

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

WKU Archives Records

WKU Archives

5-8-2004

UA45/6 Remarks Upon Receiving Honorary Degree

Mitchell McConnell

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [Leadership Studies Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), [Military and Veterans Studies Commons](#), [Public Affairs Commons](#), and the [Public Policy Commons](#)

This Transcription is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in WKU Archives Records by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

Mitch McConnell
SENATE MAJORITY WHIP - UNITED STATES SENATOR FOR KENTUCKY

PRESS RELEASES

PRESS OFFICE

**Senator McConnell Addresses The Western Kentucky University
Graduating Class Of 2004**

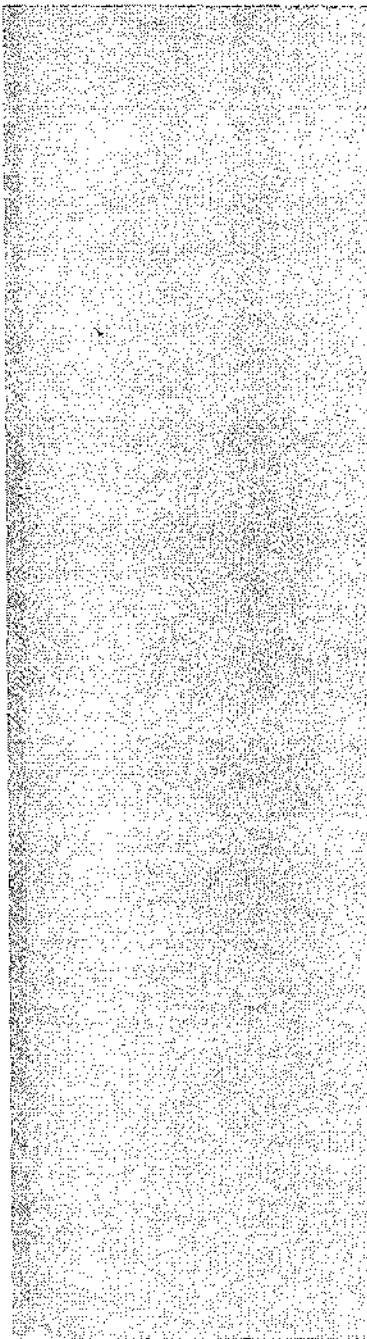
from the Office of Senator Mitch McConnell

Saturday, May 8, 2004

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell today addressed the graduating class of 2004 at Western Kentucky University's Commencement. During the ceremony, Senator McConnell received an honorary degree from Western Kentucky University. The text of Senator McConnell's Commencement Address follows:

"Thank you for this special honor. I've given many commencement addresses over the years, but I want you to know that this is the first graduation at a public university in Kentucky at which I've had the privilege to speak. As your senior senator, it is a great honor to be here at Western Kentucky University.

"I want to thank my friend President Gary Ransdell, the administration, board, and faculty of Western Kentucky University, and most of all, the students for welcoming me to be a part of your important day. Gary, I know you are proud of this institution and its people, but I hope that you also know how proud we are of your leadership. Western's success is a direct reflection of your selfless commitment to this fine university.



"To the Graduates of the Class of 2004: congratulations on your achievements. It may have seemed to many of you as if this day would never arrive. But let me assure you that your parents are sitting here thinking how it feels like only yesterday that you left their home for the University on the Hill. And they deserve recognition and gratitude for their support – and patience – that has helped you to reach this important moment in your life.

"When I first accepted this invitation to speak to you today, I was tempted to focus on an important problem in American foreign policy that has soured my view of one of America's allies. I wanted to express my outrage that some Italians would exploit, for their own financial gain, the most recognizable mascot in college athletics.

"However, the Italians – unlike some of their neighbors – have been valuable allies in the war against terrorism in which all free societies have a stake.

"So the Italians today will get a pass for attempting to steal Big Red, whom the entire world now knows belongs to the Hilltoppers of Western Kentucky.

"Had the French stolen your mascot, I would not have let them off so easily.

"Let me turn to a more serious theme that I would like to sound: America's place in the world today, and your place in America.

"On every continent, America is a symbol of unprecedented freedom, democratic pluralism, and economic opportunity. For many, America is a wonderful and inspirational dream. Its allure is so powerful that one can find American cultural artifacts in the most remote corners of the earth: Coca-Cola in Kazakhstan or Microsoft in Micronesia. But America is more than the sum of its exports.

"Far more important than America's exported goods are America's exported values and principles. Our democratic form of government has been widely imitated, and the success of liberty in America has helped to inspire democratic revolutions around the world.

"I believe our success has to do with the wise deliberations of our founding fathers, whose patient negotiations established a representative

government properly situated between the poles of anarchy and tyranny. Their goal was to design a political system that protected the rights and freedoms of individual citizens, and gave these individuals a stake in maintaining their government. They accomplished this by founding our government on four central principles: freedom, equality, accountability (or the rule of law), and responsibility. Freedom and equality guarantee a level playing field for all Americans, while accountability and responsibility encourage citizens to make positive contributions to the nation.

"We take for granted that all are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights, but this concept was nothing short of revolutionary 200 years ago.

"A byproduct of the central roles that freedom and equality play in our country is that, while all citizens have an equal right to make their own decisions and pursue their own opportunities, we are all held equally accountable for our actions.

"Freedom without accountability can lead to anarchy. We must be careful, and patient, in building democratic institutions that last. This lesson is appropriate, given our efforts to bring freedom and stability to Afghanistan and Iraq.

"Building a Democracy is easy. Maintaining one is a true challenge. Upon leaving the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin was asked by the crowd what type of government the delegates had decided upon. Franklin is said to have responded: "A Republic, if you can keep it."

"We all have a responsibility to uphold and maintain our democratic institutions. This responsibility is not mandated by the Constitution, but is part of the American ethos.

"Because each American has an equal stake in our government, and because each of us controls our own destiny, we all have a self-interest in maintaining a society that respects our rights. We each have a role in governance and a responsibility to enforce our nation's principles.

"This self-interest in maintaining a peaceful and productive society has made philanthropy in America so common. The sheer number of American non-profit organizations dedicated to alleviating hunger, poverty, disease, or other social problems both at home and abroad is truly staggering. These organizations and the people who fund them – whether their

donations are for \$10 or \$10,000 or the priceless gift of time – recognize their contributions as an investment in their community, American democracy, and international stability.

“Philanthropy directly affects you, for without it, this University would be a very different place.

“The Guthrie Tower, for example, would not stand as a symbol of this University were it not for the generosity of Lowell Guthrie and his family, pillars of the local community. The tower honors the memory of Lowell’s brother Robert, a fallen soldier, and all of the soldiers who have given their life to defend our freedoms. Its construction is not the first expression of the Guthrie family’s generosity to Western, nor will it likely be the last.

“They don’t do it because they are proud alumni. In fact, not one of them has attended Western. They do it because they are members of this community, and feel an obligation to help a place they have grown to love.

“You don’t need money to be philanthropic. A case in point is John DuBarry, a 21-year old U.S. Marine from my hometown of Louisville. John is currently serving in Iraq, where his fellow Marines are helping to run an academy for abandoned children and orphans. In addition to John’s daily responsibilities with the Marine Corps, he has voluntarily taken a 12 year-old Iraqi boy under his wing and is teaching this young child about America and how to speak English. This Iraqi youth has had it rough: his mother is dead and his father beat him and forced him to sell weapons to pro-Saddam radicals.

“Eventually, the boy turned his father in to the U.S. occupation forces as an insurgent and was taken in by the Army. When John’s unit took over command of the area, he noticed that no one was looking after this young child. And right there he decided to teach him English. John’s impact on this young Iraqi’s life is immeasurable, and even if this Iraqi never becomes fluent, he will forever remember the kind-hearted American who displayed such compassion for his fellow man.

“It is tempting to say folks like the Guthries and John DuBarry are unique, and in a sense they are. But their generosity is emblematic of so many Americans who give back to their communities. People with hearts like Lowell and John are all around us, and they make America great and strong.

"No nation in human history has been as powerful as the United States is today. The gap between the economic, military, and even cultural influence of America and any other country is so great as to be unbridgeable.

"And the irony of America's preeminent place in global affairs is that we did not plan for it. In other words: we did not seek greatness; greatness came to us. "America is not strong because its leaders make good decisions about the economy; it is strong because its leaders have devolved such decisions to each American.

"Economic growth is determined by the hard work and risk-taking of the local hardware store, grocery, restaurant, or small business owner, not by bureaucrats or politicians in Washington.

"Fortunately, many nations have followed our lead. After the American Revolution, a tide of democracy swept through Western Europe. And the Twentieth Century saw freedom emerge in previously closed societies around the world. These liberated masses built democracy upon the rubble of tyranny, and by doing so have contributed to global stability and economic prosperity.

"But just as some nations have found that democracy brings unprecedented freedoms and opportunities, so too have despotic regimes viewed liberty a threat to their own authoritarian rule. Some tyrants have chosen to isolate their citizens from the outside world in an effort to suppress the aspirations of their citizens to be free. Others have sought to challenge liberty's march by waging war against democratic countries. America's status as the world's leading democracy and economic superpower brings with it global interests and a global responsibility to meet tyranny's challenge.

"Brave American soldiers have sacrificed their lives in pursuit of freedom and security on every continent. America's foreign policy interests are informed not merely by threats to our national security, but also by our compassionate values and commitment to the belief that all mankind yearns - and deserves - to be free. We have faced grave threats to our nation since its birth, and without continued vigilance to defend our way of life we will surely face greater threats in the future.

"Indeed, in your lifetime alone, the U.S. has dispatched troops to Panama, Kuwait, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Grenada, Somalia, the Philippines, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. And because the United States acted when no

other country would, America is safer and millions who would otherwise be suffering under despotic regimes are free.

"This is happening now in the Middle East. Already, Afghans are preparing for national elections that will determine the first truly democratic government in their history. And on June 30, the United States will hand over more authority to the Iraqi people in preparation for free elections that will take place next year. In less than 1000 days, Iraq will mark a transition from one of the most repressive governments on the planet to the single most representative government in the Arab world.

"We must acknowledge that the cost of freedom is not borne by nations alone, but by the men and women who fight to protect it. Soldiers such as Specialist Pat Tillman, a former Arizona Cardinals football star who gave up a multi-million dollar NFL contract to join the elite Army Ranger unit, and First Lieutenant Robert Henderson, a native of Warren County who served with the Kentucky National Guard, embody America's commitment to peace and liberty. These brave men made the ultimate sacrifice last month in Afghanistan and Iraq, where they were killed in combat. We honor their memories and their achievements by building a greater America, and by heeding the call to defend freedom where it is threatened.

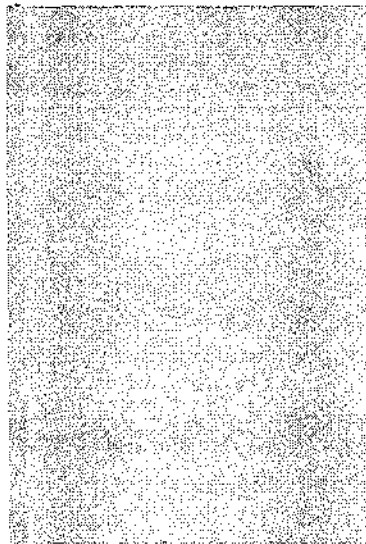
"At another critical juncture in American history, Abraham Lincoln promised: "We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom." This quote is inscribed on a bench near the Guthrie tower. And it is as true today as it was at Gettysburg 140 years ago.

"Today, I ask you to consider not simply America's place in the world, but your place in America. And reflect on how you can uphold America's values in your daily life.

"Just as America has a commitment to provide security for its citizens in a hostile world and defend the principles we hold dear, so too do each of you have responsibilities to your family, classmates, community, and country.

"Some of you may join the military after graduation. Others have friends and family currently serving with the armed forces.

"There are many ways to contribute to making America a better place, and service in the military is but one of them.



"Each of you can have an enormous impact on solving the problems that face your local community.

"By devoting your time to civic organizations, you make your community stronger and America a better place.

"By donating money or time to churches and charities, you more efficiently provide services to the homeless and hungry than can the federal government.

"By teaching, or coaching, or mentoring you can directly impact someone else's life. Role models - more so than government programs - can improve and reform troubled lives.

"While no one can be entirely sure what the future holds, America's values, objectives, and standing in the world will remain the same. There is no doubt that America will remain a beacon of hope and freedom to all the world.

"And it is your charge to uphold our principles and traditions in the face of an uncertain future."

-30-

☐ _____

381-A Russell Senate
Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
phone: 202.224.2541
fax: 202.224.2499



_____ | Kentucky photos courtesy of _____