

Remarks by Nelle H. Taylor, Chairperson
South Carolina Commission on Higher Education
Meeting of the Commission, Thursday, May 5, 1988

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I cannot conceive of any circumstance which would permit us to begin this meeting today without expressing our continuing grief and shock over the death of one of South Carolina's outstanding personalities in higher education.

I refer, of course, to the traumatic loss of Dr. Martha Kime Piper, the President of Winthrop College.

Dr. Piper had been in South Carolina and at Winthrop for a brief two years, a fact which is difficult for me to believe, considering the dramatic impact which she had already recorded in higher education in our State.

We know that she had the expected although extraordinary qualities of intelligence, the ability to articulate, presence, and dignity which we find in institutional presidents as a matter of course.

We know that she had also an uncommon courage to formulate and implement propositions and programs which were pioneering in their concept and controversial in their nature.

We know of her commitment to equality and dignity for all human beings which her life modeled and which led her to sign with the NAACP the first fair share agreement in the nation with a public institution.

We know of her firm commitment to accountability and assessment that motivated her to propose to the Commission on Higher Education the first experimental program in those activities in public higher education in the State.

We know of her interest in the entire system of higher education, above and beyond her dedication to Winthrop College, which compelled her to be among the initial and most outspoken supporters of The Cutting Edge higher education program of 1988, the first major new advance in higher education in South Carolina in 25 years.

We know that her energy and intellect led her to numerous on-campus policy initiatives, and facility projects, which placed Winthrop in the forefront of progress in higher education in our State.

And we know that her ability, reputation, and competence led to her appointment as vice chairperson of the Commission on the Future for South Carolina.

For all of these things, and for the energetic and marvelous personality she brought to us and to South Carolina and Winthrop, we are grateful.

There is no administrator who displayed more intelligence, grace, charm, and good humor in all of our deliberations here and in other committee rooms than Martha Kime Piper. So much so that it is truly difficult to fashion for her any gesture or memorial which would do justice to her contribution here.

We have elected, however, to do the best that we can. And it is my honor to present to the acting president of Winthrop College, Dr. Michael Smith, a financial gift from the members and the staff of the Commission on Higher Education to be used for scholarship purposes for students at Winthrop College.

We wanted our memorial to be a human, vibrant, living tribute that would help others. We believe that is what Martha Piper would have desired, for her whole life was a study in advancing the cause of young people.

Today we take thankful notice of her tenure and are in awe of how much we have lost by her death.