They Must Not Be Considered a Burden

By LOREN HICKERSON, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN ALUMNI COUNCIL

"In the conditions of modern life the rule is absolute, the race which does not value trained intelligence is doomed. Not all your heroism, not all your social charm, not all your wit, not all your victories on land or at sea, can turn back the finger of fate."

—Alfred North

It is ironic that, scarcely past the hour of her greatest triumph, flushed with heroism and victories on land and at sea, possessed of social charm and wit, the nation upon whom the greatest blessings of education ever have been visited should find herself in a "crisis in education."

The American educational crisis thus far has taken several forms. It exists in the form of the financial problem in private higher education. It exists in the form of a growing financial problem in state-supported higher education, fostered by more and more stringent restrictions imposed upon state institutions through legislative enactments. It exists in the form of a tidal wave of young citizens now surging through the elementary schools, who must be educated of social charm and wit, the nation itself has given voice to this view.

The recurrence of such concepts carries a hint of corrosion in the vitals of American society. Are they not suggestive that, despite the conditions of modern life, a lesser value threatens trained intelligence in America?

Finally, what of our present unprecedented numbers of young Americans? What of the 28 million youngsters in elementary schools this year, who will have become 34 millions by 1960? What of this fresh, new, hopeful generation, already born and on the way? Here they are; the greatest potential any nation ever had for its own future. To the earth's most vigorous and prosperous people, they must not be considered a burden!

Down through the years, in the conviction that intelligence is the key to a great civilization, we have made educational opportunity available at all levels, in the broadest sense. Until now, we have never found it inconvenient to pay the costs. But now? Now we are to be put to the test. The economic and fiscal conditions of life have changed. The changes have brought clear manifestations of a wavering and indecisive public attitude about the need for trained intelligence, in the new light of its rising costs.

No public institution has a "right" to be supported at this appropriations level or that. No private institution has a "right" to the benefactions of its friends or constituents. The "right" in this case is the right of free youth to its own opportunity, in its own time. We have always believed in that right, and in our hearts we believe in it now . . .

AN EXCERPT FROM AN ADDRESS ENTITLED, "THE SO-CALLED 'CRISIS IN EDUCATION'," PRESENTED AT DISTRICT MEETINGS OF THE AMERICAN ALUMNI COUNCIL.