

Lyndon Baines Johnson (1908-1973)

Remarks in Johnson City, Tex., Upon Signing the Elementary and Secondary Education Bill

given on April 11, 1965

Ladies and gentlemen:

I want to welcome to this little school of my childhood many of my former school mates and many who went to school to me at Cotulla and Houston and San Marcos, as well as some of my dear friends from the educational institutions of this area.

- 5 My Attorney General tells me that it is legal and constitutional to sign this act on Sunday, even on Palm Sunday. My minister assured me that the Lord's day will not be violated by making into law a measure which will bring mental and moral benefits to millions of our young people.

So I have chosen this time and this place for two reasons.

- First, I do not wish to delay by a single day the program to strengthen this Nation's elementary and secondary schools.
10 I devoutly hope that my sense of urgency will be communicated to Secretary Celebrezze, Commissioner Keppel, and the other educational officers throughout the country who will be responsible for carrying out this program.

Second, I felt a very strong desire to go back to the beginnings of my own education-to be reminded and to remind others of that magic time when the world of learning began to open before our eyes.

- In this one-room schoolhouse Miss Katie Deadrich taught eight grades at one and the same time. Come over here,
15 Miss Katie, and sit by me, will you? Let them see you. I started school when I was 4 years old, and they tell me, Miss Kate, that I recited my first lessons while sitting on your lap.

From our very beginnings as a nation, we have felt a fierce commitment to the ideal of education for everyone. It fixed itself into our democratic creed.

- Over a century and a quarter ago, the President of the Republic of Texas, Mirabeau B. Lamar, proclaimed education as
20 "the guardian genius of democracy . . . the only dictator that free men acknowledge and the only security that free men desire."

- But President Lamar made the mistaken prophecy that education would be an issue "in which no jarring interests are involved and no acrimonious political feelings excited." For too long, political acrimony held up our progress. For too long, children suffered while jarring interests caused stalemate in the efforts to improve our schools. Since 1946
25 Congress tried repeatedly, and failed repeatedly, to enact measures for elementary and secondary education.

- Now, within the past 3 weeks, the House of Representatives, by a vote of 263 to 153, and the Senate, by a vote of 73 to 18, have passed the most sweeping educational bill ever to come before Congress. It represents a major new commitment of the Federal Government to quality and equality in the schooling that we offer our young 'people. I predict that all of those of both parties of Congress who supported the enactment of this legislation will be
30 remembered in history as men and women who began a new day of greatness in American society.

We are delighted that Senator McCarthy could be speaking at the University of Texas yesterday, and he came up and had lunch with me today, and is returning to Washington with me at 7:30 in the morning. Senator McCarthy is an old friend of mine from Minnesota. Stand up, Senator, and let them see you. He has been working for this educational bill ever since the first day he came to the House of Representatives, and ever since he has been in the Senate.

- 35 I am delighted to have another good friend of mine who spent the weekend in his home district--McAlester, Oklahoma--and who came down here to spend the evening with me, and is returning in the morning, the distinguished majority leader of the House, without whose efforts we would never have passed this bill--Carl Albert of Oklahoma.

By passing this bill, we bridge the gap between helplessness and hope for more than 5 million educationally deprived children.

- 40 We put into the hands of our youth more than 30 million new books, and into many of our schools their first libraries.

We reduce the terrible time lag in bringing new teaching techniques into the Nation's classrooms.

We strengthen State and local agencies which bear the burden and the challenge of better education.

And we rekindle the revolution--the revolution of the spirit against the tyranny of ignorance.

As a son of a tenant farmer, I know that education is the only valid passport from poverty.

- 45 As a former teacher--and, I hope, a future one--I have great expectations of what this law will mean for all of our young people.

As President of the United States, I believe deeply no law I have signed or will ever sign means more to the future of America.

To each and everyone who contributed to this day, the Nation is indebted.

- 50 On Tuesday afternoon we will ask the Members of the House and Senate who were instrumental in guiding this legislation through the Congress to meet with us at a reception in the White House.

So it is not the culmination but only the commencement of this journey. Let me urge, as Thomas Jefferson urged his fellow countrymen one time to, and I quote, "Preach, my dear sir, a crusade against ignorance; establish and improve the law for educating the common people "

- 55 We have established the law. Let us not delay in putting it to work.
(905 words)

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