

CAS GOVERNOR'S SCHOLAR LUNCHEON COMMENTS
May 22, 2014

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Good morning. Thank you for joining us for the Governor's Scholars Awards Luncheon. We are continuing today an eighteen-year tradition of honoring the top junior year students in Connecticut's high schools. The selection criteria are demanding; the competition, since almost every high school nominates a candidate, is intense; and the process leads to the selection of an elite group designated as Governor's scholars. Our purpose today is to honor their accomplishments to date as well as to encourage their further growth and success.

In reflecting on this year's Governor's Scholars – only 30 of you in total in the whole great state - - it occurs to me how much more is required to be a scholar in this generation. Comparing it to my own and the likely experience of your parents, we were reading about Jan and Ted and their dog, Pug, in first grade – *you* were solidly into chapter books. Your high school experience is more rigorous than our high school experience, with students in this generation scrambling to get into multiple upper echelon classes that my high school didn't even offer. The ante is up, from Kindergarten through 12th grade – actually, from Kindergarten through forever. You will compete in a global market, whereas we went up against maybe a dozen others for the jobs we now hold.

The significance of your making it to this celebration this morning, and the commitment and dedication it took to get here, are not to be underrated. You have found and will need to continue to find your own value in scholarship. I say you'll need to find and remember it on your own because, unfortunately, our society – especially the media – doesn't always remember to value scholarship as they should. Pure intellectual prowess is not as coveted as superior athleticism, for example – or noteworthy musicianship, or even physical attractiveness. I'll bet most people even in this room, where education and academic achievement are clearly valued, can name several professional athletes, numerous stars in the music industry and at least one or two super models – but can't name a single scholar. (And, no, Einstein and the other dead ones don't count.) Consider how these various categories are compensated – who gets paid more, the Rhodes Scholar or

the Red Sox player with the least playing time, who sits on the bench? The President of the United States, regardless of which one, or Miley Cyrus for a wobbly, lip-sync concert appearance with questionable dance moves?

Of course, this is short-sighted of society and the media and in the end it is the scholar who will change the world. I'm quite certain, for starters, that our future is secure whether or not the next American Idol actually cuts an album or makes it big. I'll probably be OK if the top three draft picks leave the country forever.... BUT I know the world will come to an end if not for you and those like you. You see, no pressure – but we're counting on you to save the planet – because we need a place to live for quite a while longer. We need *you* to figure out how to predict earthquakes and tsunamis and floods with more accuracy than we have so that entire villages and communities can be saved. We need you to solve world peace – if you don't mind – so that this ever-shrinking world doesn't implode upon itself. In the end, whether or not it ever gains you celebrity status, or brings you great wealth, you will be our next great leaders and problem solvers because you're smart, you know how to think, and you work hard. And therein lies greater value than can be found in any paycheck or media sound bite. Some one of you in this room may find the cure to Parkinson's disease, which by the way runs in both sides of my family so I would really appreciate that. One of you may engineer a safer car before my daughter starts driving. One of you may in fact move us closer to a more peaceful co-existence with other countries and cultures before my future grandchildren march off to war. Please try. Please be the scholars that you are and value what you have been given. Use your gifts to make someone, something, somewhere better.

While some may fear the future, those of us in education see the promise in the eyes of our students every day, smile quietly and know that you are smart and strong and ready. You are scholars and, because of that, the rest of us can feel hopeful about the future. As an educator, I am impressed by and proud of you. As a private citizen, I am just thankful for you. On behalf of the Connecticut Association of Schools, congratulations again on your accomplishment -- and remember to thank your parents and families, who have supported you and have helped you to keep your eye on the "right" prize. Thank you.