels for students were going up or down (and in fact they went up). All the different programs were evaluated every year. And then the governor would make a recommendation to the House and Senate that the EIA budget should get into more of this and less of that or whatever the statistics were showing. It was all researched based.



Photos of Dick and wife Ann "Tunky" Riley taken during his time as Governor of South Carolina. Courtesy of South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

"One thing which I think was interesting (and might be unique [about the EIA]) was that we had the revenue from the penny [sales tax increase] put into a separate budget. So you had the general fund and that was all the income that came into the state as revenue. Then we had the EIA which was funded by a penny [of the sales tax] and these funds were for so called education reform and improvement.

"The EIA was designed to have constant reform and improvement. Never being satisfied with where we were. [The way we designed it] caused it to be ongoing and to have permanence to it. The whole design of it was to have the penny [sales tax] come back and be looked at every year. What was working? What wasn't working? Why? What kind of success were we having? Then the legislature would have to pass the budget and it would have the general fund budget and it would have the EIA budget. That's still the law."

In recent years, however, some of the reforms Riley put into

place have been partially undone. "The legislature, when they have a difficult time balancing the budget, has got all kinds of pressure on them," said Riley. "For example, in the recession of 2008 and 2009, they thought they'd use the penny that was meant specifically for reform type programs. They have shifted

some of the penny [sales tax revenue] over to the base budget and away from the reform and improvement budget." Also, a large source of EIA funding was lost in 2007 with the elimination of the sales tax on groceries.

When Riley signed the EIA into law in June of 1984 he said, "An old South Carolina is dying. A new South Carolina, strong and vital and very proud, is struggling to be born. We will not build the New South Carolina with brick

and mortar. We will build it with minds. The power of knowledge and skills is our hope for survival in this new age."

Many would say it is still our hope today.



"What makes Dick Riley so effective is his drive and determination. He always pursued a higher purpose and appealed to people to do the same. That's a rare quality in any elected official."

Knox White, Mayor of Greenville

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