

**THE HONORABLE GERALD L. BALILES**  
**Former Governor of Virginia**  
**and**  
**Director of the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia**

**Outstanding Faculty Awards**  
**SCHEV**

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It is a great pleasure for me to be here this afternoon with Susan Magill, Andy Fogarty, and so many other good friends. It's an honor to be with so many leaders and loyal supporters of Virginia's colleges and universities.

Twenty-five years ago, some of us in this room, who were without gray hair then, convened at a black tie dinner. It was a large gathering of college and university presidents from both public and private institutions, legislators, faculty members and students, to inaugurate Virginia's Outstanding Faculty Awards in recognition of excellence in teaching. It was a glittering event...formal attire, glass sculpture award presented to each honoree by the Governor, and a \$5,000 check, or, in today's dollars, \$9771.45.

I am pleased that SCHEV's Outstanding Faculty Award continues 25 years later, and I am grateful to Dominion Resources for undertaking the financial support of this program, even after it was deleted from the state budget some years ago.

As a foundation for my remarks today, permit me to quote from a speech I gave at a higher educational institution in the western part of our state in 1987, the same year as these awards were established. The remarks may explain part of my motivation in seeing that these awards were established.

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"The pursuit of public education, at all levels, is a particularly American idea – especially the conviction that educational opportunity must be universally available, and that educational excellence must be consistently sought.

"There is a reason for this.

"We profoundly believe in a democratic ideal: the Jeffersonian notion that men and women, by the sheer force of education, can so enlighten themselves that representative government will transcend its limitations.

"In other words, we believe in the idea of progress.

"We believe that by the power of our own minds, we will make our society advance, indefinitely, into the future.

“For us, progress means an endless stream of human creativity and imagination, combined with a sustained desire for improvement.

“So, on the one hand, our hopes and aspirations are idealistic.

“Yet, on the other hand, we have found a pragmatic means for achieving our most noble collective and individual ambitions.

“It is higher education.

“We make a simple and direct assumption: education is good and necessary – it is a prerequisite, the preface to our finest achievements.

“It is upon that assumption that Virginia has invested heavily and sought to build a system of public education that aspires to more than mere adequacy.”

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“Our system seeks excellence...

“The value of education is my surest conviction.

“The improvement of education is my personal commitment.

“But it is not mine alone to accomplish.

“Understand this: our schools are ourselves.

“We are defined by what we teach; we are shaped by what we learn.”

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“Therefore, just as no individual is an island, so, too, no state educational institution exists in its own orbit, free and unattached from the Commonwealth and the citizens who support it...

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“Universities stand for many things.

“Universities exist to distinguish between what is important and what is not.

“Universities serve to open up worlds – to open up friendships that will last a lifetime – to impart the knowledge that preserves our traditions and prepares us for the future.

“A university is not ministerial to society; neither is it divorced from society’s aspirations.”

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That's what I said then, and I believe it more so now.

Here in Virginia, where change has become an enduring constant, we know that our Commonwealth's future --- just as the nation's --- is inevitably and inextricably tied to education.

Think for a moment, somewhat specifically, about the future: Students in grade school today will be society's leaders through much of the 21<sup>st</sup> century --- and we should pause when we recall the admonition that education is the debt due future generations.

We should ask ourselves, are we doing well enough?

Are we encouraging in students an understanding of our political and cultural history, and our intellectual heritage?

Likewise, are we giving them the skills that are necessary for survival in a highly competitive, technological world?

What will the future hold?

As today's grade school students come of age in the decades ahead, notably we will celebrate enduring national landmark dates. Of course, I could mention the year 2019, the bicentennial of Mr. Jefferson's University in Charlottesville, but there is also celebration of our independence in 2026 --- the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States --- and then, in 2037, the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S. Constitution --- a document that Virginians helped write --- a document which established our nation on the proposition that people, by their collective intellect and ability, could devise a better world and forge a happier future.

America was - and is - an experiment --- a test in government undertaken in the knowledge that our new democracy would flounder if it lacked a general commitment to a single imperative: education.

Only education, broadly available to the people, would enable our fledgling democracy to endure.

James Madison, architect of the Constitution, said: "A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance."

Over the history of this country, America has been at the forefront among nations in providing education for our citizens, and it can be said without exaggeration that education has safeguarded and propelled our democracy.

And, yet, we know that existing circumstances present substantial, even grave, challenges in education. And in Madisonian language, "popular government" itself is imperiled when the foundations of education are imperiled.

As at no time before, we face vast changes in the way we live and work.

As at no time before, our economy faces challenges from around the globe.

And other nations have discovered what we first taught the world: that education drives prosperity. It may surprise some, for instance, to know that today America is no longer one of the top ten countries with regards to the education attainment levels of our adult population. In recent memory, we were #1.

The stagnation and decline of public investment in higher education, in America and in the Commonwealth, is at the root of this loss of standing. And, bracingly, the future does not present easy options to increase funding. But having hard options is not the same thing as having no options.

The Miller Center, in fact, in recent months convened a major policy conference with the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities to consider the fiscal future of American higher education. Make no mistake. Education is the heart of American democracy, and today we are a nation at risk.

We must understand that we cannot secure the quality of education needed in this global era without substantial public investments. There are details of policy to be weighed and considered, as a task force from the recent Miller Center conference is doing, but in the final analysis public investment is a basic matter of political will and bipartisan leadership.

In that regard, a question that often comes to my mind is this: when we celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nation's independence in 2026, 15 years from now, will we look back wistfully at what was left undone?

But, it must be equally understood that money alone will not secure the educational excellence we seek. We must adopt a new attitude --- both towards learning and towards teaching. We must restore the joy of education in our students, so that they see education as a window to the world --- so that they want to learn.

Education must be viewed as more than the best route to employment . . . but also as the means by which we advance our society. In Emerson's words, "education is the drawing out of the soul."

And the key to that is commitment --- the sort of commitment to scholarship, teaching, and public service that we seek and recognize and honor this afternoon. We can have a new generation of excellence in Virginia and America, if we're willing to rise to the call.

The Virginia "Outstanding Faculty Awards," which we celebrate this afternoon, and which were initiated during my term as governor, honor recipients from both private and public colleges and universities across Virginia.

At their most basic, these awards tacitly acknowledge that Virginia's educational institutions offer a rich diversity of learning experiences. There are also certain elements that all Virginia educational institutions hold in common, contributions they make to the Commonwealth. It is these contributions --- examples of teaching excellence --- that the "Outstanding Faculty Awards" seek to recognize.

Virginia's faculties are encouraged to conduct research as part of their responsibilities. We take great pride in the Virginia scientists and scholars who have acquired national and international standing. With this pride in research, we also honor the most important dimension of our faculties' mission: teaching.

The great teacher promotes a joy in learning, an appetite for knowledge. Henry Adams observed in his writings --- and I believe it to be true --- that those who teach affect eternity, for no one can tell where their influence stops. Teaching is, indeed, the ballast of our free society.

This afternoon, we honor twelve outstanding faculty members --- gifted educators, great teachers --- from institutions both public and private across Virginia. But we are also honoring their thousands of colleagues. A day to note outstanding faculty is a day to also focus on the steadfast contributions of all faculty members in our public and private colleges and universities.

Without the efforts of those inspired to scholarship and teaching, without the faculty, we would have little to brag about in higher education. In fact, if in the spirit of the Miller Center you'll indulge a presidential vignette to close, a story is told about the election of General Dwight Eisenhower to the presidency of Columbia University, right after World War II, a position he held briefly before moving on to a different line of work.

The general attended his first faculty meeting, at which he was to make a few remarks. He concluded by expressing his pleasure at being asked to work with the fine employees of Columbia University. There was an embarrassing silence, then a senior member of the faculty arose.

The faculty member said to the General, "with all respect I should like to correct your understanding of what it means to be a faculty member. We are not employees of the university; we are the university."

It is apt and fitting that today we honor exemplars of those who, in sum and substance, are Virginia higher education.

If we have challenges --- and we do --- we also have so much cause for celebration, and it is my hope to see all of you back here for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Outstanding Faculty Awards.

Thank you very much.

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