

itself, is doomed unless it is provided. The stage for this was set many years ago when the founding fathers of this Republic sought measures to counter the doctrine of despots that democracy was destined to failure—that people were incapable of governing themselves.

Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to a friend, wrote:

“If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” The concept of universal education is contained in this statement, Jefferson here was admitting that the doctrine of the despots was sound if the people in a democracy remained unenlightened. He was saying that the people could not hope to preserve their freedom if they remained in a state of ignorance. But Jefferson, and the others who stood with him in that belief, had great faith that democracy itself contained the germ of its own self-preservation—that democracy would provide an education for all the people and thus retain its integrity. Out of this concept of universal education, we know, emerged our system of public education, including state universities and other state institutions of higher learning.

Some of our state universities are nearly as old as the Republic itself, but those earlier institutions were unlike the public-supported colleges and universities of today. They were characterized by a narrow curriculum and an aristocratic attitude. The belief persisted for many decades to come that education, particularly at the university level, was for the few. State colleges and universities as we know them now evolved gradually out of the demands of the masses of people for equality of opportunity, for greater recognition in the affairs of government and for a fuller share of the benefits from a growing economy.

Under the pressure of these demands, the Jeffersonian idea of universal education was expanded into a philosophy that the state has the obligation to provide the opportunities for all who seek to improve themselves through education. It was a doctrine which called for the support by all of the people of institutions to provide higher education in accordance with ability and interest, with as little regard as possible to the financial condition of the individual. This idea, which is widely accepted today, has created many problems for the State and for the people who are engaged in the operation of our institutions of higher learning. This ideal that every individual, regardless of the number involved, should be given the opportunity to develop his talents through education is difficult to attain. A danger lies in the belief that all should share, and share alike, in the benefits of a free society, regardless of capacity, effort, initiative and ambition. It could lead, for example, to a