

## The Value of Education to American Society

[Photo: Dr. Farmer.jpg] 10/22/18 — *The Weatherford Democrat* has asked Dr. Farmer to write a monthly op-ed for the paper. Here is his latest column which was printed in the Saturday, Oct. 13, paper.

The value of education to American society is immeasurable. Education shapes both individuals and the broader society, and directly impacts our global competitiveness.

Many of our great nation's most famous leaders clearly understood the value of education to American society. When our country was struggling through its infancy, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "To penetrate and dissipate these clouds of darkness, the general mind must be strengthened by education." Almost a century later, Abraham Lincoln wrote, "Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we, as a people, can be engaged in." Many decades later, the Great Depression influenced Franklin D. Roosevelt's thinking. "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education," he wrote.

As we collectively ponder how we will grow in our personal and professional lives, in our communities, and in our nation, we must consider the appropriate role of education in our American society. While we as a nation increasingly transition to a global economy and compete with rising powers like China and others, we must determine the role education will play in helping our society compete effectively on a global scale.

Abraham Lincoln clearly understood the value of human capital. "The philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next," he wrote. Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates also values an educated workforce. "In the long run, your human capital is your main base of competition. Your leading indicator of where you're going to be 20 years from now is how well you're doing in your education system," he said. To ensure competent governmental representation and a competitive business sector, we must have societal excellence in education. Our nation's future depends on it.

Reflect for a moment on your better traits as a person. How did those better traits become part of the essence of your being? Perhaps you were taught those traits by your parents, grandparents, or other family members or friends. Perhaps it was a religious leader, teacher, or community leader who imbued you with those positive character traits. Or perhaps it was something that you read or studied that shaped you at the formative level. Theodore Roosevelt stated, "I am a part of everything that I have read." For many of us, it was a combination of many of these influences that made us who we are. Yet at their core, all of these influences share the common foundation of exposure to education.

For over 200 years, the American education system has informed the American mind and shaped the greatest nation the world has ever known. Today we live in a modern American society that is quick to criticize education, but slow to acknowledge the role that education has played in growing and preserving our great civilization. How will we collectively protect, preserve, and refine our educational system to the benefit of future generations of Americans?

I leave you with one final quote from Thomas Jefferson, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

**Tod Allen Farmer**

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