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THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

*The Honorable Timothy Downing**

Well, I have to agree—or disagree—with something that was said earlier. I think it is entirely appropriate to begin by thanking the audience and people here, and so I want to do the same. Thank you to all the Law Review students, all the students in Regent Law. I know there is a lot of campus support here as well, the people that are not from the law school here, and it took a lot of effort for this event to go on. The panels were fabulous. And, so, thank you for all the hard work that has gone into this, Dean Lingo, for your support and your leadership, for the law school. It has been a blessing. Being at the banquet last night, it was incredible, and seeing the support that is coming out for the law school. And it is just encouraging, but that takes a lot of hard work.

My friend, Dean Walton, when he called me and asked me to speak here, I was extremely humbled to get the opportunity to do that. And to be honest, I told him, you can have someone much better than me come to speak at this event. But it is humbling because he talks about when he was younger, looking up to me; I was looking up to him. Y'all know this about Dean Walton, but he was not just number one in our class in academics, he set the bar in all sorts of areas: his energy, his enthusiasm, the life-giving spirit that he brings to everything that he does. Truly, a family man, a man of righteousness and integrity. He set the bar for us, in not just academics, but in everything he did. And so, to have him now

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here as a dean, and teaching, and instructing at the school,¹ it does not surprise me, because that is what we experienced here from our faculty and staff when I was a student, that describes perfectly what your law professors are like. They are not only the best and the brightest and the highest academics, but they are also people that love you and encourage you, and they have a spirit that wants to lift everybody up. And, Dean Walton, I am so proud of you, and it is just an honor to get to be back here. He mentioned my wife and kids that are here. When we moved here, Destiny and Trinity were just little kids; we had our third child while we were here at law school, and then left pregnant with our fourth child. And so, we have a lot of life that happened, and we consider this our second home. I mean, there are so many memories coming back here that we love and hold dearly. So, I hope for you, I know you are in the middle of law school thinking, “Will this ever end?” Do not do that, I know it is hard. It is easy for me to say that, but just enjoy it. This is going to be a memory of a lifetime for you during your time here at law school, and I am excited for each of you.

As we talk about education today, and one of the reasons when Ernie called me, I was like, “Well, you could get someone better,” is, I first think, “Well, I am not in education. I do not consider myself an academic.” But I prayed about it over the weekend. I said, “You know, if You believe I should speak, I am going to do that.” And so, I prayed. And I feel like I got a word that I think all of you will enjoy.

I was sitting at a table here with a man who is a father, very much like I was. He came here, he was in education, and he is coming to law school now. And, so, you are going to be amazed. Whether you come from education or you have experienced it in the future, education is going to be a big part of your life in one way or another. And all of you in this room either currently have or are developing a worldview about being regents, and that is, we are the hand, and the feet, and the mouth for the body of Christ on the earth today.² We truly are here to represent Him.³ And so when we talk about education, we first, in my mind, have to go to what does God think about education? What is His heart? Because if we first do not know the God who we serve, and we are here to represent what He

¹ S. Ernie Walton, J.D., REGENT UNIV., <https://www.regent.edu/faculty/j-d-s-ernie-walton/> (last visited Jan. 26, 2023).

² See *Fast Facts*, REGENT UNIV., <https://www.regent.edu/about-regent/regent-facts/> (last visited Mar. 12, 2023). See generally 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.

³ See 2 Corinthians 5:20 (“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”).

thinks, then we are going to be lost.⁴ And so that is where it begins: to change the future of education is to know the heart of God.

For far too long, education has been the poster child of banning God from a public domain.⁵ It literally has been the poster child for saying God does not belong here. And Americans have been duped to believe in a sacred and secular dichotomy, and it is a myth.⁶ But can I tell you, the God who created the universe is very much sovereign, and a part, and cares about every area of life.⁷ Our Founders knew that; they knew that our country was only as solid as the Americans and the citizens that were here.⁸ And they knew that our citizens were only as solid as they were grounded upon our faith and morality. John Adams pointed this out in one of his notable quotes where he said, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”⁹ George Washington is quoted as saying, “Religion and morality are the essential pillars of a civil society.”¹⁰ We are truly a nation under God, and God cares about everything, and particularly education,¹¹ and it does not matter if it is public school. It does not matter if it is a private school, a charter school, virtual school, home school—and if I left [out] any of them, just plug it in. God cares about education. He cares about our children. So, where we go to find the heart of God? We go to

⁴ See generally *Psalm* 100:3 (“Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his”); 1 *John* 2:3 (“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.”); *Romans* 8:5–7 (“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace”).

⁵ See, e.g., *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421, 425, 436 (1962) (prohibiting official school prayer); *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 205–06, 211–12 (1962) (prohibiting official Bible readings in public schools); *Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39, 39–40, 42–43 (1980) (striking down a state statute requiring the Ten Commandments in each public school classroom); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 39, 40, 60–61 (1984) (invalidating a statute by which the state “endorse[d]” prayer in schools).

⁶ See generally David Kim et al., *The Sacred/Secular Divide and the Christian Worldview*, 109 *J. BUS. ETHICS* 203, 203–04 (2012).

⁷ See *Matthew* 6:25–33, 10:29–31; 1 *Corinthians* 10:31.

⁸ See, e.g., *THE FEDERALIST NO. 55* (James Madison) (“[I]f there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government . . . [then] nothing less than the chains of despotism can restrain them from destroying and devouring one another.”); JAMES MCHENRY, *PAPERS OF JAMES MCHENRY ON THE FEDERAL CONVENTION OF 1787*, reprinted in 11 *AM. HIST. REV.* 595, 618 (1906) (quoting Benjamin Franklin, who, when asked if the United States was a republic or a monarchy, responded, “[a] Republic . . . if you can keep it”).

⁹ Letter from John Adams to Massachusetts Militia (Oct. 11, 1798), in *NAT’L ARCHIVES: FOUNDERS ONLINE*, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3102> (last visited Feb. 4, 2023).

¹⁰ Letter from George Washington to the Philadelphia Clergy (Mar. 3, 1797), in *NAT’L ARCHIVES: FOUNDERS ONLINE*, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-21-02-0249-0005> (last visited Feb. 5, 2023).

¹¹ See generally *Proverbs* 22:6 (“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”); *Proverbs* 16:16 (“How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!”).

scripture. And there is a passage that I want to point you to in Matthew chapter 18 where we find out how God feels about children. In Matthew chapter 18, the disciples come to Jesus, and they say, “Tell us who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”¹² And Jesus looks around and there is a child standing there, and He has the child come and stand beside Him, and He says, “I tell you this, if you want to be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, be like this little child.”¹³

So, Jesus is making the point; He is saying, who is the greatest in the eyes of the Lord? It is the heart of a child, a child who is humble, a child who has childlike faith. And He says, “Be like this little child.”¹⁴ They are important to Him. But then He takes it a step further; He says, “I tell you this, whoever welcomes a child like this in my name, welcomes me.”¹⁵ And so we see Jesus say this at other times when He talks about going out and serving widows, and orphans, and people in prison; He is saying, “You are doing this for me.”¹⁶ So God is telling His disciples, what you go out and do for children, you are doing as unto the Lord. Those of you who are going to get involved in education on this front, you are truly doing the Lord’s work, you are truly doing what Christ has called you to do. And then there is a third part of this passage where we see our Christ used words that are pretty stern. Jesus says this, “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.”¹⁷ So not only does He say children are important, and it is important what you do for them, but He gives a stern warning that says, “Do not lead these little children astray, woe unto you.”¹⁸ Can I tell you, that is exactly what we see happening in America today with the agenda that we see in some of our classrooms:¹⁹ to lead children astray and to deceive them. And

¹² *Matthew* 18:1.

¹³ *See Matthew* 18:2–4 (“He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’”).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *See Matthew* 18:5.

¹⁶ *Matthew* 25:37–40 (stating that anything done for the least of the children of God is done for him); *James* 1:27 (exhorting the church to take care of orphans and widows).

¹⁷ *Matthew* 18:6.

¹⁸ *Matthew* 18:6–7 (“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come.”).

¹⁹ *See, e.g.,* Laura Meckler, *Gender Identity Lessons, Banned in Some Schools, Are Rising in Others*, WASH. POST (June 3, 2022, 6:00 AM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/06/03/schools-gender-identity-transgender-lessons/> (describing the prevalence of gender ideology in schools across

we see that that grieves the heart of God. So why is it that children are so important to God? Well, first, they are His kids, right? We are all God's children, so we know that to be true.²⁰ But there is another thing here, and that is that children are God's plan, full stop. My dad is a pastor—was—he retired a few years ago and he used to preach a sermon as a kid that I still remember this day. And he said this: “When God wants to change the world, He sends a baby to do it.” When you think about that, God is not up there in heaven looking around saying, “Man, I got this great plan, it would work perfectly, but I need a grownup; I need a hot-shot grown-up that could really help me out.” That is not how He works.²¹

You see, when God wanted to save the world from its sin, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, as a baby.²² And in the humblest of beginnings, He sent Him in a manger where He had to be nurtured, and be in a family, and grow up.²³ When God wanted to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, He sent a baby, He sent Moses, and He put him in a basket going down the Nile River.²⁴ And Moses had to grow up and learn and grow into the things God

America); Dov Fischer, *Controversial Gender Ideology in Public Education Undermines Families of Faith*, EDSOURCE (May 10, 2022), <https://edsourcesource.org/2022/controversial-gender-ideology-in-public-education-undermines-families-of-faith/671790> (identifying the divisive views on sexuality—namely the concept of gender identity—in the California school system that are antithetical to traditional family values); Zach Goldberg & Eric Kaufmann, *Yes, Critical Race Theory Is Being Taught in Schools*, CITY J. (Oct. 20, 2022), <https://www.city-journal.org/yes-critical-race-theory-is-being-taught-in-schools> (noting the prevalence of Critical Race Theory in American schools).

²⁰ In a certain sense, all men may be considered “offspring” of God, as in God all men “live and move and have our being.” *Acts* 17:28–29; *see also Genesis* 1:27 (“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”). However, it is important to note that only those who believe in Jesus Christ may be considered children of God in the full sense. *John* 1:12–13 (“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”); *see also 1 John* 3:1 (“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”).

²¹ *See 1 Corinthians* 1:26–31 (“Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. . . . [S]o that no one may boast before him.”).

²² *See John* 3:16–17 (“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”); *Isaiah* 9:6–7 (“For to us a child is born And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”).

²³ *See Luke* 2:7, 39–49.

²⁴ *Exodus* 1:22–2:10; *Exodus* 3:10 (“So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”).

had called him to do.²⁵ And at first [Moses] did not think he should.²⁶ You know, in this room we are no different as God's regents. You are called and you were placed here, and God intentionally puts you here in advance.²⁷ In our classrooms today in America, God has sent babies into our world to change the world. Ephesians chapter 2 verse 10 tells us, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do."²⁸ Jeremiah 1:5 says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; [and] I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."²⁹

See, we can replace the word in this talk, "Future of Education." Literally, you can replace the word, "education" with many things. We could call this talk "The Future of Our Homes." We could call it "The Future of Business." We could call it the "Future of America." Proverbs 22:6 tells us, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."³⁰ And for those of you raised in a Christian home, you probably heard that when you were getting disciplined a few times.

But there was another quote said this morning on the panel here before I got up here that I was going to use today, and it is, "The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next."³¹ That is saying exactly the scriptural truth, that the way we train children in classrooms will be our future to come. I am in the military, and in the Army, they have known this for some time. I went through Fort Benning for basic training, and they treat everybody the same way. We all memorized the Soldier's Creed. We all memorized the Army Values. I remember being in a CS chamber where they take your mask off, and the gas is making your eyes water.³² And for those of you

²⁵ Compare *Exodus* 2:11–12, 3:11, 4:1–17 (providing examples of Moses failing and the Lord teaching him), with *Exodus* 10:3–4, 11:4–10, 12:31–32 (describing the work that Moses did for the Lord and how he was courageous in his calling).

²⁶ *Exodus* 3:7–4:17 (recording Moses' argument with God when God called him and Moses doubted God's plan).

²⁷ *Psalms* 33:11 ("But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations."); Proverbs 16:9 ("In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps."); *Romans* 8:28 ("And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.").

²⁸ *Ephesians* 2:10.

²⁹ *Jeremiah* 1:5.

³⁰ *Proverbs* 22:6.

³¹ Monte Kuligowski, *Does the Declaration of Independence Pass the Lemon Test?*, 2 DUKE J. CONST. L. & PUB. POL'Y 287, 324 n.114 (2007).

³² See generally Michael Volkin, *In Basic Training, Surviving the Gas Chamber Requires Sound Strategy*, MILITARY.COM, <https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/gas-chamber-surviving-basic-training.html> (last visited Feb. 5, 2023) (explaining how part of basic training is the gas chamber: a room full of CS gas, which causes tearing and other reactions).

who have gone through the military, you know what that is like. And we would have to recite the Soldier's Creed. We would learn all types of skills that had nothing to do with being a JAG officer, and I thought, "Man, this is crazy." But you know what, the military understands that that brand new lieutenant, that brand new enlisted soldier, someday—fast forward twenty years—is the general officer, they are the senior NCO, they literally become the Army, and so they train us in a way that we have work ethics and character and we have morality.³³ Likewise, the way we train up the children in our classrooms with work ethic, with discipline—grounded in morality—is how they are going to lead their homes, their workplaces, and their positions of power. You cannot train other generations with a woke agenda and expect a different future for our country. That is why God cares about our classrooms, He cares about our kids, and He wants us as His body to go out and help train them up, and He gives a strong warning for those who wanted to deceive and lead our children astray. Knowing God's heart is where we begin to change our future in education in America.

The second place you turn, I believe as a regent, to represent the Lord, is begin to pray. Once you know His heart, the very first work—and it is the work—it is doing the work, is prayer. We start with prayer.³⁴ We do not end with it. It is not something we do after the fact. We know it is hard—now we begin to pray. On my calendar and every job I have ever had, I have a very unique thing on my calendar. It is usually Monday morning, first thing, and it is "20:7," and that stands for Psalm chapter 20, verse 7, and it says this, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."³⁵ My first year out of law school, I was mobilized for one year in Fort Hood, and I had the docket down there. Fort Hood is one of the largest military bases in the world.³⁶ And I had a huge docket. Every week I worked, I had more work left than I began with. You are all going to have law jobs like that at some point. Almost all law jobs are that way—let's be honest. And I remember being frustrated by that. I was praying over it—over my docket, and I remember

³³ See generally C. Todd Lopez, *Ethical Behavior More Than Just Yearly Online Training*, U.S. DEP'T OF DEF. (May 12, 2022), <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3023359/ethical-behavior-more-than-just-yearly-online-training/> (explaining the military's goal of developing a military force with a strong sense of ethics); *Army Values*, U.S. ARMY STAND-TO! (June 12, 2018), <https://www.army.mil/standto/archive/2018/06/12/> ("These values are Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage.").

³⁴ See generally 1 *Thessalonians* 5:17–18 ("[P]ray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.").

³⁵ *Psalms* 20:7.

³⁶ Huma Khan, *Fort Hood: Tragedy Not the First for Largest U.S. Facility*, ABC NEWS (Nov. 5, 2009), <https://abcnews.go.com/WN/Politics/fort-hood-tragedy-largest-us-base/story?id=9009379>.

the Lord brought this scripture in my remembrance. In fact, Professor Velloney would give devotions—he was a professor when I was in law school.³⁷ And he did devotions on Psalm chapter 20 verse 7. I heard it repeatedly. And God brought that to my remembrance. And it simply is this: yes, I have horses and chariots; I have talents—you are going to have talents leaving this law school—but you cannot trust in that. You do everything you can, but you begin with prayer and say, “Lord, you are the one who gives me the victory.” And that habit started there; it was in the legislature. When I was in the legislature, we would start Monday mornings, I would get the legislators together, and we would pray over stuff that seemed impossible to do.

In Oklahoma, the state budget has to be balanced.³⁸ That is seemingly impossible. Ask a federal legislator that. But there were these tough times, and we would lean on this prayer time. As a U.S. Attorney, I would get my first assistant every Monday morning, and we would pray over our cases, we would pray over our office, over our employees, issues that we know they were going through personally. And we began that way. Then we went to our staff meeting. Then we would begin to do the work. And can I tell you that discipline starts for you in law school.

Dean Walton and I were clerks at the ACLJ together. And I remember one day he was telling us that he was studying the Scriptures on the cord of three strands and prayers of agreement. And he was like, “You know, I have been really convicted that we are all the students praying for pro-life, and we are praying for great things to happen on the abortion front.” And he said, “I just feel convicted that we need to gather and pray together.” So, we spent some time on our lunches. And I remember sitting out here at the water fountain praying, and we did not take long—maybe twenty minutes. And I remember coming together and praying for God to change our justices, for God to bring victory in our courtrooms, and for God to overturn *Roe v. Wade*,³⁹ and for us to see a victory there. And can I tell you that the reason I remember that today, when I am reflecting on prayer in school, is because I was praying with somebody. I do not remember the individual prayers I was having, but I distinctly remember that time when we gathered and prayed intently over something. Prayer is powerful because it does not just change things around you. It changes who you are.⁴⁰ It aligns your mind, and your heart, and your spirit with the things of God. Prayer is the most powerful thing

³⁷ See generally David D. Velloney, J.D., LL.M., REGENT UNIV., <https://www.regent.edu/faculty/david-velloney/> (last visited Feb. 5, 2023).

³⁸ OKLA. CONST. art. 10, § 23.

³⁹ 410 U.S. 113 (1973), *overruled by* Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Org., 142 S. Ct. 2228 (2022).

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Jonathan Edwards, The Most High a Prayer Hearing God, *reprinted in* 4 The Works of President Edwards 567, 567 (New York, Leavitt, Trow & Co. 1843).

we can do for our schools and in our schools, and that is why there has been such a huge fight to remove prayer from our classrooms.⁴¹

I remember as a kid in small-town Oklahoma, where we have more churches than we have homes—that maybe a little bit of exaggeration, but not by much. And I remember getting this book—it was in the early 90s—it was called, “Know Your Rights,” and it was written by a man by the name of Jay Sekulow.⁴² I did not know who he was at the time, but in my small-town school in Oklahoma, they were trying to eliminate prayer, and they did that by school board members and administrators being fearful that they would be sued and held personally liable. And I remember reading this book and basically it said, “Hey, the government cannot tell you that you cannot pray at school,”⁴³ and reading about this really sparked something in me, and I remember it to this day. Can I tell you that fight thirty years ago—trying to remove prayer from school—is the precursor to what we are seeing today? Anytime you remove prayer, it has a damaging effect. If you remove prayer in your personal life, it is going to have a damaging effect. If you remove prayer from the church you go to—and it is possible for that to happen—if prayer leaves your church, it is going to cause problems. If you remove prayer from your family, it is going to cause problems in your family. To think that removing prayer in the public sphere, in government, and in education would not cause problems is ridiculous. Prayer is the obstacle to deception and lies.⁴⁴ When you have prayer in our schools, it prevents deception and lies from ruling and reigning. The agenda we have in our schools, to call evil good and good evil, that the Bible warned us about, can happen when prayer is not there to block it.⁴⁵ So the most important thing we do as regents is to bring prayer to the forefront: to pray for our schools and to pray in our schools. And that is how we will begin to shape the future of education.

So, once you know the heart of God, and once you are starting to pray for the heart of God, then the third thing to do is get to work. And I could call this the “Old Oklahoma Talk,” right? I mean, everyone had a grandparent or somebody in their lives that said, “Well, get to work, get it

⁴¹ See, e.g., *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421, 425 (1962) (prohibiting official school prayer); *Kennedy v. Bremerton Sch. Dist.*, 142 S. Ct. 2407, 2415–16 (2022) (concluding that a football coach was improperly fired for expressing his religious beliefs through private prayer).

⁴² JAY ALAN SEKULOW, *KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS* (1993).

⁴³ See *id.* at 17–25.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., *James* 1:5 (“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”); *Jeremiah* 33:3 (“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”).

⁴⁵ See, e.g., *Isaiah* 5:20 (“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”); *Matthew* 26:41 (“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”).

done.” James 2:26 is kind of that short about it; it says, “Faith without works is dead.”⁴⁶ We have to work. We cannot just pray and hope things turn out better. We have to get to work. There is a verse, Proverbs chapter 21 verse 3[1]—and I think it pairs well with Psalm chapter 20 verse 7—and it says this, “The horses are made ready for battle, but victory rests with the Lord.” It is almost identical to Psalm 20:7, but it has the words, “made ready.”⁴⁷ So it is still talking about horses and chariots, it is still trusting in the Lord, but it is saying, “You got to make them ready.” The horses and chariots are not just there. You have got to study for your law school exams; you have got to pass some of the—I guess, I heard some midterms were going on this week, and that is part of it, you have got to get to work. And so, what does that look like in changing education? Well, for some of you, you are going into education. In fact, we have a lot of people in education in this room right now, and maybe you are going to be directly in that mission field. And that is not a profession; that is your calling. And that is a high, high calling. I cannot think of anything more precious and more important to the heart God than for you to be in education directly or in some way. But some of you will not be. You will be lawyers. You may be in a different college than in the university you [are] attending today, but you are going to have a lot of opportunities that come up. When Dean Walton asked me to speak, I had to think about it. My first instinct was, “What do I know about education? I have never had anything to do with education in my career.” But the reality is I have, and you will, too.

During my time as a legislator, I ran largely on military, and law enforcement, and public safety.⁴⁸ I was on the judiciary committee, and that is where I thought my world was. Education really was not my prime policy area, but I left after my first term, winning the only award given to the house member—there is one senator, one house—to be a champion for children.⁴⁹ Because while I was there, we had nationwide teacher

⁴⁶ James 2:26 (King James).

⁴⁷ Compare Proverbs 21:31 (“The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD.”), with Psalm 20:7 (“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”).

⁴⁸ Associated Press, *Former GOP Lawmaker Becomes US Attorney in Oklahoma City*, ENID NEWS & EAGLE (June 5, 2019), https://www.enidnews.com/news/state/former-gop-lawmaker-becomes-us-attorney-in-oklahoma-city/article_73edc104-647a-5a7e-8b57-f5944511e591.html (noting that Tim Downing “earned a reputation as a tough-on-crime lawmaker”); see *United States Attorney Timothy J. Downing Announces Resignation*, U.S. ATT’Y’S OFF. W. DIST. OF OKLA. (Feb. 9, 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdok/pr/united-states-attorney-timothy-j-downing-announces-resignation>.

⁴⁹ Darla Shelden, *Sen. AJ Griffin, Rep. Tim Downing Praised for School Choice Leadership*, OKLA. CITY SENTINEL (July 7, 2017), https://www.city-sentinel.com/community/sen-aj-griffin-rep-tim-downing-praised-for-school-choice-leadership/article_3b7983f9-d62c-5ade-9122-8d8b704477c3.html.

walkouts all across the country.⁵⁰ Our state was no different.⁵¹ We had special sessions—all on education—and I ended up right in the middle [of the] big ole’ fight on education.⁵² And I was like, “What do I know about this?” But that was God saying, “Hey, this is important, this is a season, and this is what I have called you to do.” As the First Assistant Attorney General for Oklahoma—we have twelve different units and a lot of really cool, exciting things that I could talk about in the AG’s office—but that included education.⁵³ We had state laws that needed to be enforced. Or even in Oklahoma, we had school districts who wanted to force children to share locker rooms and restrooms with children of the other sex.⁵⁴ And we had state laws that prevented that,⁵⁵ so we would send demand letters, and we would reach out to the districts and do everything we could to correct that. We had laws on the books that prevented radical ideology, and curriculums, and training, and we enforced that.⁵⁶ We would reach out and say, “Hey, you should not have this book in your library. You should not be having this curriculum in your school. You should not be doing this training.” And that was part of my duties in the AG’s office.

As a U.S. attorney, I would go into the U.S. Attorney’s office thinking, “All right, I am fighting the cartel,” all the things you think about and the fun things in the U.S. Attorney’s office. Never would I have thought COVID was going to happen, and it brought a lot of unique challenges. So, I fought against city government discriminating against churches and

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Cory Turner et al., *Teacher Walkouts: A State by State Guide*, NPRED (Apr. 15, 2018, 2:16 PM), <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/04/25/602859780/teacher-walkouts-a-state-by-state-guide>; Josh Eidelson, *Teacher Strikes are Spreading Across America with No End in Sight*, BLOOMBERG (Apr. 2, 2018, 2:58 PM), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-02/teacher-strikes-are-spreading-across-america#xj4y7vzkg>.

⁵¹ Rivka Galchen, *The Teacher’s Strike and the Democratic Revival in Oklahoma*, NEW YORKER (May 28, 2018), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/06/04/the-teachers-strike-and-the-democratic-revival-in-oklahoma>; Dana Goldstein & Elizabeth Dias, *Oklahoma Teachers End Walkout After Winning Raises and Additional Funding*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 12, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/us/oklahoma-teachers-strike.html>.

⁵² Galchen, *supra* note 51; Goldstein & Dias, *supra* note 51.

⁵³ See *generally Divisions*, OFF. OF THE OKLA. ATTY GEN., <https://www.oag.ok.gov/divisions> (last visited Feb. 6, 2023).

⁵⁴ See Nuria Martinez-Keel, *Oklahoma Outlawed School Bathroom Use by Gender Identity. This Boy Is Challenging It.*, OKLAHOMAN, <https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/education/2022/09/25/oklahoma-16-year-old-challenging-transgender-school-bathroom-law/69493410007/> (Sept. 27, 2022, 1:28 PM).

⁵⁵ OKLA. STAT. tit. 70, § 1-125 (2022) (requiring individuals to use public school bathrooms belonging to the individual’s sex “as identified on the individual’s original birth certificate”).

⁵⁶ *Id.* § 24-157.

places of worship who were educating their children and their faith, from being forced to close while Walmarts were allowed to be open.⁵⁷

We were the first office to send a demand letter to a city mayor and tell them, basically, “Hey, you need to allow churches to be open.” And we had great success, and that became a model within the Department of Justice to handle COVID and cities shutting down churches.⁵⁸ You are going to be the same. You are going to have opportunities, and you probably already have them all around you, and you think, “No, that is not my lane, that is not what God is calling me to do.” Can I tell you, we are all called to be a part of our children’s future and education? It may be through government jobs, like I have described; you may be going into private practice and practicing a totally different area of law. It may be in estate planning—or whatever it is—and somebody comes in and says, “I got this issue with my school board. I got this issue with school.” And God pricks your heart and says, “I care about that. You need to get involved.” You may be a nonprofit like the ACLJ or ADF, and just on the front lines every day fighting for our schools.⁵⁹ But even if none of those things present themselves—and I heard some of the panelists mention this today—truly, we are all called to be a minister to the children around us and make a difference. So, raising your own kids, being a part of the lives of kids who are around you, doing what Jesus did, and taking your opportunities to go speak to children and pour into them:⁶⁰ you are going to have those opportunities. You can get involved in school boards or in city and state policymaker conversations. Ask God where you should be involved and then be bold and humble, and get involved and make a difference. That is how we will make a change in the future of education

⁵⁷ *Norman Mayor Clark Responds to Attorney General’s Concerns, Reopens Churches*, OKLA.’S NEWS 4, <https://kfor.com/news/health/coronavirus/norman-mayor-clark-responds-to-attorney-generals-concerns-reopens-churches/> (May 8, 2020, 10:34 PM).

⁵⁸ Stephen Dinan & James Varney, *Churches Turn Back Shutdown Orders with Justice Department Help*, WASH. TIMES (May 10, 2020), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/may/10/churches-turn-back-shutdown-orders-justice-departm/>.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., *Parental Rights*, ALL. DEFENDING FREEDOM, <https://adflegal.org/issues/parental-rights> (last visited Feb. 6, 2023) (describing the work that Alliance Defending Freedom does to protect parental rights in education and other spheres); *2020 Victories: The ACLJ Is Scoring Big Wins for Families Facing Pandemic-Related School Issues as We Continue to Fight for Educational Justice*, ACLJ (Dec. 23, 2020), <https://aclj.org/school-choice/2020-victories-the-aclj-is-scoring-big-wins-for-families-facing-pandemic-related-school-issues-as-we-continue-to-fight-for-educational-justice> (discussing the launch of ACLJ’s School Choice initiative and the organization’s efforts to fight for parental involvement in education).

⁶⁰ See, e.g., *Matthew* 19:13–14 (recounting the story of Jesus commanding the disciples to bring the little children unto Him).

as His regents and as His body. It is when we look around to say, “Lord, here am I, send me, how can I make a difference?”⁶¹

And then my final point I want to leave you with, you might think, “Oh, this is a no-brainer, of course this is how we are.” But it is this: having sought God’s heart, having prayed for His will, having done all that you can do with your own efforts, now expect a miracle. It is easy to fall into the traps of thinking that nothing is going to change, but when you catch His heart and you see people serving Him, they begin to look a little bit ridiculous. I think of Noah; he is a great example of that. That God told him His plan, God went to work to do it.⁶² Decade after decade nothing was happening, nothing was changing, and then the rain came.⁶³ Go back to my prayer time with Dean Walton. In our lifetime, abortion was just something we lived with. In a conservative state like Oklahoma,⁶⁴ I just grew up with it, thinking it was part of my life. And it was hard in those prayer times to think, “How could this ever change?” And I will be transparent—we are supposed to pray, we are supposed to do things—but how could this ever change? But the miracle happened this year in *Dobbs* when the Supreme Court reversed *Roe* and returned abortion to the states.⁶⁵ And in conservative states like mine, there is no abortion today.⁶⁶ Amen.

And I think it is important to point out, we heard about a lot of the important strategies from Erin in her talk on Friday, and there was some incredible work that went on there, so I do not want to diminish that at all. But I do want to point this out: the Mississippi legislature was passing pro-life legislation⁶⁷ like every conservative legislature had done for everyone,⁶⁸ and when I was in the legislature, we passed pro-life

⁶¹ *Isaiah* 6:8.

⁶² *Genesis* 6:9–7:6.

⁶³ *Genesis* 5:32, 6:3, 7:6.

⁶⁴ See *Political Ideology by State*, PEW RSCH. CTR., <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/compare/political-ideology/by/state/> (last visited Feb. 6, 2023) (reporting that thirty-eight percent of Oklahomans—a plurality—consider themselves to be politically conservative).

⁶⁵ *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Org.*, 142 S. Ct. 2228, 2242 (2022) (“We hold that *Roe* and *Casey* must be overruled.”).

⁶⁶ Associated Press, *Oklahoma Governor Signs the Nation’s Strictest Abortion Ban*, NPR (May 6, 2022, 5:58 AM), <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/26/1101428347/oklahoma-governor-signs-the-nations-strictest-abortion-ban>; *Abortion in Oklahoma*, COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH OF PLANNED PARENTHOOD GREAT PLAINS, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-comprehensive-health-great-plains/abortion-information/abortion-oklahoma> (last visited Feb. 6, 2023).

⁶⁷ H.B. 1510, 2018 Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2018).

⁶⁸ See Elizabeth Nash & Lauren Cross, *26 States Are Certain or Likely to Ban Abortion Without Roe. Here’s Which Ones and Why*, GUTTMACHER INST., <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2021/10/26-states-are-certain-or-likely-ban-abortion-without-roe-heres-which-ones-and-why> (Apr. 19, 2022).

legislation.⁶⁹ In the AG's office, we defended pro-life legislation.⁷⁰ They were doing the same thing, being consistent, continuing to follow God's heart and plan. And the miracle happened in God's own time. I want to point you back to my conversation about prayer in school with Jay Sekulow writing books in the early '90s, and out here on the front line, trying to make a difference for prayer in school. And this year the Supreme Court said coaches can gather with players on the football field and pray.⁷¹ That is the exact same thing thirty years ago that my school was saying we could not pray after our football games. It is literally the exact same thing. And despite the decades that coaches were being told, "Be quiet, shut up, go away," losing this fight over and over again, Coach Kennedy in Washington state was just doing the same thing that he knew was right for his school, was right for his program; win or lose, he was going to do the right thing, and God brought the breakthrough in His timing.⁷² My wife is a cross-country coach—also a track coach—and at one of her recent cross-country meets, all the students gathered—public schools, lots of public schools there—and they got in a big circle. Hundreds of girls about to take off on a cross-country run, and they had a big, huge prayer, every single one of them. Can I tell you, those things bring hope? These miracles, seeing things going on in our public schools, breathe hope to me that there is a great future ahead and God is not done. We are seeing more states begin to adopt policies to give parents and children options if they are in schools where they are stuck with a woke agenda.⁷³ We are seeing states pass laws and prevent training and curriculum that is designed to lead children astray.⁷⁴ These are all signs that I give you to say: do not give up on our country or education just yet. God is not done, and He is at work.

We have had decades of prayer, decades of serving and working, and God will bring forth a miracle. And in education, God is not limited in how He can restore or renew a generation. Nothing is off limits to the Creator of the universe.⁷⁵ There is not a public, private, virtual, charter school or

⁶⁹ OKLA. STAT. tit. 63, § 1-740 (2023).

⁷⁰ Laurel Calkins, *Oklahoma Abortion Ban Faces Challenge at State High Court (3)*, BLOOMBERG L. (May 26, 2022, 12:14 PM), <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/health-law-and-business/oklahoma-high-court-to-weigh-blocking-states-total-abortion-ban>.

⁷¹ Kennedy v. Bremerton Sch. Dist., 142 S. Ct. 2407, 2415–16 (2022).

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *School Choice in America*, EDCHOICE, <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice-in-america-dashboard-scia/> (last visited Feb. 20, 2023) (providing a database of school choice status' across the United States).

⁷⁴ See, e.g., IDAHO CODE § 33-138 (2022) (prohibiting race- and sex-based curricula); Legality of Critical Race Theory in Montana, 58 Att'y Gen. of Mont. Op. 1 (May 27, 2021) (determining that "race scapegoating" and other uses of Critical Race Theory violate the Constitution); TENN. CODE ANN. § 49-6-1019 (LEXIS through the 2022 Reg. Sess.) (prohibiting the promotion of one race or sex as being superior to another).

⁷⁵ See, e.g., *Isaiah* 14:27 ("For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him?"); *Isaiah* 43:13 ("When I act, who can reverse it?").

home school that is beyond His reach. He can bring forth life and restoration where we see only a valley of dry bones.⁷⁶ His arm is not too short to bring this generation however He chooses.⁷⁷ And make no mistake, He will be doing it through the prayers and faithful work of His body in this earth. Our job as regents is to know His heart, to pray for it, to work for it, and to expect the miracle. God's job is to bring it forth in His time, and He is going to do it through each of you in this room. And I am excited to see it. So, God bless you. God bless Regent University. And thank you again for allowing me to share this day with you.

⁷⁶ See generally *Ezekiel* 37:1–10.

⁷⁷ *Isaiah* 59:1 (“Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save . . .”).