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EDUCATION AND PATRIOTISM

by

Vice Admiral H. G. Rickover, U. S. Navy

upon accepting

GOLD GOOD CITIZEN MEDAL

from

Sons of the American Revolution

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I deeply appreciate the honor you have bestowed upon me by your award of the Gold Good Citizen Medal. It is a great pleasure to be with you tonight. I regret I have been unable to find time to prepare a speech that would do justice to this distinguished audience. My increasingly heavy work schedule in the Navy's nuclear propulsion program, for which I am responsible, restricts to a minimum my outside activities. We now have a nuclear fleet composed of sixty submarines, a nuclear destroyer, a cruiser and an aircraft carrier. In addition, we have under construction thirty-eight submarines, two destroyers and a small submarine capable of exploring the ocean bottom. It is our purpose in the Naval Reactors Group to try constantly to improve design and construction of new ships which means, of course, that a great deal more work must be done than if these ships were assembly line products. Also, they must be manned by exceptionally competent officers and men, whose selection and training takes up a large part of my time.

When I received your kind invitation, I therefore tried to find a subject with which I am familiar enough to present to you some informal

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remarks that might perhaps be of interest. It occurred to me that, since you are a patriotic society and I have long been deeply concerned with better education for our children, I might speak about the need for better political education in our public school system. By political education I mean preparation for democratic citizenship.

Democracy is the most difficult of all political systems because it will not function well unless ordinary men and women assume the kind of political responsibility, and acquire the kind of political competence that in monarchies and aristocracies is expected only of a single ruler or of a ruling class. No political system functions well unless those destined to rule are carefully educated for rulership; unless they acquire the mental capacity to exercise the power of government; unless they develop a sense of personal identification with the country, so they will know in their bones that the common good is part of their own well-being. It always and everywhere has been more difficult to educate the people as a whole for rulership than to educate one man or one class. But upon our ability to develop these rulership qualities in the ordinary citizen depends the success of our system of government.

First among the qualities we must seek to nurture in our boys and girls I would put comprehension of the meaning and value of democracy. Those who grow up in a free society need to be made intellectually aware of what freedom means, how hard to win and easy to lose, how rare and precious it is. There is no other way to bring about this awareness than through a carefully planned sequential course of studies in such basic-- and for many children difficult--subjects as history, government, geography and literature, a course beginning in the elementary grades and continuing