RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP

The subject of responsible citizenship is one that is very close to me. All my life I have believed firmly that the good citizen is the responsible citizen, and that responsible citizenship is the only way we have of preserving our democracy and our way of life.

The kind of government we have in America inevitably reflects the kind of citizenship we have. That is true because we Americans have developed a type of government which truly and completely belongs to the people.

Sometimes we are inclined to forget that we, as citizens, are directly responsible for everything that happens in our government. We forget that we are the government, and that we own it. Often we are inclined to blame the misfortunes of our state and national life on hidden influences of one kind or another. In doing so, we forget that the responsibility for such misfortunes rests squarely upon the citizen himself.

I think this inclination to be forgetful arises in part from the fact we Americans have enjoyed our liberties for so long that we take them too much for granted. Our freedom is not...
automatic. It must be renewed and reaffirmed every generation if it is to survive.

Also, the very fact that we enjoy personal liberties gives us the opportunity to be selfish. That is, we have the right to profit, the right to make more money and acquire more goods. In pursuit of our own desires, we often neglect the basic realization that the welfare of the individual citizen is tied up with the welfare of his nation. Our system of free enterprise produces personal security and the bountiful life, but it cannot continue to do so unless its citizens preserve that system by their sacrifice, devotion, and service.

Since the responsible citizen is the good citizen, the qualities of good citizenship should be our primary concern. Let us consider some of these qualities briefly today.

First of all, the good citizen is self-reliant. He relies upon himself, upon his own good judgment, and upon his own ability to overcome handicaps and make his own way in the world.

Today, we are threatened with a weakening of the spirit of self-reliance in America. We are turning increasingly to government to get things done for us in what may appear to be the easy way. Many people are very much afraid we are going too
far, and that we are in danger of forgetting that we are the
government. The more we get away from self-reliance, the
more we lose the ability to depend upon ourselves.

We hear a lot of talk about the government's having
taken away our rights. Actually, what is happening is that
we are giving them up. Rights and privileges are not taken
away -- they are given up. In order to keep our rights, we
must exercise them.

Secondly, the good citizen is the well-informed
citizen. He knows something of the glorious history of our
country, and of its literature and its ideals. To him, the
Bill of Rights is not just a vague chapter in history, but it
is a living document which has every-day importance in his
own life.

The good citizen keeps himself informed as to what
is going on in his community, state, and nation. He equips
himself with all available information on the issues of the
day, so that he may be capable of reaching an intelligent
decision on public questions.

A third quality of the good citizen is that he has
faith in the democratic way of life. He not only believes in
the ideals of democracy, but he is a firm advocate of those ideals.
This means that he is ready to become a champion of democracy every time the occasion may arise. It is this kind of faith which is the basis of America's strength. Without that faith, our people could never have won the position of world leadership which is ours today.

Another characteristic of the good citizen is his high sense of patriotism. He loves his country deeply and sincerely, and he is ready to serve it in any way he can, no matter what the sacrifice may be.

Sometimes we forget that patriotism is necessary in peace as well as in war. The patriot is vigilant at all times, ready to defend his country not only against enemies who attack from without, but also against those who assail its ideals and principles from within.

Another very important quality of the good citizen is that of brotherliness. A sense of obligation to his fellow man leads a good citizen to stand ready to offer assistance wherever it is needed. This is the spirit of the good neighbor, and it has been one of the foundation stones of America's greatness.

From the earliest days, when men often depended on their neighbors to roll the logs that built their homes, the spirit of cooperation and mutual effort has helped our country to enjoy steady progress.
Finally, the good citizen is an active citizen. He is not satisfied to sit around and complain about conditions — he does something about them. He participates in the activities of his community, contributing whatever he can. He is not content merely to pay taxes and let it go at that. He makes his influence felt in state matters, through his elected representatives. And he participates in the affairs of his nation in every way open to him.

Above all, the active citizen goes to the poll and votes. His criticism of public officials is made where it should be made — at the polls. The right of the ballot is the clearest and best expression of democracy in action.

This week, we are celebrating Education Week in South Carolina. No subject points up our need for responsible citizenship more clearly than that of education. One of our State's greatest needs is an improved educational system which will bring the advantages of education to all our citizens. We cannot attain that improvement merely by sitting back and hoping the State will do it, or hoping that Uncle Sam will do it. The job must be done by our citizens.

General Omar Bradley, speaking recently to an audience of 60 prominent citizens on an educational subject,
asked his hearers a few questions, to determine whether any of
them were actively seeking to improve the educational advantages
of their community. He found that not one of the 60 was a member
of a school board, only a half dozen knew the names of their
children's teachers, and not one of them had ever taken the trouble
to meet his child's teacher and find out something about her.
General Bradley was justified in concluding that such an attitude
on the part of a citizen "cannot and will not work." We can never
solve our educational problems unless they become a matter of
genuine personal concern to all our citizens.

In the final analysis, responsible citizenship in
America means simply intelligent self-government. For in the
proper exercise of our liberties in this country, we are making
the world's greatest testimonial to the ability of mankind to
govern himself. In this great effort, every citizen has an
important role.

When we give our allegiance to flag and country, we
undertake a responsibility which cannot be relinquished. As
Woodrow Wilson said in an address to 5,000 newly naturalized citizens;
"You have taken an oath of allegiance to the United States. Of
allegiance to whom? Of allegiance to no one, unless it be God --

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certainly not of allegiance to those who temporarily represent this great Government. You have taken an oath of allegiance to a great ideal, to a great body of principles, to a great hope of the human race."