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NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY INDUCTION
SMITHFIELD-SELMA SR. HIGH SCHOOL
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ON BEING CONCERNED WITH GOVERNMENT
AND THE WORLD AROUND YOU

I am pleased to be here with you at this National Honor Society induction this morning.

This ceremony today is in honor of a few of you, those of you who have performed especially well in school and in your community. It is a great award, one to be proud of. But the remarks I am going to make are directed to all of you, for you are all important in my eyes, and in the eyes of the world around you.

As you are important to the society,

society and the world you live in must be important to you. For your own interests, as well as those of your loved ones and neighbors, you must learn and be informed about your community, our country, and events abroad, about how things are and why they are that way. In short, you must get a good education.

Americans have always understood how fundamentally important education is to us, and to our spirit as a nation. In 1835, when Alexis de Tocqueville (Toke-ville) published his famous book, Democracy in America, he wrote:

"They (the Americans) have all a lively faith in the perfectability of man, they judge that the diffusion of knowledge must necessarily be

advantageous, and the consequences of ignorance fatal..."

Certainly, that quote reflects my views. And, since it may encourage you to work a little harder, I want to point out that a good education has several, real, tangible benefits. Some of these may seem a little far off to you, but they really are not-- in a very few years, all of you will be independent, self-supporting adults.

One major benefit from education is that it provides economic security. One reads, from time to time, about how much a high school or college education is worth in dollars and cents. It is possible to put that kind of value on an education although that is only part of it. To become a doctor or a lawyer, or a plumber, or a

truck driver, one has to learn and develop some skills. Further, as you learn more and develop more skills, you will find that you get better jobs and higher pay. And there is no reason for me to explain how this helps you.

Education is also the key to the survival of our civilization, and therefore, to your ability to lead a decent, healthy life. Inside the teacher's piece of chalk, is the ability to build a home, or erect an office building. In it is the skill of the surgeon, and the wisdom of the counselor or minister who can help a troubled mind find peace. In it our values, our defense, technology, shelter, and laws have their beginning. Education means something as commonplace as leaving a car to be fixed by someone who can read a manufacturer's

information about the new models. In a thousand ways, your education benefits all of us.

That same education helps link you to your community. We are a people who have lived for 200 years by certain principles of self-government. We have lived, for much longer than that, by certain values and ideals, all of which bind us together. Recourse to common principles and tested values strengthen those bonds, which helps each of us to support ourselves as individuals. It is distinctly human to share in traditions which last longer than our own lifetimes, and to be sustained by them.

It is your generation which is going to lead us into the next century, now less

than twenty years away. To play any part in this at all, whether it is to be economically productive by holding a job, to be a community leader, to even talk to others, you have to be able to read and to write, to add and to subtract and to have some understanding about events.

If you are going to keep your own freedoms alive, you will have to have this education. That this is the most democratic and free country in the world is intimately related to the fact that it is the best educated.

The message of the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary War, and the Constitution is this: We, the people, take upon ourselves complete responsibility for our own government and our own well-being. Two hundred years ago, this truly

was revolutionary thought, and outside the United States few people thought it was possible. The doubters asked: Where will the people get the knowledge of events, the wisdom of state, even the mere information they will need to act in their own behalf?

The answer came from the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, one of the great figures in the world's first experiment with democracy, who wrote: "All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends upon the education of youth."

This was elaborated upon by one of our great Americans, Thomas Jefferson, who said that when the people are exercising power unwisely, the solution "is not to remove the power from the people, but rather to

educate the people so they might govern wisely."

And that is the foundation for the development of education in America. Do not take the public schools which educate every child for granted. Public schools did not exist when this country was founded; in fact, they only started to appear 40 years ago. Even your grandparents' generation could not take schooling for granted, and many had little chance to get an education. Yet today, even though education is not mentioned in our Constitution by our actions we have made the opportunity to get an education a right for all Americans.

That every child should receive a free education through at least high school has been a goal of Americans for many years,

but it is only in the last couple of generations, the last fifty years, that this has actually been realized. And it is a goal that the United States has actively pursued and realized. Even in most Western European countries, most children are only guaranteed an education through the eighth grade, and only about a quarter of them get to go to college.

In non-democratic countries, the majority of people are uneducated or ignorant, sometimes simply because of poverty and slower development or, as in the Communist countries, by design. In the Soviet Union, the young are only taught falsehoods and kept ignorant of many things so they cannot threaten the state. It is the favored and lucky ones who get the education you take for granted in this country.

Education needs our constant support. Unvalued, unsought, unappreciated, it vanishes. Knowledge has no life of its own. It does not wait, like a valuable mineral in the earth, simply to be discovered and mined. It does not lie still, like water, to quench the thirst of a casual wanderer.

If the knowledge that has been won with such great effort is neglected, it will be gone, and all of us suffer. Of all the things that my generation leaves to yours, the education we provide you with will be the most valuable. And it is something you must take advantage of, for yourself, and for your children in the future.