

February 1, 1989
Acceptance by
Larry E. Temple

Except for my marriage and the birth of our two children; I confess to you that this is the most memorable event of my life.

I am mindful that the Santa Rita Award has gone to some brilliant and distinguished people in the past. You are honoring me by putting me in such company. I probably don't deserve it -- but I'm not going to give it back.

In accepting this prestigious Award, I would remind all of us of the reason and purpose of higher education -- and why it must have our constant commitment. Above virtually all other endeavors, higher education seems to draw the involvement of people of all kinds. As parents, as private citizens, as educators, as public officials -- we are called to the cause of education not just because it is such an exhilarating enterprise, but also because it offers us the best way to leave a meaningful and lasting legacy to future generations.

My involvement with The University of Texas began when I was a student on the Austin campus in the 1950's. At that time I had only a hazy view of the relationship between education and the values a person builds over a lifetime. I believe I see it more clearly now.

In the larger context, education is integral to the entire economy of a nation. It creates jobs. It is essential to commerce and industry. It generates the organizations and the tools and technology to support civilization. But all of these are the by-products that come out of that intangible product -- the expansion of human knowledge.

I suppose a university education would still be good for humankind if its only contribution was economic progress.

However, education is much more than the key to our economic future. Education does more than generate funds for the coffers of our state treasury and expand our economic activity. These are the benefits of education, but certainly not its primary purpose.

All else aside, the purpose of education is to educate.

If anyone questions that, let me ask this question: Is there any one here who would send your children to college to strengthen the economy of Texas?

Of course not. We send our children to college for their personal well-being. We send them to college for their spiritual and intellectual well-being, hoping that their horizons will be expanded and their lives enriched.

Why is it, then, that we say we educate other people's children for the sake of Texas or to benefit the Texas economy?

Surely their personal enrichment, their intellectual growth, their personal happiness is important, too.

I suggest that when we grapple with the public policy issues of education in Texas, we should never lose sight of the real reason we are doing it.

We are doing it not just for the economic benefit of Texas. That's an investment that all too easily could be postponed from one budget cycle to another. Rather, the purpose of our educational enterprise is for both the advancement and the transmission to the next generation of human knowledge. That human investment is postponed only at our peril.

So when we deal with these policy issues, we really ought to look upon the students of Texas -- and the ones to come as our own children. For in a true sense, they are. Their futures and their happiness and their personal enrichment are entrusted to us.

It is incumbent on us all -- legislators, regents, members of the Coordinating Board, alumni leaders, administrators, teachers and most of all the citizens -- to consider the education of our neighbors' children to be every bit as crucial and as precious as our own children's education.

If this is done, there will never be any question about the emphasis this state puts on its schools. And I will guarantee you one thing: the economic development of Texas will take care of itself.

In this year of 1989, higher education in Texas still has a long way to go up the ladder of national eminence. The state's needs exceed the state's income and the debate over priorities for spending rages in Austin.

The competition to attract the best and the brightest students to our classrooms continues unabated among the institutions of higher learning.

There lies just ahead of us an even greater challenge and more intense competition: the need to replenish our dwindling reservoir of the best and the brightest teachers of our students.

Only last week the President of Columbia University, Michael Sovern, warned us that universities all over the country are facing a massive wave of faculty retirements in the 1990's. Unfortunately, many of these teachers will not be readily replaced.

Dr. Sovern and other educators believe we are in part victims of our own affluence. Too many of our best and brightest graduates are much more attracted to high salaries in the private-sector than they are to faculty positions. So we cannot take it for granted that the great teachers of today will be succeeded by their equals when they depart.

The unique partnership of public and private involvement that has been education's mainstay will be called upon to prevent such a calamity. Leadership at the top, from the President and the Congress, will have to confront the threat. But governors and legislators and regents have the same responsibility.

During 1985 and 1986 it was my privilege to chair the Select Committee on Higher Education. In our report we declared that "faculties in Texas colleges and universities should be among the best in the United States." And we added, "Their compensation should be competitive with those of comparable institutions throughout the nation. Outstanding faculties should be developed and nurtured. Top scholars should be recruited and retained, rewarded for excellence, and provided sufficient resources for their work."

That principle must guide our public policy decisions for education, in good times and bad.

I worked in the mid-1960's for a governor, John Connally, whose abiding concern was to bring faculty salaries to the national average. He and the Legislature did it, but not without struggle.

I worked for a president, Lyndon Johnson, whose Higher Education Act of 1965 brought the federal government to the table in furthering the advance of higher education. For the first time, higher education was opened to students who could not afford it on their own.

President Johnson's dream has become a reality. I regret that Governor Connally's achievement was transitory, because the national average for faculty salaries is a moving target. Moreover, the national average no longer should be our goal. We must be competitive with the ten most populous states since they truly are our competition.

Texas cannot slip ten percent and more below the average faculty salaries in the ten largest states and expect to be recognized as a bastion of higher education. While the other ten largest states continue to increase faculty salaries, Texas cannot continue to send messages of 26 percent cuts and 34 percent cuts, and even 8 or 9 percent cuts, and expect to stay in the major leagues of higher education.

Those are my concerns, and I express them to an audience whose commitment to education is unchallenged.

So we must accept the responsibility to translate that commitment into action. If we are reluctant or are too busy to help, then who else will do it?

In receiving the Santa Rita Award, I commit to continue my efforts toward the goal of excellence in higher education. I don't want to see Texas relegated to the minor leagues. I don't want it said that we lack the staying power to compete effectively.

You and I love this state. We care about the commitment to excellence symbolized by the commitment of The University of Texas System. I never cease to be amazed how often

we find extremely busy men and women, epitomized by the gentleman who introduced me, who are willing to lay aside every other pressing matter in order to give their time and talents to the University. May it ever be so.

Thank you for the great honor you have bestowed on me. I will do my best to justify your confidence.