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National Education Association  
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Speaker: Senator Hubert H. Humphrey —

Place: Hall of States,  
Hotel Leamington

Topic: TOWARD NATIONAL MATURITY

When I get a chance to talk about education, I take it gladly. And when I have an opportunity to talk about the problems and aspirations of rural people, I jump at it. In other words, today's meeting with the Rural Education Department is uniquely satisfying to me.

It would be presumptive of me to discuss the professional details of rural education. You are the experts. On the problems of rural education, I am a willing listener, and I have been listening hard to many of your leaders.

Rather I will share with you in a few moments some thoughts about a goal toward which all educators, and all other thinking people of America, are striving -- national maturity.

But I cannot let this opportunity pass to say a word about the tremendous leadership of your executive secretary, Dr. Howard A. Dawson, and Dr. Mary Condon, whose keen insight and unfailing determination to advance the cause of education in rural America have made them valuable allies in the struggle for better education which goes on in the halls of Congress as well as in the Grange halls and church meeting-places and school auditoriums of this great nation. You are well-represented in Washington. You may be sure of that. Your national leaders are truly dedicated and gifted individuals.

This is a nation of great gifts -- of great natural gifts. Ours is a land of plenty -- set in the midst of a rich, teeming continent. Here, in a natural arena that cried out for development -- and largely protected from power struggles of the Old World for nearly three centuries -- enterprising men and women have raised a new kind of society. Here in America, after three centuries of almost uninterrupted growth, man has largely solved his age-old struggle to find food, clothing and shelter. There is really, at least in our own country, enough to go around.

We are in danger, in fact, of getting fat. As a nation, we must be watchful that our superabundance of production does not clog our arteries, dull our thinking, and turn us into the kind of a people that spends half its time worrying about how to lock up our wealth -- losing sleep over the possibility of something happening to take it all away!

We must be ever watchful that our national leadership does not fall into the paths of self-satisfaction, and self-righteousness.

Yes, we have solved the problem of production here. But even in our own country there are still areas of great economic distress. While as a nation we are producing more than we can consume, many groups of our people are still denied a decent living standard. Bigotry hold down millions of our people through job discrimination and a denial of educational opportunities. Millions of our elderly are still forced to live meager existences in this time of plenty. And, paradoxically, Americans great rural population -- the producers of most of the real wealth of the nation -- do not share equally in the fruits of their labors.

Yes, although it lies within our grasp to eliminate poverty and need throughout our nation, we have not -- as a nation -- taken the necessary steps. In this time of general abundance, there is much yet to be done to remove the legal, economic, and social barriers that block out huge sections of our population from their rightful share of the national wealth. There is much yet to be done to provide adequate economic security for our very young, our elderly, and our ill.

A mature people -- a mature nation -- will not tolerate inequality of opportunity and will strive ceaselessly to root out the great pockets of poverty and distress in America that still remain.

A mature nation -- looking around it at the three-fifths of a world whose sufferings are almost beyond comprehension -- will also understand that the relief of suffering and want among the darker-skinned peoples of the world must be a prime national goal of the United States.

It is not only because our great spiritual and political heritage demands that we strive toward this goal of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and helping the sick -- but it is increasingly evident that until the long-surpressed peoples of this earth have secured a more equitable share of the good things of life, this world will be in ever more constant turmoil.

There will never be real peace, and we will never achieve anything like a measure of national security until the world's basic economic problems are brought under control. All the nuclear weapons and guided missiles in the world can not give us real peace.

There will never be real peace, either, until a way is found to permit major change and growth in the underdeveloped areas of the world to take place without catastrophic violence.

When every breach of the peace opens up the possibility of a nuclear holocaust, the problem of preserving a peaceful world is absolutely paramount. Yes, this is truly a paradox -- that as

mankind holds almost within its grasp a millenium of economic plenty-- man and his works have never been in more mortal danger.

Equally important, as the world power struggle intensifies, is the preservation of our institutions. A mature nation will realize that if we sacrifice individual freedom in America on the altar of national security we will have lost the struggle without firing a shot.

Individual freedom and opportunity in our own country must be preserved at all costs. This is a goal we must not shirk. No matter what demands are placed on our nation in her task of world leadership, we must not forget what the struggle is all about.

Today science and technology are triumphant in communications, as well as in the production of goods. We can almost literally reach the moon. We can move in a matter of hours to any point on the globe. We can communicate instantaneously to any major city in the world. Through printing press, radio, television, and film, ideas may be transmitted to billions of people in a short time.

Yes, man's eyes and ears and voice now have almost infinite extensions. We even have robots to make mathematical calculations and to produce goods.

But science has not yet invented, and will not invent, a substitute for wisdom, for leadership, for maturity.

And an American must ask of himself whether our nation has yet developed the wisdom, the leadership and maturity necessary to lead a seething and turbulent world in the path of peace.

Any careful reading of the world's leading journals of opinion will demonstrate that the world's impression of America has not been too reassuring in these past few years. Our leadership is criticized for blowing hot and cold, for acting on rash impulse, for trying to seek solutions of all the world's problems in terms of military pacts and military aid. At the same time our people seem perhaps too pre-occupied with the trivia of everyday life, with gadgets and push buttons, with the pursuit of pleasure, and too little concerned with the vital world of ideas and decision. Critics accuse us of being materialistic, too frivolous, too flighty.

Some of these criticisms I think you would agree are valid. But the weaknesses of our nation are the weaknesses of youth. They are not necessarily "permanent fixtures."

The critics generally fail to note the often-demonstrated qualities of generosity, compassion, and open-heartedness of the American people which are the latent sources of great national strength and maturity.

Moreover, there is a vigor in our people, a restless, seeking energy which -- given direction and purpose -- has accomplished

great things. When the American heart is stirred, when the American imagination is challenged, -- in short, when our nation is well led -- there is almost nothing we cannot do.

I do not think we have yet risen to greatness as a nation -- although we have had our moments of glory and achievement. But I am convinced that we can be a great nation -- a mature nation, certain and silent about our strength, willing to make hard decisions, and humble before the responsibilities which our God-given wealth and good fortune lay upon us.

Everywhere I have travelled since the adjournment of Congress in August, I have found our people worried, restless, and concerned. There is the feeling that we ought, somehow "to be doing better than we are." There is an uneasiness about our role in the world, and our relationships with the other peoples of the world. In short, there is the kind of stirring, of concern that demonstrates to me that Americans are ready to get behind bold, imaginative, constructive policies.

Beneath the surface veneer there is a deep and restless stirring among our people, a hunger for purpose and meaning.

The resurgence of church attendance is remarkable. So is the astounding proliferation of voluntary organizations in America dedicated to the solution of specific problems of illness, poverty and misfortune. These are important signs of a rising concern with others which can one day be more broadly reflected in the national policies of our government.

It is the task of every thinking man and woman in America to hasten this process, to encourage the development of young leaders whose education is not confined to the training of their mechanical, technical and scientific abilities.

Education and educators have been taking some hard knocks lately -- unfairly so. It is awfully easy to look for a scapegoat and to blame all the troubles on one group.

Some have even said that education has failed America. The truth of the matter is that education itself has been failed, and that American educators have overcome almost insuperable handicaps in their efforts to strengthen and to lead Americans into a better life.

Similarly, it is asking too much that educators must single handedly erase all our faults and raise all our virtues.

Still, we will all agree that the educational effort can be intensified, and that our educational system can stand much improvement. The kind of effort which the Rural Education Department of NEA for many years has been making to provide better education facilities for rural people, and to upgrade the qualifications of rural teachers, must be

backed up and implemented. The problem areas of rural education -- such as the education of the children of migrant workers, and the severe financial straits of many rural areas due to the loss of farm income -- should receive increased attention at all levels of government.

But perhaps the greatest challenge to the rural educator, as it is the great challenge of every responsible leader in America, is to discover the more resourceful, intelligent, and creative boys and girls -- to discover them and to encourage them to develop their capabilities. . .to challenge them, to inspire them.

All of the new techniques for teaching are invaluable -- the audio-visual tools should be used to the utmost. Educational television is tremendously valuable. But the role of the teacher -- the personal relationship with the student -- is if anything more important than ever before.

Yes, indeed, we must have more science facilities for the teaching of rural young people. They must be given the same opportunities for the developing of engineering and technical and language skills that the very finest urban educational centers provide. We must make it possible for rural young people to overcome the handicap of low incomes and thereby to go on to higher education.

As many of you know, I introduced legislation at the beginning of the 85th Congress -- in January, 1957 -- to provide for national scholarships for the gifted students, and college loans for the worthy. I supported legislation in 1958 which would accelerate the development of adequate science teaching and language teaching facilities in rural areas, and to increase experimentation in audio-visual techniques.

All of these measures were incorporated in the National Defense Education bill which passed the Senate early in the morning of August 14. Regrettably, the House of Representatives knocked out the scholarship provision -- but I can assure you that I am going to do my level best to have a scholarship bill passed next session of Congress!

I am proud to have participated in this historic effort to meet a national problem with national action, maintaining the necessary provision of no Federal control of education.

But of all the many constructive provisions of the Act which finally became law, I am proudest of my 1957 proposal to encourage young people to enter the teaching profession by "writing off" part of their college loan obligation.

For it is the teacher who is the key to better education. The teacher -- not the physical facilities of a school -- must lead, must encourage, must inspire. Our society must do far more than it is now doing to encourage young people to enter the teaching profession. There is really nothing in the Constitution, you know, that requires us as a nation to award to a talented singer of popular songs, for instance, public recognition and financial rewards which dwarf that accorded to the most

gifted and talented in our teaching profession. There is nothing that requires us as a people to allocate more of the national dollar to tobacco and liquor than we set aside for education.

I happen to believe that teachers should be paid well -- not only because they would enjoy it, but because it is in the national interest to encourage people to enter the teaching profession. And I say that it will be one of the hallmarks of a new national maturity when the educator is awarded an income commensurate with his long and arduous training, his superior qualifications and his heavy responsibilities.

I am, by the way, pleased that in the National Defense Education Act provision was made for local control and initiative. And I am opposed to the reported opinion of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare that the county superintendents of schools cannot be utilized in the administration of the Act. They can, and should be utilized, and the legislative history of the Act makes no such exclusion necessary.

I want to add, too, that I will continue to oppose any effort to force individual states to come up with a reorganization plan for their school districts before they received Federal funds for school construction. Such a requirement would be in the nature of Federal control.

But to return to the National Defense Education Act, there is one important feature of the Act which is of direct relevance to our discussion of the goal of national maturity. And that is that in neither the original scholarship provision, nor in the finally-drafted student loan provisions of the bill is there any discrimination against the gifted student whose bent will not take him into the fields of engineering, technology or languages. While there is emphasis on the training of such specialists, there was also clear agreement among the sponsors of the bill that non-technical leadership must be encouraged, as well.

The development among students of a critical sense and the ability to synthesize -- this must be encouraged -- at least equally with the scientific and technical skills which underlie the military strength of the nation.

For the nation's strength and security rest upon the quality of its political and economic leadership, as well as from the capability of its scientists and engineers.

War is not something that we can leave to the generals, as it has been well said. Nor can we afford to leave foreign policy to the province of the professional diplomats. A new understanding of foreign policy as the product of the whole intellectual life of a nation is needed.

Intellectuals -- the thinking men and women of America -- must play a far more significant role in the life of our nation.

Those who are naturally endowed with more brain-power than some of their fellow-countrymen have an obligation and a duty to use at least part of it in the national interest, to participate not only in professional discussion, but (in the broad sense) also in political discussion and decision.

I have said before that we need more eggheads in positions of leadership -- and fewer fatheads!

But few are going to actually invite the eggheads to play a greater decision-making role in our national life. They are going to have to take the bull by the horns themselves. They must on their own initiative give up more time and energy to the public business, take a far greater interest in politics and policy. That is the clear and immediate duty of the present generation of intellectual leaders.

As for the coming generation -- whose leaders are even now in the classrooms of your schools throughout America -- no greater service can be given them than to transmit a spirit of purpose and dedication, to inspire them to face courageously a world of great complexity and difficulty. If the educator today can encourage these potential young leaders to say "yes" to life, to press forward into the thick of difficulties, to assume the burdens of leadership gladly, we need have no fear that our nation will not achieve maturity in time.

I believe that this great task is being performed superlatively well by American educators. I applaud and admire what is already being done. I only ask that the effort be intensified, and that other professional groups join with you in this great task. This is the way to national growth, development, and maturity. This is ultimately, the only way to an orderly and a peaceful world.

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