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EAST PEORIA, IL--The United States may be as educationally "at risk" in December 1984 as it was militarily after Pearl Harbor (1941) and in the industrial/technological field after Russia launched Sputnik (1957), according to Dr. Stanley G. Rives, Eastern Illinois University president.

In an address Friday night to the Chamber of Commerce here, Rives said he made the comparison from the message in the report, "A Nation at Risk," issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education more than a year ago.

According to the report, the president said, "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity . . ."

Gov. James Thompson has taken that charge seriously, Rives declared, and outlined in an address at the University of Illinois a series of proposed remedial steps for elementary, secondary and higher education.

Rives said the steps include attracting and retaining the best of the young people in teaching, making clear the central purposes of schools, have strong educational leadership, improve organizational and administrative efficiency, and improvement of funding for elementary and secondary education.

For higher education, the Governor recommends more rigorous admissions requirements, stronger basic disciplines, attracting and keeping superior faculty, and renovation of outmoded facilities.

"If you believe as I do," Rives said, "that what he is proposing is right for students, right for economic development, and right for the future of Illinois, write him and tell him so."

The president declared "that while a good education is important to the individual, a good educational system is essential to national viability . . . I believe the recommendations of the Commission point the right direction for the nation and those of Governor Thompson the right direction for Illinois."

"The most precious asset or natural resource of any society is well-educated people . . . and no society can prevail unless it is willing to make a significant commitment to the education of its young people," Rives told his audience.

As the year 2000 approaches, Rives said, "the yet unrealized dreams of our human community are still clear: a world where war is a part of our past rather than our future; a world where want, hunger, illness, discrimination, and poverty are no longer a part of the human experience . . .".

These "impossible dreams are worth the struggle," Rives added.

He said there was nothing insignificant about Pearl Harbor or Sputnik "and there will be nothing insignificant about an effort to assume our future viability as a nation by improving education as a fundamental part of its infrastructure."