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Convocation of Teachers

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NOTES FOR SPEECH

CONVOCAION OF TEACHERS

September 2, 1959

Comments on some of points in Mr. Willett's address:

I. TEACHERS' SALARIES

1. Teachers' Salaries. The School Board generally subscribes to Mr. Willett's views. In our Budget Message to Council last spring we expressed the views that salary scales must be increased (i) to provide fair compensation for our faculties, (ii) to facilitate recruitment of properly qualified new teachers, and (iii) to retain competent personnel already within our system.

These are still the views of the Board -- and the need to meet them satisfactorily becomes more pressing as we enter a new year.

2. Salaries Only Part of Problem. But it must be remembered that salary scales are only a part of the Budgetary Problem -- which the Board and Administration must face realistically.

Each year the School Budget goes up -- almost automatically. This results primarily from the population increase which

injects each year some 1200/1500 additional pupils -- requiring new buildings, additional teachers and other personnel. Moreover, as Mr. Willett stated, salaries have gone up some almost every year -- although they have certainly not attained satisfactory levels.

Then, we have had our expanded programs in math, science and foreign languages -- which have required specially qualified personnel and additional facilities. And there are various other aspects of our educational program which we would very much like to improve.

The end result has been, as I indicated, a request to Council each year for a substantial budget increase.

3. Difficult Position of Council. This places Council in a difficult position -- as I am sure Mayor Anderson will agree. Budget increases are also usually sought by the various Departments of the City Government. All of these requests have considerable merit, and our friends on Council would probably like to grant the increases.

But there is one small problem -- money! Unless taxes are raised, there simply has not been enough money to meet the existing needs.

4. State Sales Tax is Necessary. Real estate taxes have been the principal source of revenue for the localities. Those of you who are home owners will agree, I believe, that there is a limit beyond which real estate taxes simply cannot be increased. Many think we have already reached that limit.

It has been my view for some years that Virginia should revise its tax structure, and should adopt a just and reasonable Sales Tax. Most of the other more populous states have long realized that such a tax was necessary to provide adequate revenues for public education and other essential state and local services.

It is my hope that the General Assembly, at its 1960 session, will face up to this necessity, and enact appropriate legislation without further delay. This will not relieve the localities from being more realistic about meeting their own responsibilities to provide for better education, but it will broaden the entire base of tax revenues -- without in my opinion placing an oppressable burden upon our people.

5. Improved Education is the Best Investment a State and City Can Make. I know you were pleased -- as was I -- by the report in yesterday's paper on the study of education made by the Virginia State Chamber of Commerce.

This study concluded that we in Virginia must recognize that the educational level determines in due time the economic status and welfare of a community. Those of us in education are fully aware of the soundness of this conclusion. We have not always been successful in selling this to our governing bodies.

Rather than argue for increased salaries -- which is a familiar position for most all of us regardless of our employment -- we should sell improved education as the most urgent need of our time.

As Mr. Willett has said: "Increased salaries should be a means -- not an end in itself -- a means to quality education.

II. IMPROVED EDUCATION REQUIRES
A NEW LEVEL OF EXCELLENCE
THROUGHOUT OUR SYSTEM.

1. Not just at High School level.
2. Not just in Science and Math.
 - (a) Cite New York Times study.
 - (b) Dr. Edward Teller
3. Problem of Legal Profession -- an example.

III. THE CAPACITY TO COMMUNICATE MUST BE IMPROVED

Passing from generalities, there is one specific problem which has long had a high priority with me -- namely, the shockingly inadequate training which the average American receives in speaking and writing. I am not referring specifically to Richmond, but to American education virtually everywhere and at all levels.

Only a relatively limited number of college graduates -- and even fewer high school graduates -- have been trained to express themselves adequately, either orally or in writing. And yet "words", and the use of language, are the only means by which man may communicate ideas. It is no doubt true that one cannot write or speak with clarity and force unless he has a well trained and disciplined mind, but we all know many who possess such a mind who are still hopelessly inarticulate.

I therefore urge each of you -- as your special task for this year and every year -- to instruct carefully in the use of the English language, and to insist upon a much higher level of performance in both oral and written work. This should be done in all classes, and not merely in the language courses.

IV CONCLUSION

Refer to new High School requirements.

Ushering in a "new era".

Richmond a leader -- an example others seek to follow.