

Speech by

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I want to thank you for allowing me to have a small part in your program here tonight. This meeting and the activities of the Capital Area Development Association are evidence of the wonderful spirit of community service that prevails throughout North Carolina, and especially in this region. The people of North Carolina and the counties which comprise the Capital Area Development Association are indebted to you for the services you have rendered and the example you have set.

This event tonight - your Fifteenth Annual Awards Banquet - is for all of us a very happy occasion. It is for me because it reminds me of the progress and achievements we can make when citizens work together in the best interests of their community. It reminds me of what we North Carolinians are capable to doing for ourselves.

And I know it is an exciting event for you because tonight you come here to look back at your record of progress and give much-deserved recognition. Tonight you meet to honor your neighbors for serving their communities well and to remind each other of the responsibility every citizen has to give of his time and talents to the service of his friends and his community.

You know, in every community there are persons who shun civic endeavors, such as those we meet to recognize tonight, on the pretext that they haven't the time or that they just aren't "joiners". In some few instances their reluctance may be justified and understandable. But in most cases it is not. In most cases these persons simply haven't taken the time to consider their responsibility to their communities, to their fellow citizens, and to themselves. It just hasn't occurred to them that there is more - much more - to being a good citizen than obeying laws, voting, and paying taxes. And the sad part is that they haven't discovered what you have discovered - what they are missing in the way of personal satisfaction that can only be derived from making a real and lasting contribution to their own communities.

I know that you as individuals have your own special hopes and aspirations, your own special interests, and of course, your own special problems. Yet each of you has taken time away from his private activities to participate in the activities of this civic organization - The Capital Area Development

Association. This is very significant to me for it means that you good friends do, in fact, recognize the importance of community responsibility. It means to me that you acknowledge the fact that you, individually, will gain from your community's progress ... that you as a member of this community, this county and this State, will benefit, even if indirectly, from anything that also benefits your neighbors.

I think that it has been this recognition on the part of millions of North Carolinians across the centuries that has gained for our State a reputation for being forward-looking and progress-conscious. I think it is this fact which has caused North Carolina to move forward while many states under similar circumstances have stood still or even lagged behind.

We are a progressive State and it is an honor for me to be here tonight among people like you who are so directly responsible for that progress. It is exciting for me to think about the things you have done through your community organizations and to think about the talent and resources you have to achieve almost anything within the realm of your imagination. You already have demonstrated the power for community and area development that can be wielded by the people here tonight and the members of the organizations you represent.

We meet here tonight to honor some of our people for outstanding work already done. But we also meet to examine the challenge which is before us all. That challenge is to determine the means by which we can best and most effectively take full advantage of the reservoir of energy and talent already dedicated to the improvement of communities and the lives of ourselves and our neighbors.

In the almost four years that I have had the privilege of serving as your Attorney General, I have become even more aware than ever before of the tremendous potential we have in North Carolina. I have tried to keep in mind what we as North Carolinians working together with progressive leadership could do to make North Carolina a better place for all of our people to live. I have tried to see where we have excelled in our State and also to see where we could have done more.

I decided immediately after taking office that one place we could have done better was with our young people. It has been said so many times it has become trite, that our people, and especially our young people, are our most valuable resources. Yet, as we looked around we saw that we were in the middle of a crime crisis and that our young people were more directly involved than anyone else.

For as long as national crime statistics have been compiled, they have shown that boys between the ages of 15 and 24 are the most crime-prone group in our population. Consistently, almost half of the property crimes committed in our State are committed by young people under the age of 18.

The reports, year after year, continue to point to the fact that our young people are the key to solving the crime problem. But we saw very little that anyone had done to try to attack this problem. Very little had been done to get directly to our teenagers, to teach them about the law and help them realize the consequences of violations of the criminal laws.

[Explain the history of Youth and the Law Project]