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The Need for Raising Educational Standards in South Carolina

Strom Thurmond

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MEMBERS OF THE PALMETTO STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION:

It is a great pleasure to me to welcome you to your capital city, and to express the hope your stay here will be both enjoyable and beneficial. Your presence at this meeting indicates you are interested in educational advancement over and above the routine duties which concern teachers from day to day. I sincerely hope this extra interest will be justified, and that you will have a successful meeting.

As Governor, it is always gratifying to me when I see people manifesting concern for the welfare of education in our State. I have tried in every way possible to emphasize the importance of improving our educational standards, as part of our great effort to raise our economic level of life.

Here in South Carolina, we have a twin problem; we must raise the educational standards of our people on the one hand, and on the other we must increase their average per capita income. The two problems must be attacked together, since they are dependent upon each other. Higher income follows better education and training, and the educational dollar yields the highest possible return on the investment.
In both economic and educational development, we are making great progress. In the educational field, the most progressive school legislation in the history of the State has been passed during the last two years. This included the best salary schedule ever provided, under which all teachers have equal opportunities to advance by making themselves qualified. Teacher salaries as a whole have increased 50 per cent in the last two years, and the average increase has been $610.

Provision was made in 1947 for a survey of the school system, which has now been completed. This survey will provide a valuable background for legislative study of our further educational needs.

In the matter of economic development, South Carolina is going forward as never before. During 1948 alone, more than $230,000,000 in new industry either began operation, began construction, or was announced for construction. This resulted in more than 17,000 new jobs, with additional payrolls of more than $28,000,000. Industrial payrolls last year reached more than $350,000,000.

In agriculture, new levels of income were reached last year, with a gross farm income of approximately $420,000,000.
As our farms become more and more mechanized, a large number of our farm families must leave the farms and find their places in other walks of life. One of the best ways we can train people for other vocations is to take advantage of the new Area Trade Schools now in operation in three divisions: Columbia, Murray, and Denmark. The trade school offers opportunities to acquire skills which will demand good wages.

I would like to urge you, as teachers and educational administrators, to be on the look-out for students who are eligible for the Denmark School. This trade school is already training more than 300 persons in 11 different skills: auto mechanics, barbering, brick masonry, carpentry, cooking and baking, commercial sewing, cosmetology, electricity, painting, shoe repairing, and tailoring.

Anyone who has studied the operation of these schools is amazed at the short time in which an unskilled person may learn a good trade which will support him all his life. I consider the Area Trade Schools to be one of the most important educational developments in South Carolina's history.

I should point out that veterans may also take advantage of the trade school training, under the G. I. Bill of Rights.
We still have much to do in an educational way.

One of the important items is the need for the establishment of a training school for delinquent Negro girls, similar to that already in operation for Negro boys. There is now no provision for rehabilitating such persons, and I have several times recommended the establishment of a school, the most recent occasion being in my Annual Message to the General Assembly this year. The project is now under study in the legislature, and it is my hope that favorable action will be taken upon it.

The State Government can do much to raise the educational standards of our people, but it is powerless in this respect without a corps of teachers who are both capable and devoted. The work of every teacher in the State has a direct bearing on the future of our citizens. The results of the painstaking, daily efforts of our teachers may be found in the unmistakable marks they leave on our people, for good or bad.

Except for that of his parents, the influence of his teachers is perhaps the most important influence that ever comes into a man's life. The teacher moulds the character of the citizen, and through the citizen, the teacher shapes the destiny of the nation. Good teachers are, therefore,
the best hope for the future of our country, and for the preservation of the ideals of personal freedom and local self-government upon which our democracy depends.

In any consideration of the proper characteristics of the good teacher, there are five qualities which I believe to be most important. These are:

First, devotion to duty -- the quality which often makes the difference between a poor teacher and a good teacher. A teacher should be genuinely devoted to the highest principles of his profession, and he should build his teaching career upon a desire to serve his people and to help make them better citizens. A proper devotion to duty, of course, would include a love for young people, and an understanding of their problems.

Second, character -- the quality which is necessary to real success in any profession. A teacher whose character is upright and honest will serve as an example to his students, and such an influence may often be the most important thing a child gains from his education. A teacher of good character is remembered for life.

Third, courtesy -- a quality which enables the teacher to gain the love and affection of his students.
so they will be inclined to learn from him. I think it is true that courtesy is more important when dealing with children than with adults. The child will carry a scar for life from a discourteous act or remark.

Fourth -- energy -- a very important quality in any good teacher. The energetic teacher is the one most likely to inspire his pupils to higher things. Without a large measure of energy, the teacher cannot hope to provide the leadership his students need. Getting an education requires a lot of energy, and the child who sees this quality in his teachers will be inspired to work hard for his education.

Fifth, training -- a quality which is, of course, absolutely essential. The good teacher is constantly on the alert to improve his own educational standards. He is on the look-out for opportunities to learn new methods of teaching, to take summer school courses, and to keep up with the new wealth of knowledge which our scientists are constantly giving to our civilization.

A teacher who has these five qualities will, I believe, inspire and lead his students into a happier and fuller life. In addition, the teacher will gain for himself a deep satisfaction and happiness from his career -- and these
are more important gains than the dollar value of the teachers salary.

Good teachers have an important role in South Carolina's future. And that future is a bright one. Our State is on the move in many respects. We may look forward to greater income and greater advantages for our people.

Toward that end, we must work together in harmony.

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