



The following is the text of a speech given by the Honorable Marjorie O. Rendell, Judge, Third Circuit, U.S. Court of Appeals, First Lady of Pennsylvania, and Founding Partner of the Pennsylvania Coalition for Representative Democracy, during the American Civic Education Teacher Award Presentations on November 19, 2006, at the Fourth Annual Congressional Conference on Civic Education in Washington, D.C.

November 19, 1863, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania was a community in shambles with more than 51,000 killed, wounded and missing. Most of the dead still lay in makeshift graves, some not buried at all. Distressed by the situation, Pennsylvania's Governor Andrew Curtis commissioned for a 17-acre land parcel to be purchased as a fitting burial ground for those fallen soldiers.

One hundred and forty-three years ago today, Gettysburg National Cemetery was dedicated and the famous Gettysburg Address was delivered by President Abraham Lincoln. The brevity of his words transformed that community from a scene of carnage into a symbol of humanity. Delivered in just 2 minutes, 272 eloquent words gave meaning to the sacrifice of those dead and gave further inspiration to those living. President Lincoln breathed life into the depths of our Constitution and its promise of equality and the "proposition that all men are created equal". Many historians believe those words inspired and reshaped the nation by defining the word "ONE" people dedicated to equality.

It is important that we citizen-representatives of democracy rededicate ourselves to the American ideals consecrated that day – to create "voices of the people" – proficient in understanding, and willing to sacrifice for the rights and responsibilities embodied in our Constitution. It is important that we understand that there is a price for freedom – both in death and in life—and that it is our duty as "living" citizens to educate our youngest so that they not only know the words... "Four score and seven years ago"...but understand their relevance still today.

In recent years, such understanding and learning has been increasingly pushed aside. Until the 1960s, three courses in civics and government were common in American high schools, and two of them (Civics and Problems of Democracy) explored the role of citizens and encouraged students to discuss current issues. Today, those courses are very rare. What remains are courses on "American government" that normally spend little time on how people can – and why they should – participate as citizens.

But a national movement is currently underway to restore the civic mission of our nation's schools and each of us here today is an important part of that undertaking! Civic duty and learning has deep roots in America. In fact, preparing each new generation to be active participants in our democracy was a central reason for free public schools in the new Republic. And this grew from the social connectedness that "we the people" and our Constitution upheld – serving the common

good with a true sense of civic virtue, morality and standards of righteous behavior that forged strong relationships of one citizen to another within society.

Today is a new democratic era – an era where democracy is burgeoning and socialization at every level is imperative for the validation of who we are as a nation. And multiplicity of teaching is more important than ever before in our nation’s history. We no longer live the days of September 10th, as defense, electronics, food, clothing, medicine, goods and even knowledge flow from sources outside our arena. As global inhabitants, it is our responsibility to reflect upon the model of our country, our constitution and the level of our citizenry that makes it work. Through self-examination and reflection on OUR historical past, I believe we can learn much and draw on that past to better understand the importance of socialization as a community of one.

More than ever before, we are tasked with the responsibility to maintain OUR republic and to sustain it within a world that is structured differently. We should be proud of being Americans but it must be an informed pride born of an American soul and an active citizenry. Ringing true are Benjamin Franklin’s words to a curious woman upon leaving the Constitution Convention in September of 1787 when she asked, “*What kind of government have you given us, Dr. Franklin?*” to which he replied, “*A Republic, madam, if you can keep it.*” ...AND WE MUST!

But how do you sustain a republic in a world where ideals, culture and religious beliefs are not promulgated on the bases of freedom and liberty, rules and law, tolerance and charity, beliefs and mores or sexual equality? How do you safeguard these principles when others have a collective death-wish for the world? The vastness of the task at hand is daunting.

Today’s education must encompass more than the acquisition of content knowledge – it must focus on not only a measurement of the “who” and “what” of historical significance, but further question, through experiential learning, the “why” of historical significance. Today’s students can read BUT can they reflect? We need to develop leaders who can analyze and propose solutions that come not from rote learning but from the development of problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

As a federal judge and First Lady of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I am advocating for the education of our children as informed citizens. First, of this country – then of the world. This has resonated with me (as it should with all of us) – not because I am a federal judge or First Lady – but because I am a citizen first and foremost.

I am part one of the lead advocates in a shared venture known as PennCORD (the Pennsylvania Coalition for Representative Democracy) and it is our mission to work together as educators, students, parents and community organizations to renew the civic mission of our schools. It is no longer enough to teach the 3 R’s – reading, writing and arithmetic – today, we must teach the 5 R’s – reading, writing, arithmetic and civic rights and responsibilities in order to lay the strong foundation that enables our children to become true citizens of the world. Only then, can we truly share our democracy, when it is understood that it is a gift and one imbedded in our culture and our history.

As Chief Justice Sandra Day O’Connor said in 2003, “*Knowledge about the ideas embodied in the Constitution and the ways in which it shapes our lives is not passed down from generation to generation through the gene pool. It must be learned anew by each generation. It is NOT enough simply to read or memorize the Constitution. Rather, we should try to understand that which gave*

it life and that give it strength still today. Our understanding today must go beyond the recognition that liberty lies in our hearts to the further recognition that only citizens with knowledge about the content and meaning of our constitutional guarantees of liberty are likely to cherish those concepts.”

Have we lost sight of the founding principles of civic virtues, how to value them, how to properly teach them and practice them? We need to rediscover, as participants in a self-democracy, the civic learning tools necessary for personal freedom and reaffirm for all men – free and equal – those rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The concepts of civic responsibility are tools that young students require for active participation in an expanding, pluralistic society in which citizenship, social responsibility, human rights, community and mutual respect are inseparable, and one in which difference will normally co-exist and must be understood and valued. This awareness can only come from an education where civic learning is integrated with normal pedagogic tools, not as peripheral to curricula, but as a vital component in a comprehensive education. I think of education as that raw material needed to create a finished product that benefits all. As Jefferson said in 1822, *“I look to the diffusion of light and education as the resource to be relied on for ameliorating the condition, promoting the virtue and advancing the happiness of all mankind.”*

Civic learning cannot be calculated as a pass or fail method – but rather by a term know only as “progress”. And if our educational institutions are true to their intent, each individual will seek education for a purpose: to prepare them to be a better citizen, leader, family member, professional; but fundamentally, a better, more thoughtful, wiser, more humane, more flexible and more remarkable person. By providing students with the finest education we possibly can devise, we help ensure their personal future, the future of all people -- and indeed the future of the world they will shape and lead far into the next century.

Current students are very aware of the issues. If asked what concerns them about the world today, they identify with significant concerns. They are worried about terrorism, the ozone layer, global warming, AIDS, racism, saving the environment, oil and gas reserves, genocide and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. They have heard about these things – but in an abbreviated manner without much discourse or problem-solving methodologies.

They should have the right to study, investigate and explore all issues as a normal part of their learning experiences. Through curriculum that teaches civics -- topics and questions arise that foster critical thinking skills and inspire young people to reflect on, and become actively involved in, developing solutions that make for communities and a better world, not as incidental subject matter, but as the primary focus of a full and substantial educational learning experience.

We can make a tremendous difference to the entire world by preserving the earth for subsequent generations, only if we can reprioritize learning for citizenship. John Dewey, an early educational reformist, strongly believed that both educational knowledge and skills must be fully integrated into the person, the citizen and the human being. He believed that the nature of education must dramatically change if we are to make a difference as human beings living in a social world and that in doing so, we can generate a responsible citizenry – interdependently preserving the earth for future generations. In his words, *“As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as*

make for a better future society. The school is the chief agency for the accomplishment of this end."

So I leave you with this:

A zealous school reformer, wearied by jousting with the status quo, heard about a spiritualist who was able to make contact with the dearly departed. So one evening, he went to one of her séances. And, when his turn came, he asked her to make contact with John Dewey...

After struggling for a while, she reached Mr. Dewey. The reformer was thrilled. "Professor Dewey", he said, "We have labored for 15 years to improve America's schools without success. Please tell me how we can create the kinds of schools our children need and deserve?"

Dewey hesitated a moment and replied: "Well, there is the natural way and the miraculous way. Which do you want?" The reformer, his idealism faltering, asked for the natural way.

"The natural way," Dewey said, "Would be for God to send down bands of angels to visit every single school and transform them into places of true learning."

"Good heavens," gasped the reformer. "What then is the miraculous way?"

"Ahhhh," said Dewey, "The miraculous way would be for the people to do it themselves."

So, as we commemorate this day – just as we did 143 years ago, let us venerate the ideals, the passion, the love of country, the quest for freedom and the patriotic duty and single-minded determination of our brothers in the defense of humanity. Those citizen-soldiers blanketed this nation's soil and we owe them a debt of incalculable gratitude as we honor them by continuing to live as citizens giving a voice to the foundation of a more perfect union.

American character was personified in Abraham Lincoln's moral compass – one that was pointed firm and true. And, here today, his words might further inspire us to summon some measure of that American character, as we move to educate our youngest citizens.

Conceived in liberty – democracy is our legacy to uphold and together we can reclaim learning for a broader purpose. Our democracy – one of the people, by the people, and for the people -- will survive, one generation to another, only if we cherish our highest honor and greatest responsibility -- that of "citizen".

THANK YOU...