

Column: College Community Connection

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Educating Leaders for Tomorrow

By Dr. Al Roberts

Every February, people across the United States observe a holiday commonly known as Presidents' Day. The official federal designation is George Washington's Birthday. Virginia and a few other states preserve the original focus on Washington, but many states honor an expanded slate that includes additional presidents.

Washington was an advocate for education. In his first annual address to Congress on January 8, 1790, the president exhorted lawmakers with these words: "There is nothing which can better deserve your patronage than the promotion of science and literature. Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness."

Since Washington's time, many of his successors have reiterated similar sentiments regarding the role education plays in maintaining the freedoms outlined in the U.S. Constitution and other founding documents. They have observed that educational institutions are a fundamental ingredient for a properly functioning democracy.

Thomas Jefferson envisioned "a system of general instruction, which shall reach every description of our citizens, from the richest to the poorest." Jefferson authored the Declaration of Independence and served as our nation's third president. He also worked to establish the University of Virginia.

Abraham Lincoln, the 16<sup>th</sup> president, talked about the importance of education from his very first political speech. When running for a seat in the Illinois General Assembly, he told the people about his vision for a country where "every man may receive at least, a moderate education, and thereby be enabled to read the histories of his own and other countries, by which he may duly appreciate the value of our free institutions."

In 1938, Franklin D. Roosevelt, our 32<sup>nd</sup> president said, "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education."

And, more recently, our 44<sup>th</sup> president, Barack Obama noted that "gutting our investments in innovation and education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine. It may make you feel like you're flying high at first, but it won't take long before you feel the impact."

At Southside Virginia Community College, we honor the legacy of our nation's historic leaders by educating and training leaders for the future. Academic and workforce classes prepare students with the knowledge necessary to develop their roles and responsibilities as participants in our ever-changing

society. Classroom and extracurricular activities provide opportunities to expand leadership skills. Through counselors and clubs, we provide mentors who help students develop their intellectual, personal, and social skills while gaining a greater self-awareness of their own values and directions.

Tomorrow's leaders are in classrooms today. If you would like to be among them, visit [southside.edu](http://southside.edu) or call 434-949-1000 for more information.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at [al.roberts@southside.edu](mailto:al.roberts@southside.edu).