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#### THE ROLE OF PRIVATE COLLEGES IN AMERICA

I appreciate having the opportunity to speak to you today. It is always a pleasure speaking at an institution like Pfeiffer College which, as a private college, represents one of the best traditions in American education.

Although we have an extensive system of public higher education in this country today--and among the various states, North Carolina's is definitely in the top five--it is worth remembering that it was private colleges and universities that provided this nation with the higher education skills it needed. From the time that Harvard College was founded in the 1630s through most of the nineteenth century, there were mostly private colleges. And, in fact, most of these colleges were founded by religious organizations.

Today, private colleges and universities have reached a crossroads. Beset with declining enrollments, ever increasing competition from state-supported institutions, a maze of expensive federal rules and regulations, and financial difficulties, some people are beginning to question whether private colleges have a future.

As far as I am concerned, those who ask that question are failing to remember what private colleges have given this country and what they, and only they, can continue to provide us. I believe it is incumbent on all of us, public officials, businesses, churches, and each and every American, to act to insure that we always have a healthy, strong, and independent private sector in higher education.

This becomes much more clear when one looks at the kinds of benefits that private colleges and universities can bring us, things that we cannot expect from the public sector.

One of the keys to the success of the American system of education has been its diversity--the large number of independent schools and the diversity of viewpoints they represent, their differing educational philosophies, and their ability to experiment.

We have universities that follow the most rigorous methods of instruction. And, there are those that have more open methods, that give students a considerable voice in the design of courses, allow them to pace themselves, and so forth. We have colleges that prescribe most of the degree requirements, and those where the specified courses are few. Maybe most

important, private institutions can experiment freely. A promising new idea comes along, and they can try it out. If it does not work, it can be discarded.

By contrast, public institutions have to stay reasonably close to whatever the mainstream viewpoint is at any given time. While this requirement (one of practice and custom--not law) is understandable, it certainly does not allow for a great deal of variety.

This diversity reflects itself not only in educational philosophy, but also in the types of services that colleges can provide. Public institutions, by definition, have to serve the general public. Private institutions can exist to promote specific goals or to serve specific segments of the population.

Only a private college can exist to teach fundamentalist views of the Bible, such as Bob Jones University next door in South Carolina. Only a private college can admit only women, like Salem College, or focus on the needs of blacks, like Shaw University in Raleigh. While there are differences in public colleges--Chapel Hill certainly is not the same as North Carolina State thirty miles away--these are differences in degree. The absolute differences one finds between institutions can only be found in the private sector, and it is important that they be maintained.

A third important service that, by and large, is only found in the private sector is the degree of individual attention that can be provided to each student. Private colleges tend to be smaller and tend to have better student-teacher ratios. The University of Maryland, for example, is charged under Maryland law with the obligation of taking virtually any student who graduated from high school in that State with over a C average. Their response to this problem has been to put all of their freshmen and sophomores in huge courses, several hundred students each, and then they flunk half those students out of school to bring the student population down to a manageable size. It is impossible to conceive of a private school following the same practice, but I can also see why Maryland university officials feel obliged to do this.

The actual size of an institution is also important. Many young people feel uncomfortable when placed in a school serving 21,000, like North Carolina State, or 20,000 at Chapel Hill. But, for reasons of economy, public schools are forced to be larger. And, this situation in this state is far better than in other states, for in many states the public schools are even larger and the individual attention given to students, especially freshmen (who need it the most) is less.

A fourth reason that private schools are important is that they provide competition for public institutions and a standard for which the public colleges can aim. Related to this, they are an expression of our free society, as important to maintain the freedom of individual Americans as having an independent and uncensored press.

Colleges and universities are the crucible of the free flow of ideas in this country. Private colleges deserve tremendous credit for insuring that a variety of ideas, often highly controversial, get a forum for discussion and also for protecting this cherished right. This is certainly a right that has been protected within the private sector. Periodically, one reads of a public university refusing to hire or agreeing to fire a professor because of political pressure arising from that instructor's views. That is inconceivable in schools like Pfeiffer.

The final reason that private colleges are important is one that is difficult to quantify or explain, and that relates to the historical continuity that they provide. Many private colleges have been in existence for well over a century. Their roots go back to our own roots. They provide an important link to the past, to our traditions, to our heritage.

We compare well with other states in our interest in education. I know of only two schools founded in our state in the 18th century--Salem College in 1772, and the University of North Carolina in 1789.

As churches became more interested in an educated clergy, other schools sprang up--Wake Forest in 1834 and Duke (Trinity) in 1838. Davidson College was founded in 1836.

After the Civil War, when the slaves had been freed, North Carolinians through private interests again responded to an educational need. Shaw University was founded in 1865 and Livingston College in 1879.

In short, our state has always responded to education in a positive way. From every colleague that I have in the United States Senate, I hear words of praise for our educational system. We are on the map in bold letters. And our private schools share with our public schools the great tradition of education in North Carolina.

Let me reiterate that there is a need for public higher education in this country, as the public schools play certain roles that the private schools cannot.

But the existence of a public system in no way diminishes the need for and importance of having a strong and prosperous network of private colleges and universities. They have played a crucial role in the development of this country, and this role has not been lessened by time.

Keeping our private colleges strong will require dedication from all of us. Given our heritage of higher education, our pride in our schools, and the knowledge that private schools have a unique role in our state, I believe that we will be able to endure and to prosper.