WASHINGTON, D.C.—Richard L. Bowditch, president of the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, today called for a stronger school system and said “nothing must hamper its freedom of inquiry and discussion.”

“This nation was conceived and rose to world leadership on the ideas of nonconformists and free-wheelers, of men and women of integrity and wide vision, of individuals with bold far-reaching minds, who insisted on crossing the frontiers of the unknown,” Bowditch said. “... They dared to disagree on many things, but our country and our culture are infinitely richer and stronger for their challenge.”

In his “keynote address” prepared for the annual meeting of the national business group, opening today, Bowditch said a strong school system should be America’s “first line of defense against freedom-killing communism.”

He said America’s objective “beyond all others” is “to prevent the outbreak of an all-consuming World War III.” This requires spending “unknown billions” for arms, skilled negotiating and “above all ... the united effort of the American people and our allies,” he said.

But Bowditch, a Boston steamship executive, said this country cannot act as a world leader and defend itself without the “difficult and painful process” of molding its youth for democratic responsibilities.

“To our public school teachers we turn over the most precious thing in America,” he said. “But all too frequently, we ask these teachers to carry on their vital work in cramped, outmoded physical plants which we should never tolerate in our businesses—and at salaries less than we pay our secretaries.”