

Chapel, February 22, 1927
President Wright

This morning I want to finish the series of talks I have been giving you about our responsibility in the government. In the light of what I have said to you, it seems to me that it ought to be perfectly manifest to every one that an eight months school term is almost an absolute essential in a democracy. If the voting citizenship is to elect the people who are to make the laws, judge the laws and execute the laws, then it is perfectly clear that a democracy is dependent upon the citizenship in the democracy, and if we are to have the best type of government, it is necessary that we have an intelligent citizenship. I would like to get that thought written deep into the heart of every teacher and every citizen in this country. The very foundation stone of a government like ours is intelligence. We cannot hope to continue as a republic or a democracy unless we educate each generation of boys and girls. In fact, it is there that we get the justification for the expenditure of public funds for what we call public education. Looking at it purely from the standpoint of the government, there is no other justification for the spending of what we call tax money on education except in that it makes an intelligent citizenship so that those boys and girls when they become men and women can vote with intelligence in the selection of law makers, judges and executives. That state in this Union that is the most prosperous and has the best government is, a rule, where the people spend the most for the education of their boys and girls. There are byproducts that go with it to be sure and one of the by-products is that it makes the most productive citizen and an intelligent citizenship can do more things that are worthwhile and add more to the wealth than one who is not intelligent.

Now, bring it right down to our problem, can we hope to educate the boys and girls of North Carolina when they go to school twenty-four weeks out of fifty-two? That is what a six months school term means, go to school twenty-four weeks out of fifty-two. The General Assembly two years ago authorized the Governor of the state to appoint an education commission to make a thorough study of the whole situation

in this state. That education commission couldn't do all they were supposed to do in the length of time that was at their disposal, but they did make a pretty thorough study of some of the phases of education and teacher training in North Carolina. You will find their report in our library as soon as Miss Gray can catalogue it and get it where you can get hold of it. I have asked that ten copies be put in our library. Dr. Morrison and Dr. Nobles were employed by the education commission to do the most of this work, and those two young North Carolinians have given to us a real masterpiece of work. It is the kind of report that will take some study to find out its full significance, but the point that I want to get before you this morning is that after the commission had made this study they unanimously agreed that the state of North Carolina ought to have an eight months school term. They did split on the question of how to do it and when to start it, but with the facts that were gathered, and they are now public facts, no intelligent citizen can read them and reach any other conclusion than the conclusion reached by that commission; namely, that eight months should be the minimum term for the public schools of the state. Now as to how to finance it, that is an entirely different matter from whether we ought to have it. Not long ago I was talking to a citizen who is not in the public eye, but who evidently is thinking, it was just a casual conversation. He said to me, "Do you think we will get the eight months school term?" I said, "Yes, sooner or later. If we can afford thirty million dollars for roads and smile when we pay the tax we can afford this." He smiled and said, "Yes, the people of North Carolina can do whatever they want to do." I said, "Do you mean that when they want an eight months school term, they will find a way to finance it?" He said, "Yes, that is exactly what I mean." I said, "Then you mean that when they say they don't know how to finance it, they really mean that they do not want it." He turned his head and smiled, and said, "Yes, I think that is the truth."

Now, I want to say to you that there are people in our state who are just as anxious for an eight months school term as I am, who do not agree with this young citizen who was talking with me. They really think, and they are honest in it, that

we must get a system of financing before we even-undertake an eight months school term. Let's grant that they are honest in it, I really think they are, but they are mistaken. I mean, I think they are mistaken. When we want to do something, really and truly want to do it, we will find a way. I have heard a man say that he didn't want certain types of citizens educated, that the ignorant one was the best kind to have on the farm. There are a lot of people in North Carolina who think that if you educate a person, you at once take him away from doing the daily routine, you take him away from being a good worker. If that is true, then there is something wrong with our education. I heard an intelligent citizen and a wealthy citizen of North Carolina use this illustration, and it exactly fits my concept. He said, "Education ought not to change an axe from an axe into something else, but ought to sharpen the axe so it will cut more." Now, do you catch the significance of what that man had in mind. The right kind of education ought not to take a man off of the farm and bring him into the city if he ought to be on the farm, but it will give him the kind of intelligence that will make him a better farmer. It will enable him to find the thing for which he is best fitted and will prepare him to do that task better, will prepare him to be more efficient. We are not going to get an eight months school term in North Carolina until you and I and all those people all over the state who are interested in the education of the children of North Carolina carry the message back home to the people of our state and cause them to realize the truth that an educated citizen is a better citizen and a more efficient worker.

I want to say something that I have said time and time again -- The hope of a democracy, the stability of our government, the safety of our homes and institutions, such as the church, yes, the civilization in which we live is dependent upon universal education, is dependent upon an intelligent citizenship.