

# Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at Providence-St. Mel High School in Chicago, Illinois

From the Reagan Archives at University of Texas

## January 19, 1983

The President. Thank you very much, and I thank you, Paul Adams. It certainly is a delight to be back here with everyone here again. Paul, when I left the last time, I said I'd like to have an opportunity to return and see what was happening, and the progress that might be made here at Providence-St. Mel. And I understand that the chairman of your board, Tom O'Mara, has a progress report.

Mr. O'Mara. Thank you, Mr. President. We're very honored to have you -- welcome you back to Providence-St. Mel. When you came here 8 months ago, you were an interested visitor. Today you come as a good friend.

As you've seen this afternoon, much has happened since your last visit. With the help of individuals and corporations, we have acquired some new computers to help our students go into the world fully equipped to handle the high technology needs of today. Compulsory training in computers is just one example of Providence-St. Mel's commitment to excellence. That commitment has been very rewarding. This year 100 percent of last year's graduating class went on to college.

But as you know, Mr. President, we still have a long ways to go. This school is struggling for its survival. That's why I'm proud to announce today that you have agreed to serve as honorary chairman of our new \$6\1/2\ million fundraising campaign, a campaign to take care of our pressing needs today and our future dreams. It was through your initiative that our board of governors was formed, and I am pleased that our good friend Mr. Stone has issued a \$100,000 campaign, challenge campaign grant to help us kick off this campaign.

This campaign has already received a half a million dollars in donations and grants, and we're ready to get rolling. But we still have a roof that leaks. [Laughter] More importantly, we have students who need financial aid, which means that we need more support. We need support from individuals; we need support from corporations; we need support from people that care -- that have a care about whether American education is in the future of places like this private initiative high school.

Providence-St. Mel is well known as the hard-work high school only because students here are willing to invest in their own futures. They want to learn. And with our help, they will.

Thank you, sir.

The President. Well, thank you very much.

Well, with what I've seen and heard, I certainly am impressed with what you're doing. And, again, as you acknowledged over here when I left after that one visit a year ago, I made a phone call and told Clem Stone what I had just seen and experienced here. God bless him. He was immediately involved.

Our first stop here, as you know and as you mentioned, was in the computer room. And Sister Jeanne and the students demonstrated what they're learning in that advanced computer class. And, you know, from time to time, I talk about the importance of training for people that are seeking work. And some think it just takes a magic wand. But nearly a fourth of our unemployed never had a job or are just entering the job market for the first time. Many are willing to work. But they lack the skills in a fast-changing economy that is geared, more and more, to computers. And retraining today's work force for tomorrow's world is a great challenge and a great opportunity.

Here at Providence-St. Mel, you're providing a lesson in leadership. And I understand that 44 percent of your recent graduates indicated that they intend to pursue a science-related career.

I annoy some of the people around me by, on Sundays, getting a hold of metropolitan papers and looking at the help wanted ads. And there are scads of pages of them. But it's very significant. And I've been impressed that lately they're not just ads of employers looking for someone to come to a job, but they're, literally, ads that are begging and advertising for people in the fields of science and electronics and engineering and so forth. And it reveals that, with all of our great unemployment that we want to solve, there are jobs out there that are going unfilled simply because people haven't been trained to fill them.

But you're making -- meeting that need, I should say, with this computer class, and making it mandatory for graduation. I remember back when a year of Latin was mandatory. [Laughter] I had trouble with that. I think I'd have more trouble with the computer. [Laughter] But just as schools must meet the change for the future, so must government, business, and labor work hand in hand to help in this effort.

As I mentioned, the board of governors has been established -- or it has been mentioned, I should say, to spearhead a campaign, and I understand for -- to \$6\1/2\ million campaign to finance scholarships, meet operating needs, and to buy needed equipment. Well, this will help Providence-St. Mel be geared up to what lies ahead. And I'm delighted that you've asked me to be the honorary national chairman of this drive and I'm honored -- is the way I feel. And I was going to say here -- and you did it for me -- I was going to say, ``I accept." [Laughter]

But, you know, many computers are now being used in schools, and they are made available and donated by private firms. Business knows, I think, that it's in their interest to have young people who are trained for tomorrow's tasks. As a matter of fact, I'm asking businesses across the country to meet these challenges.

I've been told that the school -- and you told it here again -- that the school is known as the hard work high school. I'd heard that already clear back in Washington. And I've seen it proven today. It really is.

Poet Tennyson said, ``I dipt into the future, as far as the human eye could see, Saw a Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be." Well, Providence-St. Mel has looked into the future and seen what a wonder it is. And the biggest reason that you're sitting right here is that you're not afraid to dream, to get involved, and to care. So, let us pray that Providence-St. Mel will be a shining example to schools all across this country. The future isn't something to fear, and today's problems can be tomorrow's victories, and that working together, there isn't anything that we can't do.

So, to all of you and to all of those young people that I know are in another room hearing this, I thank you all. And God bless you all for what you're doing.

Mr. O'Mara. Thank you, Mr. President.

We'd like to discuss now as a group what this means to Providence-St. Mel. We'd like, perhaps, to have an opportunity to share -- some of our students and some of our fellow board members -- our comments about the future, our energies and our goals ahead. And I thought Mr. Stone might like to start at this time.

Mr. Stone. Well, Mr. President, in behalf of the millions of Americans -- and not only adults but young people -- who are in this great movement of self-help, since your Inaugural address, that you are the government and therefore you should learn how to help yourself and share with others. Fantastic things have happened, and specifically with Providence-St. Mel's. In addition to the computers, they are working with me on the human computer -- the brain and nervous system -- so as to achieve any goal whatsoever under the concepts we call the Art of Motivation With PMA.

And something more: Our allies -- the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, West Germany, and Japan -- those of us in the private sector are sharing with them your concepts that any government that spends more than it takes in -- whether it's welfare or anything else -- and has no way of paying it off, moves to the left, and the Communists take over. And in view of the programs that are successful here with youth organizations in the United States, they are following our concepts of uniting and learning the concepts of self-help. And Scotland -- the Boys' Club which had been in business for over 50 years was insolvent. The bank was going to close in on them. And in line with the American spirit of self-help, the trustees were willing to learn, get to work. And what has actually happened -- the organization has moved ahead very swiftly in raising funds from the private sector. The same way in Wales and also in West Germany and now in Japan.

In behalf of those citizens of these countries with whom I and others have worked, in behalf of all of us in America who are following your inspiration of self-help, I want to thank you.

The President. Well, thank you.

Mr. O'Mara. Perhaps one of the students at Providence-St. Mel would like to make a comment. Volunteers?

Mr. Canty. Yes. My name is Gregory Lamarr Canty. I'm a senior here at Providence-St. Mel High School, and I plan to attend Los Angeles University of California.

I would like to make a suggestion to Mr. James T. Hadley that here at Providence-St. Mel we require more math -- 3 years of math and 3 years of science, since this school is college prep -- so that when the student does go into a highly competitive university, such as Yale, Princeton, Harvard and so on, they won't be lost when they get into the classroom.

Mr. Hadley. My response to that -- I am James Hadley, chairman of the board of trustees -- we are very welcome to hear these suggestions from students. We have a committee that works on the curriculum, and I'm sure they will be glad to hear this. And they are sitting around this table today. So, I'm sure we can provide you with that wish.

Mr. Canty. Thank you.

Mr. O'Mara. Any board member would like to make a comment?

Ms. Smith. Yes. I'm so excited about the dynamic leadership that is exemplified in our principal, Paul Adams, and the really primary example of breaking the cycle of poverty that he has developed here at Providence-St. Mel that I wish, Mr. President, that we could find a way of taking it across the country. All the technical training in the world doesn't do any good if the other parts of a well-rounded education aren't taken into account. And the discipline and drive and high moral standards that Principal Adams has set up in this school are what make the total student and what is responsible, in my opinion, for making these students such exciting examples of what our American youth can be.

The President. If there's one word in his vocabulary that's never been a part of his vocabulary -- and I almost want to whisper it so he can't hear it and never learns about -- ``permissiveness." [Laughter]

Mr. O'Mara. Perhaps one of the young ladies who are students at Providence-St. Mel would like to make a comment.

Ms. Houser. I would like to ask a question that I would like to direct to President Reagan. How did you get interested in Providence-St. Mel High School?

The President. Because of your principal here, we heard, in Washington -- heard about this school and what had happened and almost happened -- that it almost was to be closed down -- and then heard what one man, who surrounded himself then with others who felt as strongly as he did in the teaching line and so forth, what he was doing here, literally hanging on by his fingernails to keep this school open. And I wanted to see it and came here and visited and saw that everything I'd heard was true; met the students, had a question-and-answer session with them, and was even further impressed. And that's when I went out of here and called Clem Stone and said, ``Something like this has got to be continued. Nothing must happen to this."

And I'm back here now, and you can feel it before you get in the building almost, the vibrancy of what's taking place. But, you know, you lit a candle. We saw it all the way in Washington.

Mr. O'Mara. We have time for one more comment. Bob, would you like to -- --

Mr. Ewing. Mr. President, I'm delighted to be here and to help in this great cause. This is a demonstration of some things that, I think, are near and dear to your heart, like private initiative, private enterprise, and creativity. And it has taken a mixture of that across the Chicago community to make this success story. And I and Banker's Life and everybody else here are very happy to be a part of that.

Could I add just one other thing that'll strike home to you? I grew up in a small town in north Missouri, and I used to listen to baseball games. [Laughter] And there was a sportscaster by the name of Reagan, and he did such a great job that -- in re-creating the games -- that it took all of us in our little town about 2 years before we found out he was doing it off of a ticker tape. [Laughter] I thought he was in Wrigley Field here in Chicago. Now, that's creativity.

The President. Well, thank you very much.

In those days a team didn't have its own announcer -- [laughter] -- and so there were six or seven of us doing the same game, and you had to kind of compete for the audience. And some of our competitors were actually at the ballpark. And I was waiting to get it off, as you say, a telegram. And then you'd do the home games of both teams. When the Cubs left town, you stayed and did the Chicago White Sox games. There was a depression on, and we did all of that.

But it was just that, you know, I'd get something that said S-1-C. And you can't sell very many Wheaties if you just excitedly yell ``S-1-C." [Laughter] So, I would say, ``Dean comes out of the windup. Here comes the pitch, and it's a called strike, breaking over the outside corner to a batter that likes the ball a little higher -- "[laughter] -- --

I have a story that I've told at times -- and maybe I shouldn't take the time to tell it here -- but one day a fellow on the other side of the window -- it wasn't a ticker tape, it actually was -- he had headphones and would get the Morse code and tap it out, and a slip would come under a little slit in the window to me. And I saw him start to type, so, I started another ball on the way to the plate. And he was shaking his head. [Laughter] It was the ninth inning, and it was the Cubs and Cardinals. And I didn't know what -- and when I got it, he said, ``The wire's gone dead." [Laughter]

Well, with those other six or seven fellows out there broadcasting, I knew that if I said, ``We will pause for a brief interlude of transcribed music until they get the wire fixed," everybody'd just switch stations, and I wouldn't have any audience left. So, I thought, there's one thing that doesn't get in the scorebook. And Billy Jurgens was at the plate, and I had him foul one off. [Laughter] And I looked at Curly on the other side of the window there, and he was just -- he was helpless. And so, I had Dean use the rosin bag, and then he shook off a couple of signs to take up some time. Then he threw another one.

Well, I had this -- when he hit a foul ball this time behind third base, and I described the two kids that got in a fight over the baseball. [Laughter] And then he fouled one to the left that just missed being a home run by a foot. And about 6 minutes and 45 seconds later, I think I had set a world record for someone standing at the plate -- [laughter] -- --

And suddenly Curly started typing. And then when he handed me the slip, I started to giggle, and I could hardly get it out. That wire said Jurgens had popped out on the first ball pitched. [Laughter] But maybe I shouldn't tell that. You -- people are suspicious enough of those of us in politics. [Laughter]

But I did hear you speak about the roof leaking. And I hope when you get it fixed -- if you learn anything in fixing it that could help us with some leaks out of the White House, I'd be glad to hear how to do it. [Laughter]

But, again, this is such an example. And I tell you the truth; just recently, we had a Cabinet meeting -- the Secretary of Education being heard -- that what has been brought to the attention of the Federal Government as a nationwide problem is the lack of science and mathematics teaching in so many of our public schools that it is going to lead to a great shortage in the fields of engineering and science that we need so desperately in this new world. And to sit here and hear a student talking about that very thing and asking for courses of this kind -- why did somebody think it was a problem that we should settle in the Cabinet Room in Washington? This is where it should be settled, right out here where people like you are doing this job.

Mr. Adams. Thank you. Thank you very much.

I just want to say to you, Mr. President -- I want to thank you for sharing our dreams. And I'd also like to thank a lot of -- there are many other people who are across this country who are sending in 10 and 15 dollars per month. I'd like to thank some foundations. I would like to thank some businesses in this country for believing in Providence-St. Mel's. It has been a difficult job, but it has been the most rewarding job in my life. I wouldn't change places with anyone this day. To receive the President at Providence-St. Mel for the second time is unbelievable.

Thank you very much. And we're going to move on, Mr. President.

*[The President spoke at 2:20 p.m. at the meeting in the high school cafeteria. Following his remarks there, he and Mr. Adams went to the school auditorium, where the President spoke to the student body at 2:49 p.m.]*

The President. You can't see it, but it's a ``Welcome Back to Providence-St. Mel." Thank you very much. I'm most grateful.

And I'm not going to make another speech at you, because I know that you've -- I've been told that you were hearing what I was saying down there in the other room. But I can't tell you how happy I am and how excited to be back here where I was last May. Now, I know that one class has left since then and another one has come in, so most of you here were probably here then, at the same time, and we had a chance for a visit and a question -- --

Hey, sit down. [Laughter] I'm sorry. So, you see I am excited.

But what has taken place and what's going on here is an inspiration, I think, to everyone that knows about it. And what our job now is to make sure that more people in this country know about it and find out what can be done if you decide to make it be done, which is what you've decided here. And I think you will agree with me, you've been very blessed in a way that we all know about. But you've been blessed in another way, and that is having Paul Adams here as your principal.

But you just keep at it. And what you just recited here is -- that's what has made this nation from the very beginning. We have a theory that was brand new that had never happened before in the world, a theory with regard to government, a theory with the right of individuals to fly as high and as far as their own initiative and ability would take them without being penalized for it, and yet at the same time, to keep an eye out for someone that needed a hand up, because we were taught that also. And this is what you're doing here.

And, believe me, the opportunities out there are limitless for those that are learning as you are learning and who are determined to make a place for yourself in this nation and in this world. And I am so reinspired by coming here and seeing you again and seeing the progress that you've made. And I'm going to do what I can to spread the word.

You know, being in the job I am, you get some complaints sometimes from people out in the country, and some that have to do with education and just feel that the problems are so big for them. And they want to know if the government can't think of a way to help. Well, I think sometimes the government is the problem, not the answer. And you've done it the other way.

Maybe we should have a government program in which people who call in and want to know what they can do to solve some terrible problem in their education system is send them a roundtrip to Chicago and the address of Providence-St. Mel -- and let them come here and find out. [Laughter]

And lest some of our friends in the media think that that's all you do is to keep your mind on the things you should, the studious things -- also they're 15 and 2 in basketball this year.

Well, they tell me that I have to go; I've got some more meetings. But I can tell you that, from here on, they won't be nearly as exciting or as much fun as they've been here with you again.

God bless you all.

