



Department of Justice

ADDRESS

OF

THE HONORABLE EDWIN MEESE III
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

THE GREATER SAN DIEGO INDUSTRY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

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Thank you very much Pete Reas, president of GSDIEC, Dennis Conelli, and members of this organization for that fine award.

I am extremely honored to have been chosen to receive this first Patron Award. And as a great fan of the Eagles, I am especially pleased that you have selected this particular emblem. As you all know, I am very interested in the activities of Greater San Diego Industry Education Association. I think that the work being done here is an outstanding example for the entire nation, and I am very proud to be a part of this evening. Nothing is more important to this country than education. And nothing is more important to education than the tireless efforts of workers such as are represented here in this association-- private citizens who are dedicating their time and energy to enhancing public education.

I am particularly impressed with how much this association is doing to carry out what President Reagan calls private sector initiatives. Since he became President in 1981, he has urged people to act to improve their communities, and through that action to improve the nation. Certainly this organization, by bringing together business and labor and the education community, is carrying out that initiative in a very important facet of our society--education.

I was tremendously impressed when I learned from Pete and others about the work this organization does. Your activities virtually catalogue how private sector citizens can contribute to educational excellence. The adopted school program, the awards

programs in which you recognize student achievement as well as good teaching, your efforts to mobilize private industry behind sound educational programs, your efforts to put students and teachers in touch with scientists, computer experts, engineers and other representatives of the work force and the labor community--all of these are very important contributions to steadying the sights of the young people in our schools today. The work that you do in informing students of vocational opportunities and vocational requirements is a great contribution to their lives. And the list goes on.

One thing that I would like to mention in particular is this association's role in keeping young people in high school, of motivating them to stay and complete their high school requirements and ultimately to graduate.

Yesterday Ursula and I had a great opportunity. We went up to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot and witnessed the graduation parade of one of the platoons--two platoons actually--of Marine Corps recruits who were completing boot camp. I had a chance to talk with General Lukeman about what it takes to make a good Marine. I have had similar conversations with the Commanding General at Fort Sill about what makes for success in the Army recruit program; I have been at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center to see what they felt about the Navy recruits. And every one of them said the same thing. The best indication of future success is high school graduation among the young people coming into the armed forces. So what you are doing in terms of keeping

people in high school and giving them that motivation to graduate is tremendously important.

For 27 years you have shown teachers and students that the San Diego community cares about good education. Well tonight I would like to take just a few minutes to talk a little bit about education in America and particularly the views and activities of this administration.

I can't overlook this opportunity to talk directly to you; sometimes in Washington we get the impression that what we are trying to do back there doesn't always get across in the same way we mean it. I think Bill Lawry would agree with me--it often loses something in the translation through the news media. As a matter of fact there's a story going around in Washington right now about two scientists from the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration--NOAA--that is what we used to call the Weather Bureau. In any event they were looking through their telescopes and they noticed this meteor hurling towards earth. They did some calculations and figured out that the meteor would hit earth within 24 hours, and it would be such a cataclysmic collision that all life on this planet would be extinguished. The story goes on to speculate how this might be handled by the various newspapers in the country.

For example, the New York Times would have a box on page one which would say, "World to end tomorrow -- see page 14." And the Wall Street Journal would have a notice up in the left hand column that says, "World to end tomorrow, markets to close early." USA Today would have a full color series of graphs on

the front page that would say, "World to end, how we really feel about it." And then of course our good old Washington Post would have banner headlines that would say, "World to end tomorrow, Reagan tax cuts blamed."

Well, on a more serious note, I am glad to have this opportunity to talk directly with you and to share just a few thoughts about the subject of education.

You know its an interesting thing that in recent years-- Louise Dwyer mentioned tonight--several studies have emerged that have indicated the need for a major overhaul of teaching and learning in the United States. Careful examination of our school systems and our educational process reveals that at nearly every level there is a need to enrich our educational program. The confusion of the 1960s and some of the problems that we endured during that period impacted especially on higher education; it then spread into the high school and elementary school years, and led to a general deterioration of American educational standards. It was for this reason that President Reagan launched the commission that Louise talked about--the Commission on Excellence in Education. They came back with a series of steps that local communities and state departments of education could take to improve the quality of education throughout the country.

The Commission's report is an excellent example of what the President means when he says that the federal government can provide leadership, can show the way, but the only way that education is going to be improved is at the state and particularly the local level. There is very little that a

Washington bureaucrat can contribute to improving education. It has to be done by local school districts, by dedicated school administrators and particularly by devoted teachers. And that, in fact, is what is happening now.

I was privileged to be here several months ago when Ron Packard sponsored, in his district, a program on a Saturday to review the recommendations of that Commission on Excellence in Education. I was very impressed to see the literally dozens of school teachers, school counselors and administrators who turned out to learn how they could do a better job. They spent the whole day reviewing the report. Bill Lawry has done the same thing in promoting that program within his district. And throughout the country we have had this example of dedicated teachers who, wanting to do a better job, review these recommendations and then put them into practice. As a result, I think that throughout this land we have a renewed interest on the part of citizens in education, and a renewed concern and search for responses by officials at all levels. Governors, legislators, school administrators and teachers are banding together to improve our educational system.

Already, we have seen some results in terms of improved test scores. But more importantly, there is a renewed interest on the part of communities to improve education, and that of course is where this association has been leading the way. What you have been doing for 27 years is now being done by organizations and communities all over the land.

One of the Commission's major findings was that traditional values have been supplanted by secular values or no values at all. The result has been a pervasive public confusion about what education in a free society can and should do. But now we have a Secretary of Education--William Bennett--who is willing to try and clear up the confusion and to provide at the national level an example an example of leadership which can then be carried out at the state and local level. Bill Bennett's personal contributions to the field of education go back a long way.

While still head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, he issued a report that has yet to be refuted by the critics. In this report, entitled "To Reclaim a Legacy," he said that based upon his findings and the findings of an all-star academic panel, the primary goal of education is to provide students with knowledge of a common culture rooted in a civilization's lasting vision, its highest shared ideals and aspirations, and its heritage. In short, their conclusion was that education can no longer risk being so-called value-free. Education is by definition, and must be in practice, the transmission of our most fundamental values.

Thus, education in America must be understood to be more than mere training for employment, although that surely is very important. It must be understood to be more than the rote memorization of fundamental skills in reading and writing, although that too is very important. Education in America must be understood to constitute the very foundation of the American way of life, and to transmit not only information, not only

values, but motivation for the young people of our land. And motivation is really what you are in the business of promoting. You are making sure that young people have that vision of their own lives, but also the vision of what this community and this nation are all about.

When I speak of motivation and the foundation of American life, I mean that the primary purpose of education in America, public and private, elementary and secondary, collegiate and professional, is nothing less than preparation for good citizenship.

To do so, however, is not to advocate political or ideological indoctrination. It is to argue for a citizenry capable of thinking for itself; for individuals who are willing and able to pursue their happiness as they define it and to understand the line that distinguishes liberty from license.

Only an educated people can make the sorts of judgments necessary to the cultivation of the arts and the sciences and the humanities; to the development of law and legal institutions; and to the encouragement of public morality and a sense of civic decency. In other words, democracy depends upon education.

Education alone is what prepares a people for civilization and freedom. For in the midst of an enlightened people, the dark shadows of hate and oppression have no place.

Thus, in addition to the legendary "3Rs" as Bill Lawry said before, Bill Bennett has suggested that we need to cultivate the "3Cs"--content, character and choice. And Bill gave a very good explanation of what those terms mean. Together, these twin

concerns--to develop the heart and to develop the mind--will continue to make America the vital commercial and successful civic republic she has always been.

Alexis de Tocqueville, though a Frenchman, was probably the most observant commentator on the American scene in the 1800s.

He wrote:

"If you give a democratic people education and freedom and leave them alone, they will easily extract from this world all the good things it has to offer."

Well who could ask for more?

By pursuing excellence in education, by pushing both the "3Rs" and the "3Cs," we can ensure America's place as the leader of the world for centuries to come. For it is only through education that America can remain strong and free; it is only through education that America can continue to serve as the moral beacon that still illuminates the often dimly lit corners of the world.

You, the members of this organization, are helping to make this happen.

I thank you for the honor you have bestowed upon me. But more important I thank you for your energetic efforts on behalf of education and thus on behalf of this country we all love. I commend your past efforts, congratulate you on your successes and extend my best wishes for continued success in the future.

Thank you.