

**Richard W. Riley
James F. Byrnes Foundation
Annual Luncheon
Columbia, South Carolina
June 14, 2014**

It is a great pleasure to join you today to help carry on the long and unique tradition of Mom and Pop Byrnes. It is an interesting day – between Friday the 13th and Father's Day. I hope that each of you fathers has a great day.

I had the good fortune to meet James Byrnes more than a few times when I was growing up. My father – Ted Riley – and Mr. Byrnes both were active in politics and close political allies for many years. On several occasions, Jimmy – as my Dad called him – was a visitor in our home in Greenville.

As you well know, James F. Byrnes was one of the most influential South Carolinians of his time – perhaps of *all* time. With no formal high school education, he worked and studied hard to become a newspaper editor, a lawyer, a solicitor, a Congressman, Senator, Governor, Supreme Court Justice, Secretary of State and more.

A close confidante to President Roosevelt during the World War II years, he was considered by many to be one of the most powerful men in the United States.

He also was unique, as you well know, in giving up that seat on the U.S. Supreme Court to run the war effort on the home front.

Long after World War II, when I was Governor of South Carolina in the 1980s, I made a speech in Stuttgart, Germany, the home of several South Carolina companies.

Speaking before me was the Mayor of Stuttgart, the son of the famous German General, Erwin Rommel (RAH mul). He told of a speech given after the war by another American, also a Governor from South Carolina. James Byrnes' speech, he said, changed the entire post-war history of Germany and, for the first time, gave the people of Germany hope for the future.

But of all the things that James Byrnes did during his lifetime, he was most proud of the "family" he and his wife, Maude, created with this Foundation.

The continuing closeness, camaraderie and support that you "brothers" and "sisters" share . . . your success as individuals . . . your contributions to society . . . the honor that you bring to the Byrnes family name . . . these are indeed his most enduring legacy.

Governor Byrnes would be so proud – as am I – of the graduating seniors and the new scholarship recipients who are being honored today.

Like Governor Byrnes, you young people – and all of you alumni – have had to overcome great personal and financial obstacles created by the loss of one or more of your parents.

But, also like him, all of you have chosen to focus on academic achievement, civic participation and personal accomplishment. And it is these positive traits that have earned you the distinguished Byrnes Scholarship and your place in the Foundation's close-knit "family."

As we all know, Governor Byrnes' father died within a couple of months of his birth, so Jimmy faced many challenges throughout his young life. Certainly it was financial hardship that caused him to quit school at the age of 14.

So we can see why he had such a personal interest in investing in your education and giving you much-needed help during difficult times in your life. He wanted to give *you* what *he* always wanted but never had – a college education.

And he wanted to help you broaden your horizons and become caring, knowledgeable and involved citizens – not only in your community and state, but in the nation and the world.

Many of you alumni were fortunate to know Mom and Pop Byrnes personally. The support, love and education you received from them transformed your lives.

And you, in turn, have helped uplift others – fellow Byrnes Scholars and many other people whom you have touched and encountered. You are the Byrnes' legacy and enduring hope. What a wonderful gift to the Byrnes name.

As we know, James Byrnes was unique. Without any formal high school, college or legal education, he went on to lead a learned life of distinction, success and purpose.

But as one who has spent decades working on education issues in South Carolina and the nation, I can say without a doubt that those days are over. Governor Byrnes' unusual route to success is not a pathway that any of *our* children and grandchildren should follow in this 21st Century.

I am fortunate to have 14 grandchildren. And they *all* are “above average” – just like all of yours.

Actually, I think most children are "above average," if given a chance. Let me tell you about one, in particular.

During the mid-1990s while I was Secretary of Education, we were launching a new summer reading program for the nation's students. The announcement was held at an elementary school in Arlington, Virginia – just outside of Washington, D.C. A large audience was present, including about 15 national press cameras.

The school principal gave me a microphone and directed me to a stool in front of a shelf of children's books. I was asked to read a children's book to the students.

A cute, little first grader stood beside me; his name was Franklin. The young boy's mother had dressed him well – he had on a bow tie.

I asked Franklin to choose a book that he wanted me to read. He chose – you'll love this title – *Animals Eating Ice Cream*. So I started reading and went through horses, cows, elephants . . . all eating ice cream.

It was getting a little boring so, when the next page was about the spider, I said – "Franklin, who ever heard of a *spider* eating ice cream?"

Franklin looked up at me, leaned over to the microphone and said, "Mr. Riley, this book is *fiction*."

Franklin truly was above average. I know that evening he told his mother that the Secretary is *supposed* to be *smart* . . . but he *believed* that about the spider eating ice cream!

But young people like Franklin, as well as our children and grandchildren, live in an entirely different world than Mom and Pop Byrnes. Science and technology are creating a dynamic and changing economy that is becoming more globalized each and every day.

President Bill Clinton honored me just a few weeks ago when he spoke at a Riley Institute event in Greenville. In talking about the changes in education we must make, he said – "We are today educating our children for *our* world instead of *their* world."

And that, in a nutshell, is the great challenge for our State and our nation. The world is changing at an accelerated pace and we are leaving too many of our young people behind when it comes to giving them a first-class, comprehensive education . . . for *their* world.

Yes, we are becoming a much more diverse nation . . . and that is not a bad thing. This diversity will help grow our economy and bring a new vitality and strength to maintaining America's role as a super power and a great democracy.

But what does this diversity mean for our schools and the future of American education.

Right now, hundreds of our schools all across America have student populations of 30 to 40 different nationalities.

Those children, like the children of generations of immigrants before them, will learn America's customs and traditions . . . learn English a lot faster than everyone thinks . . . and probably improve our chances in the World Cup in the years ahead.

So we have some challenges to overcome . . . and we can do this if we work together for the long-term good of our nation's students. But that requires some new thinking about American education.

In the immediate future, we will need a lot more high-quality pre-k programs, all-day kindergarten and many more community supports for our schools. We all must be concerned about the large number of our young people living in poverty . . . or near poverty . . . and the homeless . . . and the disabled.

I am a great believer in designing and using our public schools as Community Learning Centers – keeping the schools open later and longer for people of all ages, but with a particular emphasis on creative, enriching after-school programs. Schools that thrive best are those that make the most use of their community assets.

We also will need a lot more bilingual teachers who can help teach English as a second language. Here the catch is that lots of immigrant students learn to *speak* English but they don't fully *understand* it academically.

We should envision our local schools as part of a global environment, and a move in that direction would be to teach foreign languages. Young children have a great gift for learning foreign languages. In some areas, there is strong demand for *full immersion schools*, where students are taught in two languages.

We also will need many more career academies and project-based learning experiences – learning by doing.

The Riley Institute at Furman, in partnership with others, is helping create New Tech high schools in Clarendon and Colleton counties along the I-95 Corridor (known as the *Corridor of Shame*), where the need is so great. We have more coming in Horry, Florence, Lexington and Greenville. These New Tech schools focus on project-based learning in the STEM fields – Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. I really prefer STEAM schools – adding the Arts to STEM.

Also, a greater emphasis is needed on what we in education call 21st Century skills. In this competitive economy, employers place a very high value on creativity, teamwork, perseverance, emotional intelligence, adaptability and a strong work ethic.

Many of these so-called “soft skills” are learned best through project-based teamwork, as well as through music and the other arts. So we must keep those programs dedicated to music and the other arts in our public schools.

And we should support our nation’s community colleges that clearly are improving. They are – among other things – doing a wonderful job of helping our young people move into higher education and obtain the knowledge and skills they need to get good jobs.

As you seven new Byrnes Scholars enter college, you probably will find that your academic workload is more difficult than in high school.

I urge all of you to be excited about the changes you are facing . . . listen carefully to your professors . . . work hard to move forward with an enhanced love of learning.

To be prepared for your future career and adult life, it is so important to become well-versed in technology and the verbal and written expression of thoughts and ideas.

We in America are so fortunate to have such a high-quality system of higher education. Unfortunately, it often is very expensive, so please make good use of your Byrnes Scholarship. And, of course, do the Byrnes name proud . . . as I'm sure you will.

I hope that I have conveyed to all of you some idea of the challenges and opportunities we face as we look ahead to the future that our children, our grandchildren and these young scholars will inherit.

We all have much to do. And to my way of thinking, what we do in the classroom to educate the rising generation is vitally important to shaping the future of our great country – that, too, is patriotism.

Today we hear a great deal about America's role in the world, and there is even talk that we are ceding our standing as a Great Power. In my opinion, this is NOT true.

We remain the world's most dynamic economy. We have a battle-hardened military that is second to none. And we remain a mecca and a beacon of hope for millions of striving individuals who will become patriotic Americans committed to freedom and democracy.

I was an officer on a minesweeper in the U.S. Navy and – like all of you – I believe that America has a special role to play in the world. But I also believe that we need to expand our view of patriotism.

In my view, every time a high school teacher inspires a young person to stay in school, a patriotic duty is being performed. Quality teachers, principals, superintendents, parents and students all are patriotic citizens . . . IF they work hard to improve education.

In my view, too, every time a guidance counselor persuades a young person to take rigorous courses that get him or her on the path to college or a meaningful career, our nation becomes a little stronger.

And every time a college professor encourages a bright, young person to become a teacher, our great nation becomes more secure.

If we offer our nation's young people a future of hope and an education of excellence, they will respond. They will fulfill the promise of this great nation to achieve freedom and equality. And they will continue to sustain America as a free democracy of learning. They will be our future patriots serving to improve our great country.

Maude and James Byrnes – through their love, compassion and scholarships – they have offered you South Carolinians an excellent education and a future of hope.

I congratulate you . . . and I thank you for your past, present and future contributions to society. Mom and Pop Byrnes are proud of each of you.

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Thank you . . . and good luck. As Garrison Keillor, the well-known American author and humorist, put it, "Be well, do good work and keep in touch."