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I think it is good we are taking this time to express our appreciation for a private school. For too long, private schools have been seen as the sanctuary of the rich, as the fortress of the segregationist, and the drilling-ground for the religious fanatic. This is a warped view, and I think we ought to put it to rest.

The fact of the matter is, private schools play an important and altogether worthwhile role in our educational system. I would like to outline some of the reasons I think this is so, as one who is not an educator, but as one who loves education and tries to understand the ways of the public.

The function private schools serve in our society is double. On the one hand, they serve as alternatives to the kind of education available in the public schools. Besides this, because they play such a role, private schools are from time to time competitive challengers of the public system itself. In other words, when people begin to become dissatisfied with what the public schools are doing, there is a sudden and obvious increase in the popularity of private schools. This serves as a healthy warning to the public schools themselves.

I think we are coming to a much better attitude toward the role of the private school as an alternative. Take, for example, the parochial school. There is definitely a place for religious education as part of the child's total educational experience. Obviously, the schools of the state cannot and

should not ever try to impose any particular religion upon students. This would violate our fundamental separation of church and state.

But there are people in our society who believe that education and religious training cannot and should not be separated. At one point not too recently, it seemed that parochial schools were on the way to oblivion. That fear appears now to have been groundless.

When interest in religion wanes, these schools will wane, and now that religion is beginning to be taken up again by more and more people, the religious schools will also thrive. In any case, I think there is far more understanding and acceptance of the role of the religious school.

But tonight I want to concentrate a little more deeply on this question of the private school as an educational alternative. What we have been witnessing in the last few years is the so-called "back to basics" movement, which has been part and parcel of the growth of private schools in this country.

Schools have been started and have grown, not because of their religious appeal, not because of their snob appeal, and not because of their segregationist appeal, but because of their educational appeal.

I don't intend to rehearse the litany about the failure of the mainstream of education to provide adequate training in the three R's. Everyone has heard about "grade inflation." It now appears we are reversing this upward movement of grades, which finally resulted in a ridiculous number of students getting solid A's and B's, and the virtual extinction of bad marks.

Recently, the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that most 17-year-olds were lacking basic math skills.

Fewer than one in a hundred could balance a checkbook. More than half of them could not determine what was the better buy in the supermarket, and could not calculate property taxes.

In this area, too, there appears to be a turn-around. State systems all across the United States are beginning to go to the idea of a proficiency test -- a functional reading test or math test -- designed to see whether students are able to carry on these elementary activities.

In short, it has been realized that we have gotten too far away from fundamental education. The need to return to solid education is being met. We are a practical and effective people at governing ourselves, and I have no doubt that we will turn this situation around.

But the point is that these realizations on the part of parents created a boom in private school enrollment. People who send their kids to private schools, are doing so because they find themselves in a position expressed by a member of my staff, when he was talking about educating his children in the Washington area. "If I send my kids to the city schools," he said, "they won't know how to spell cat. If I send them to the so-called 'progressive' schools in the suburbs, they will not only be unable to spell cat, they will come home and argue with me that spelling is a matter of opinion, and that they have a right to do it however they want."

This is the feeling of frustration that causes parents to send their kids to private schools.

Now, there is nothing healthier than a little competition.

Competition exists in the education business, too. And there is no doubt in my mind that the growth of private schools offering the three R's had a great deal to do with the realization on the part of school administrators that all was not well.

Another issue which has been involved in the growth of private schools has been that of discipline and order. It is a truism that the nation's schools reflect the state of the nation. Children going into the schools more and more often come from families which are feeling the stress of social change. There are more families in which both parents are working, there are more single-parent families, there are

more divorced families, and the families of minorities now have their children in the mainstream of education.

We have been, for almost 20 years, a disordered and troubled society, and the schools have had to deal with that trouble and disorder. There are those who have said -- and they are the clientele of the private schools -- that the response of the school systems to these problems was incorrect. They said it was wrong to try to help a troubled and aimless child by giving him freedom and expecting him to "find himself" in a vacuum. They said the truth of the matter was that children need a sure knowledge of the limits of acceptable behavior, and worthwhile models to emulate, and need these even more when they are troubled. Children need structure as much as they need love.

Of course there are those within the "back-to-basics" movement who claim they are getting away from the imposition of values on their children, and are simply educating them in the truth. I cannot agree with this entirely. A scholar of education has pointed out that "all education implies the transmission of values."

Unless I miss my guess, the conservative and the liberal would find, if they sat down and talked to each other long enough, that the values they want their kids to learn are things like respect and self-respect, concern, trust, friendliness, and honesty.

The difference is where the emphasis is going to be placed. Is it going to be put on self-realization, self-

expression, and the rights of an individual seen -- negatively -- as the victim of society?

Or is it going to be put on the idea of the individual as a competent member of society, who is responsible to others, and expresses that in good citizenship, courtesy, and good manners?

The parent who sends his child to a private school is likely to answer that the latter is more important, and is in fact the key to self-respect. And the parent might also argue that self-respect will never be gained if the young adult produced by the school cannot read, write, and do simple math.

In both these areas, conduct and basic education the

private schools have played the role to the brake which slows the pendulum swinging too far in one direction.

The public schools have gotten the message. The change appears to be inevitable. We will not go back to the kind of education you and I grew up with, because the world is a different place, but it will resemble that kind of education far more nearly than has been the case lately.

But there is a third area in which I hope the private schools can send a message. That message must be sent, not to local administrators, but to elected officials like myself, in the Congress of the United States.

It is certainly the case that private schools are not only attempts to avoid the problems of behavior and educational

emphasis, but also are attempts to avoid increasing federal regulation of the educational process.

The Federal government now controls the purse strings of the local school systems to an alarming degree. As John A. Howard, President of Rockford College, put it, "If academic freedom once existed in this country, it is now a thing of the past, and federal subsidy has been the bludgeon employed to demolish it."

Educational priorities are set when the budget is set, and the farther away from the scene of the action these financial decisions are made, the less likely it is that those decisions will meet local needs, and will be competent.

The superintendent of a North Carolina school system

pointed out the trouble with policy set at a distance from the school system itself. Federal policy has been to allocate funds to try to improve the reading skills of minority groups.

But the fact of the matter is, the superintendent pointed out, that none of the kids can read well enough, and money needs to be allocated for reading programs in every school in the city. The problem is not race, but reading. He knows that because he is on the scene. Washington doesn't know it because it is looking at social problems, not educational problems, and doing it from a distance.

I can see that this is one of the reasons for private schools. It is my hope that my colleagues in the Congress will come to realize this, as well.

I want to close by making sure I do not leave you with the wrong impression. I may have given the impression that I regard private schools solely as the symptom of an illness.

I do not, private schools are viable institutions in their own right. They happen to perform a service to the country by providing a healthy comparison with the main direction of public education, but their real mission is educational.

I do not want, either, to give the impression that I see only doom and gloom as far as education is concerned. The fact is I am fed up with negativism.

We as a people have displayed such a genius for self-

government, for solving great problems, that we are the wonder of the earth. Again and again, we have met and prevailed over the problems of mistaken direction and mistaken judgement, and we shall prevail again.

If there is anything which should be called American know-how, it is not the knowledge of how to build machines, but how to confront and lick the problems which have ruined government after government, and defeated nation after nation. They shall not ruin us, or our government.

America is the nation which can crack a problem without cracking up.

Americans will regain confidence in their institutions, including the Federal government, including the state government,

including the educational system itself. We can see the problems being solved before our eyes. Private schools are part of that problem-solving process, and we as a people should be grateful to them for it.