

TRULY PRIVATE EDUCATION

by George C. Roche III

George Roche has been the president of Hillsdale College since 1971. Under his leadership the college has developed a growing national reputation as a defender of the private sector and a proponent of traditional American values.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us . . .

Little did Charles Dickens realize how applicable these lines would be not only to 18th century France, but also to 20th century America.

Though we have been the beneficiaries of the greatest material prosperity in the world's history, Americans seem obsessed with a growing sense of failure. A nation which once valued individual achievement now strangles itself in regulation. A once self-reliant and thrifty people now struggle with the growing distortions of inflation. We are increasingly unsure of our institutions and ourselves.

Conversations concerning the American decline have been the subject of manifold debates in recent years. Many readers conclude that since society can be no better than the level of understanding displayed by its individual members, and since the individual's understanding is based largely upon his educational experience, we can only arrest the national decline by "more education."

I do not fault the argument as far as it goes, but the specific definition of "more education" seems open to question. Perhaps the most "educated" people of antiquity were the Greeks, yet they destroyed themselves. The Germans have been among the most literate and most completely "educated" people of modern times, yet succumbed to the siren song of Adolf Hitler.

Surely, education should be helpful rather than harmful. Surely, education should be encouraged to the utmost. At least this is the way we all talk about the subject. Do we really mean it? More important, should we really mean it? The answer to these questions depends on what sort of "education" we have in mind.

Our efforts, time and tax dollars have been extended to overcome the knowledge and ignorance of what? Sadly enough, that issue was all too seldom faced when we were constructing the philosophy and institutions of modern American education.

Though the proper goal of education is the development of the individual and the great task is to bring the educational structure back to that purpose, the trend continues in the opposite direction. Through the growing educationist bureaucracy, our schools have become progressively less oriented to the education of individuals and more oriented to the education of the "masses." We now seem to turn out a "socialized" product, certified as socially acceptable by the appropriate diploma. Though such a bureaucracy can no longer educate, it lends itself admirably well to social engineering, to turning out technically proficient automatons ideally suited to running the system without questioning its values. This is one of the valid complaints our students have. One of the bits of doggerel from the Berkeley uprising, to be sung to the tune of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, went as follows:

From the tip of San Diego,
To the top of Berkeley's hills
We have built a mighty factory,
To impart our social skills.
Social engineering triumph,
Managers of every kind
Let us all with drills and homework
Manufacture human minds.

It is true that a larger school provides more specialized teaching and more staff specialists. Each student finds himself more counseled and tested. But it is also true that in the process the individual teacher steadily loses his personal contact with the students as more and more of his functions are taken over by outside "specialists." Students and teachers alike are involved in more and more activities outside the classroom while becoming less involved in what has been traditionally called

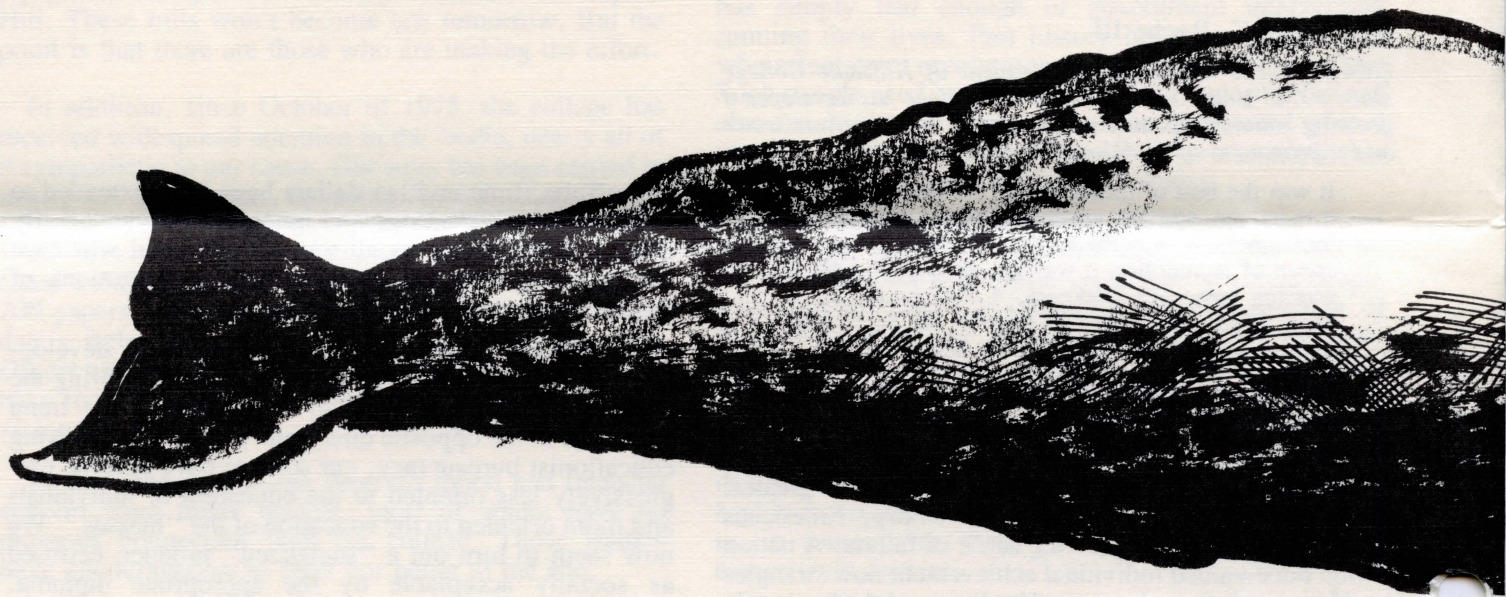
“teaching.” The close pupil-teacher relationship seems impossible in our supersized educational structure.

Thus, the emphasis is upon larger and larger aggregations of collective authority and organization, within which individual personality finds a smaller place. Let anyone who doubts this attend a massive public high school or gigantic state university campus. What we teach and how we teach it makes it harder and harder for the individual to find and defend his place in the sun.

To adapt to these masses, the total standards of our educational system have faced alteration. We now place

our educational system. A variety of experiences (no matter what their quality) with constant growth (no matter in what direction) and constant activity (no matter how frenzied) are now to serve as a suitable educational goal. Here again, the decline of intellect is most graphically demonstrated.

The result of such instruction? Perhaps more than ever before young people are concerned with “the reason why,” in examination of moral premises of our society. They hunger for this because our present institutional structure offers them so few values and principles on



special emphasis upon training the dropouts, upon making the curriculum so soft that no one can flunk. Thus, we are caught up in one of the fundamental “democratic” dilemmas of our age. If we make our schools sufficiently mindless to accommodate those least able, we run the grave risk of turning out a totally mindless graduate. Such a solution should be unsatisfactory, unless we wish democracy to mean the rule of the uniformly ignorant and incompetent. Perhaps we’ve toiled unduly over defects, weaknesses and shortcomings, to the grave neglect of talents, virtues and achievements. If we wish our schools to be only shelters for idle youth, we must recognize the frankly revolutionary premise which underlies such a system. The logic of such “democratic” pedagogy implies a total structural change of traditional American society.

We have not only neglected to uphold the standards by which to judge academic achievements, but we have also failed to give proper attention to the value of that which is to be taught. In keeping with the times, we are told that we must sweep aside the dead hand of the past with its constricting and confining tradition and morality. We are told that the disciplines of former ages no longer bind us. We are told that, in view of these rapid transformations, all standards are relative to social considerations; man and society are whatever we choose to make of them. Thus, change itself, change for its own sake, has become the dominant philosophy of the age, and thus of

which to build their lives. Whatever the reason, the student with his concern for moral issues often finds himself in the company of a teacher or a professor for whom the morality of the existing power structure is a matter of little or no interest, or, worse yet, a professor who is concerned less with teaching than he is with turning the structure to his own politicalized uses.

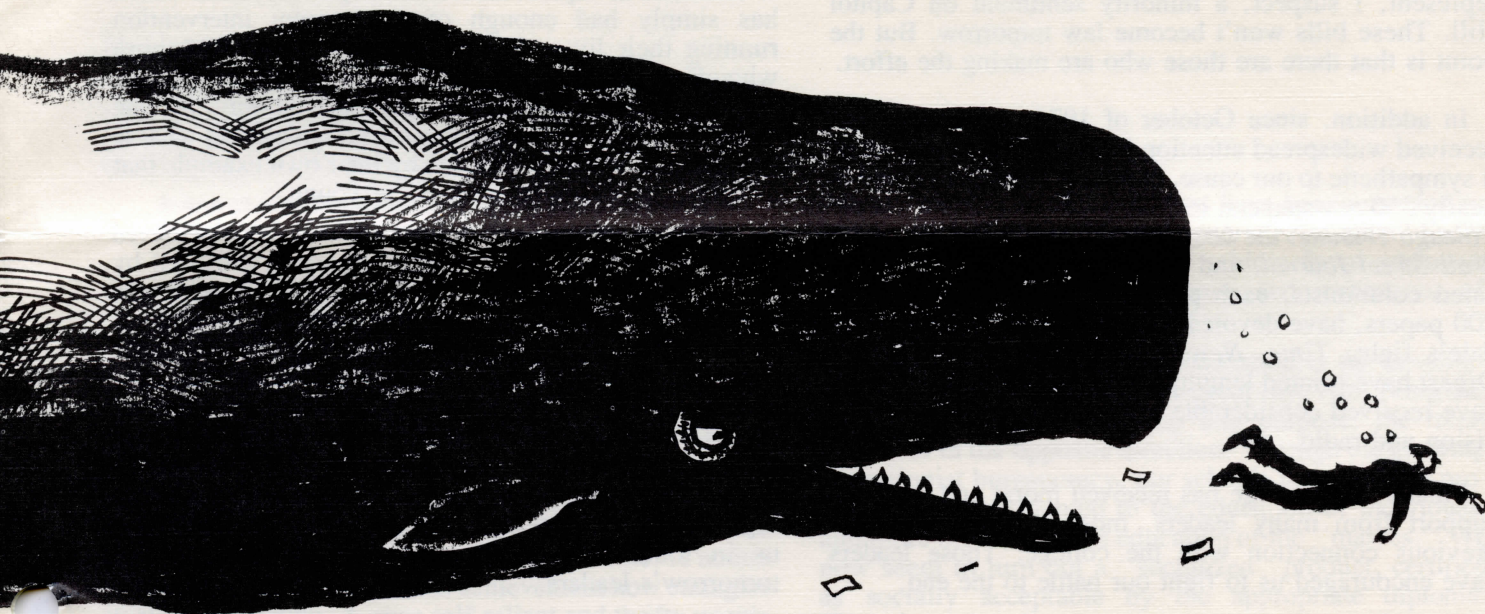
This confusion of mind did not exist to such a degree with the traditional education of the past. During my boyhood in the mountains of Colorado, I was privileged to attend a one-room, one-teacher school that met the needs of children in all eight elementary grades. Admittedly, I was fortunate to have a remarkable teacher of great character and strong personality, who was then and remains a profound influence on my life. Yet, without the benefits of swimming pools, of guidance counselors, of the 1,001 other such items now assumed to be “essential” to education, we children of that school (incidentally, a cross section of well-to-do and very poor) managed to learn our reading and writing and arithmetic, while learning to respect adults, respect one another, and finally to respect ourselves. Throughout, the standards we were expected to maintain were never in doubt. We also knew at all times who was running the school!

Such schools and such teachers have been the tradition rather than the exception in this country. In fact, much of

what we now call "juvenile delinquency" would have been subject to quick solution in a woodshed of an earlier day. But then, such a system as I am describing was based upon standards and discipline, viewing children as individuals, individuals important for their own sake, individuals destined to assume a responsible place in the community. Today, we extend no such courtesy to our young people.

On the contrary, for twelve, and often sixteen years of his life, the American child is subject, day in and day out, to the guidance of our "progressive" educational

institutional enmassment, we must beware of the tendency to use political power in correcting the situation. The autonomous university community has usually been a seat of traditional values and a haven for the individual against church and king. At its best it can again be such a haven against the assaults of democratic politicalization. In fact, our present discontents on the university campus are largely due to the extent to which we have accepted political authority (financing, standards, controls, values) in an institutional area where that authority does not belong.



system.

When we continue to initiate an educational system void of standards, void of authority, void of responsibility, void of the ideal, is there really any question as to why the lives of our youth develop lacking moral standards, self-discipline, or a sense of responsibility? Despite the good intentions of many parents, educators and administrators, we have created a society of perpetual adolescents. We expect no standards during the initial eighteen years of their lives. Need we expect responsible, upright, adults afterward?

J. Allen Smith, patron saint of the intellectual climate of the 20th century and father of the ideas expressed by Charles Beard in *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, made quite a pointed remark in reflecting upon this course of events. As Smith explained, "The trouble with us reformers is that we made reform a crusade against standards. Well, we've smashed them all, and now neither we nor anyone else have anything left." Nothing left! Strong words coming from a prophet of the modern academy. If Smith was right, our modern standards are all smashed. Then to what can we turn in educating our young people?

The results of progressive education have been ugly, on campus and off campus, but a word of warning is in order. However reprehensible our present college and university community may have become as the result of

Americans need only to open the daily news to note the growing government intervention in higher education. For example, collectors of academic curiosities may recall Columbia University's announcement of several years ago: "We would like to have been able to make copies of the full-text edition of Columbia University's Affirmative Action Program available to interested parties without cost. However, because of the expense involved in reproducing, collating, binding, packing, and handling this 316 page, 3½ pound document, we are making it available at \$17.25 per copy, which includes postage."

If an interested party were to send for a copy of this document, though it is difficult to imagine who might be interested, he would receive a bureaucratized and computerized flood of trivia about the inner workings of Columbia University—more than most observers could conceivably want. The vast outpouring of time and energy necessary to gather and evaluate this information on institutional policy symbolized a major crisis for Columbia, a crisis given public airing by its administrators.

Columbia University is not alone in its anguish. Other institutions of higher learning across the nation are suffering similar problems as they rush headlong to comply with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare guidelines imposing racial and sexual quotas on

campus. They find they are obliged to hire directors of Affirmative Action Planning at substantial salaries, and set up affirmative action programs with policy influence over every aspect of campus life.

Obviously, government control of the American educational process is not the answer. A look at the outcome of the current educational system proves that values, standards and self-respect simply cannot exist with the present day politicalized system of learning. Past experience clearly shows that genuine education and government education are a contradiction of terms. So what's to be done to reestablish a system which will instill within our future leaders value and respect for the American ideal? The answer must come from the private sector.

But why the private sector? Because the attributes, values and concerns of this group are synonymous with, rather than contradictory to, the aims of genuine education. Education must offer challenge and variety to awaken the *individual* conscience and draw forth unique qualities and capacities. Looking for the best in others and allowing their free development, letting people be themselves, afford each the opportunity to achieve his own potential. Such a view of education implies no "system," no "establishment," in the usual sense, but rather guidance by the private sector.

Furthermore, the task of the true educator is primarily that of liberation. The individual needs to be freed from his limitations in order to develop his potentialities and become a better man than he would otherwise have been. This is the most radical presumption of all. If we assume that the individual can develop his unique potentialities only in freedom, implicit in that assumption is that different people have different capacities and varying rates of progress. Thus, genuine education implies discrimination and difference which is made available only through the private sector as distinguished from the dead level of equality which is the product of control by the public sector.

In a practical sense, genuine education trains students to think for themselves. Mere indoctrination will simply not suffice. As Emerson once wrote, "Cannot we let people be themselves, and enjoy life in their own way? You are trying to make that man another you. One's enough." To expect that the distant, impersonal government can best educate our young people is indeed a fallacy as past history has proven. The private sector—parents, friends, community educators—would certainly be the best judge of the individual educational needs of those within their community.

The success of the private sector over the public sector in providing genuine education can be noted in the achievements attained by Hillsdale College, a small private, liberal arts institution in southern Michigan. Hillsdale exists as proof that maturity, responsibility, and a sense of self-respect are best developed in our young people when they are encouraged to pursue their *individual* talents within the framework of fixed truth, and of a definite right and wrong, not subject to change by human whim or political dictate. Such an education is possible through private, not public control. Although many contemporary authorities on education profess that

the Hillsdale philosophy is totally out of date, we take great pride in the quality of young people who have been the product of our "behind the times" tradition.

Of course, it is true that the young people at Hillsdale are like young people everywhere in many ways, especially since our 1,000 students come from 32 states and 15 countries. Like all young people, they have their good times and bad times, ups and downs, victories and defeats. Yet in other ways the graduating Hillsdale student is different from many of today's young people. Why? Because the education he or she has received has encouraged that uniqueness.

The Hillsdale philosophy of education, simply stated, is this: Improve the individual as an individual, stressing the peculiar and unique attributes each has to develop, but also emphasize the development of that "higher side" shared by all individuals when true to their nature. Such a philosophy contrasts greatly with the modern notion as to what should constitute an education. It is little wonder that our graduates would reflect this contrast.

To insure the reality of this philosophy, our enrollment is small, with roughly 1,000 students on campus annually. Our classes have a ratio of 15 to 1 between students and faculty. Students, called by first names, are not only encouraged, but expected, to contribute individually to classroom discussions and activities. Hence, *individual*, not mass, ideas are expressed and pursued. Likewise, the *individual* is held accountable for his actions.

Unlike those at large universities, our business majors do not discuss inflation in a classroom with several hundred other students. Instead, they enjoy small classes and the opportunity to host and personally meet prominent national figures during one of our many lecture series on campus. Our English majors are not taught over closed circuit television. Instead, they have the opportunity to attend coffee hours and hold small classroom discussions with such renowned writers and critics as James Dickey, Marion Montgomery, John Ciardi and Tom Wolfe. Our music and art majors, history and political science majors, philosophy and education majors, have all encountered similar individual leadership opportunities. Because of our smallness the opportunities by which one might obtain a sense of responsibility and self-confidence are numerous on the Hillsdale campus. Such an education helps make our students unique.

Whereas progressive education stresses the importance of specialization, the traditional educative philosophy maintained by Hillsdale stresses the importance of a liberal arts background. Liberal arts study serves as a base for our curriculum because college faculty, administration and friends who work with the college believe that there is great value in developing well-rounded young adults. Indeed, we recognize the fact that specialized knowledge in the Western world has accomplished miracles through increasing human control over physical environment. Man has achieved power in the process, a power being concentrated in the governmental and private institutional giants of our time. Rewards are high for the specialist. In such a process, however, we run a

grave risk of losing the capacities which make us human. A young student of great ability easily may pass through his entire education without encountering the reality of the human condition or establishing his self-identity. Instead, he moves from one superficial consideration to the next, always dependent upon "expert" and "fashionable" opinion, "objectively" studying nothing but "facts."

A look at human conditions today shows that the superspecialization demanded in our times often leaves the individual, as Ortega says, so specialized that he is ignorant in many facets of human existence, so ignorant that, outside his speciality, he reacts as an unqualified mass-man. On the other hand, when an endless search for facts is replaced by teaching which asserts a philosophy of life, the result tends to be the universally educated man.

The benefits of individual leadership opportunities, of personal interaction with faculty and staff, and of a college run by administrators on campus instead of in Washington D.C., have been available to our students because Hillsdale College has never been a recipient of government funds. Since its founding in 1844, Hillsdale has neither sought nor accepted federal funding of any sort for its operation. The college has actively taken this stand for 134 years because, in our eyes, the benefits of total freedom and independence have far outweighed the advantages attainable through additional funding. In the past we felt sure that because of our independence, we were free to direct our own affairs, to decide what should be taught in our classrooms, and to follow what we consider the traditional system of American values.

But with the coming of the Title IX regulations, all that was changed. Previously, all government regulatory activity in higher education had been directed only toward those institutions which accepted government money. However, the Title IX regulations specified that Hillsdale and all other independent colleges and universities would now be subject to government directives if we had on campus any student who, as an individual, was receiving government financial assistance.

The reaction of the Hillsdale College Board of Trustees to the HEW order was unanimous and complete. All members agreed that the public sector had overreached itself. On October 10, 1975 the Trustees prepared a resolution which faced the issue squarely:

WHEREAS the Board of Trustees of Hillsdale College has been made aware of new restrictive regulations imposed by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare promulgated under the guise of implementing Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; and

WHEREAS Hillsdale College has maintained its freedom and independence of federal control by consistent refusal of federal aid to education, federal grants and any and all forms of subsidy by the Federal government; and

WHEREAS, the regulations aforementioned, the Federal government now seeks to impose its control over such freedom and independence through the subterfuge that a few of the students of Hillsdale College receive federal aid through the medium of

such programs as Veterans Benefits and the National Direct Student Loan Fund; and

WHEREAS it is the conviction of the Board of Trustees of Hillsdale College that such regulations are excessive of the authority granted by Congress and violative of the inalienable rights of freedom and choice of this institution and are therefore immoral and illegal; and

WHEREAS Hillsdale College has traditionally far exceeded the social benefit purported to be achieved in such regulations by natural and voluntary non-discrimination: Now therefore be it

RESOLVED, That Hillsdale College will hold to its traditional philosophy of equal opportunity without discrimination by reason of race, religion or sex, but such non-discrimination will be voluntary, thus preserving equality with dignity and encouraging friendship based on recognition of equal worth and mutual respect; and be it

RESOLVED further, That Hillsdale College will, to the extent of its meager resources and with the help of God, resist by all legal means this and all other encroachments on its freedom and independence.

Let me stress that the issue at stake is not equal treatment for minority groups or women. Throughout its 134 year history, Hillsdale College has opened its doors to all, irrespective of race, religion or sex. The first woman in Michigan and the second woman in the United States to receive the bachelor's degree was an 1851 graduate of Hillsdale. It seems especially ironic that Hillsdale College, which pioneered in non-discriminatory treatment long before the first federal legislation on the subject should now be compelled to comply with government regulations promulgated in the name of equal rights for women.

The trustees fully appreciate how high the penalties are likely to be. If the bureaucracy now withdraws the scholarships of those students attending Hillsdale College, the college itself will also be penalized. In an age when independent higher education already faces inflation, governmentally subsidized competition, and a continuing reduction of private revenue through more and more stringent tax policy, the difficulties of meeting the budget and surviving have grown larger each year. Now we are faced with the additional burden of aiding those students against whom the government proposes to discriminate.

And yet the penalty of losing scholarship funds because of our actions is certainly minimal when compared to the freedom and independence we would lose should we succumb to political decree. The issue involves not only the future of Hillsdale College, but the future of the private sector as a whole.

Obviously, many have recognized the dissension between the Department of HEW and Hillsdale College as representative of the culminating battle between the public and private sector, for the response we have received from concerned Americans has been overwhelming. We have received many thousands of letters from concerned citizens, the leaders in the private sector across America.

Since the beginning of the battle two years ago, we have heard from nearly thirty senators and representatives who emphasize their approval of Hillsdale's stand, saying: "We never intended that HEW should be granted the kind of power it is wielding in your case. We never intended that they should have any control over the truly independent sector in education." And their support has been more than verbal.

In fact, there are now four different bills pending before the Congress which would bring relief to our particular situation. The proponents of this legislation represent, I suspect, a minority sentiment on Capitol Hill. These bills won't become law tomorrow. But the point is that there are those who are making the effort.

In addition, since October of 1975, the college has received widespread attention in the media, nearly all of it sympathetic to our cause. Our story has been carried in nearly 350 newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *National Observer*. Six syndicated columnists, each published in between 100 and 200 papers, have devoted a column to describing Hillsdale's fight. *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Fortune* and *Reader's Digest* have printed lengthy stories on the affair, and we have received considerable broadcast time on both television and radio.

Finally, the college has received moral and financial support from many leaders, most of whom have no previous connection with the college. Those leaders have encouraged us to fight our battle to the end.

In all these expressions of support, I have sensed a concern which goes beyond the question of Hillsdale College vs. HEW, even beyond the question of independent education. Ultimately, I think people fear that somehow our government has grown so large that, rather than controlling it, we are in fact being increasingly controlled by the government. They recognize that we are gradually losing the power to direct our own lives—to run our businesses, to educate our children, to make our own decisions.

Thus, these concerned American leaders have turned to Hillsdale as representative of the private sector which has simply had enough of government intervention running their lives. Past history has proven that those who effect great revolutions are always small in number. Such people need not wait to become a majority. No one else can do the job except those who understand what is at stake and who serve notice by their own example that a better way exists to educate our young.

Perhaps the greatest indicator of the success achieved by the truly private, liberal arts education provided by the private sector at Hillsdale is the type of young people who emerge from the institution upon completion of their studies. Above all else, leadership has probably been the most distinctive characteristic of the Hillsdale graduate. Hillsdale is blessed with students from all across the nation, fine young men and women in search of genuine education. Our ability to provide the Hillsdale experience depends upon reaching highly qualified, highly motivated students. We rely on our friends to put us in touch with these young people who will be tomorrow's leaders.

Hillsdale College is marked by its strong independence and its emphasis on academic excellence. It holds that the traditional values of Western civilization, especially including the free society of responsible individuals, are worthy of defense. In maintaining these values, the college has remained independent throughout its 134 years, neither soliciting nor accepting government funding for its operations.