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## UA45/6 Perspective & Commitment

Hays Watkins

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REMARKS OF  
HAYS T. WATKINS  
PRESIDENT, CSX CORPORATION  
COMMENCEMENT  
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY  
MAY 9, 1981  
PERSPECTIVE AND COMMITMENT

THANK YOU, DR. ZACHARIAS. IT IS A REAL PLEASURE TO BE BACK IN BOWLING GREEN WITH YOU GRADUATES, YOUR PARENTS, FRIENDS AND FACULTY.

TO THE GRADUATES,--ISN'T IT A GREAT FEELING? THIRTY-FOUR YEARS AGO I SAT WHERE YOU ARE SITTING --WITH THE SAME FEELING OF ACCOMPLISHMENT.

TO THE PARENTS -- YOU SHOULD SHARE THIS FEELING OF ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR YOU DESERVE SPECIAL RECOGNITION FOR YOUR GUIDANCE, PERSEVERANCE AND SUPPORT THROUGH THESE PAST IMPORTANT YEARS.

CERTAINLY, THE FACULTY OF THIS GREAT UNIVERSITY DESERVES  
RECOGNITION OF THE HIGHEST CALIBER. YOU CHARTED THE COURSE,  
MONITORED THE PROGRAM, AND HELPED MAKE THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATION  
A REWARDING ONE.

OF COURSE, ONE CAN ONLY SPECULATE JUST HOW REWARDING THE  
FUTURE WILL BE FOR THOSE OF YOU GRADUATING. EACH OF YOU WILL  
TAKE DIFFERENT PATHS AND SET DIFFERENT GOALS. SOME WILL SUCCEED  
EARLY; OTHERS WILL TAKE MORE TIME. SOME WILL NOT REACH THEIR  
GOALS, AND UNFORTUNATELY, SOME WILL FAIL.

BUT I AM NOT HERE TODAY TO TALK ABOUT FAILURE. LET ME TAKE  
ABOUT 15 MINUTES OF YOUR TIME AND TRY TO PUT THE EXCITING PATH ON  
WHICH YOU ARE ABOUT TO EMBARK INTO PERSPECTIVE WITH THE REAL  
WORLD OUT THERE; AT LEAST THE WORLD HAYS WATKINS HAS BEEN VIEWING  
OVER THE YEARS.

FIRST OF ALL, IF YOU LEAVE HERE TODAY REMEMBERING JUST TWO  
WORDS, I WILL FEEL VERY GOOD. ONE, I HAVE ALREADY USED, THE WORD

PERSPECTIVE . THE SECOND WORD IS THE WORD COMMITMENT .

REMEMBER PERSPECTIVE, AND COMMITMENT, THAT'S ALL I ASK.  
FOR PERSPECTIVE, AND COMMITMENT OR LACK THEREOF, IS CRITICAL TO  
ALL OF US IN AMERICA THESE DAYS.

NOW, A FEW QUESTIONS OF YOU GRADUATES.

JUST WHAT IS IT YOU ARE COMMENCING TODAY? IS IT A NEW LIFE?  
A NEW CAREER? IN WHAT SORT OF ENVIRONMENT ARE YOU COMMENCING?  
IS IT GOING TO BE AN EXCITING EXPERIENCE OR JUST A "DRAG"? SOME  
OF YOU MAY EVEN BE ASKING SHOULD I "COMMENCE" AT ALL?

THESE ARE ALL VALID QUESTIONS FOR SOMEONE SITTING WHERE YOU  
ARE TODAY. WHEN ONE LOOKS AROUND, IT'S EASY TO BE DEPRESSED -  
INFLATION, A QUESTIONABLE JOB MARKET IN MANY SKILLS, ENERGY  
SHORTAGES, INTERNATIONAL CRISES, ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATIONS - IT  
GOES ON AND ON.

MAGNIFYING THESE PROBLEMS IS THE CONSTANT EXPOSURE TO  
CRITICISM AND DOUBT. YOU SEE IT AND HEAR IT EVERY DAY. THE

UNFORTUNATE RESULT, OF COURSE, HAS BEEN A CONTINUING EROSION OF OUR NATIONAL CONFIDENCE AND HOPE. WE HAVE LOST OUR NATIONAL PURPOSE. THE OLD DRIVE, THE OLD RESOLVE TO MAKE THINGS BETTER IS IN A SOME WHAT WITHERED STATE.

HEAVEN KNOWS THERE ARE PLENTY OF REASONS FOR QUESTIONING. BUT IF YOU THINK EVERYTHING IS GOING DOWNHILL THESE DAYS, I IMPLORE YOU TO LOOK AROUND WITH A BALANCED PERSPECTIVE,

START WITH A FEW BENCHMARKS. FOR ONE, LOOK AT AMERICA AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY FOR A SHARP CONTRAST WITH THE PRESENT.

IF YOU WERE BORN IN 1900 YOU WERE EXPECTED TO DIE AROUND 1948. FATAL EPIDEMICS WERE COMMON AND DISEASE WAS ACCEPTED AS A PART OF LIFE. CHILD LABOR WAS THOUGHT TO BE A NORMAL PART OF RUNNING A BUSINESS. ONLY THE PRIVILEGED FEW LIVED OTHER THAN IN SQUALID CITY TENEMENTS OR UNDER HARSH RURAL CONDITIONS. AND, BY ALMOST ANY YARD STICK, SOCIETY THEN WAS GENERALLY MORE INDIGENT, MORE IGNORANT AND MORE INTOLERANT.

THEN THE COUNTRY PASSED THROUGH TWO WORLD WARS. AFTER THE SECOND ONE, OUR NATION ENJOYED A LONG, SUSTAINED PERIOD OF EXTRAORDINARY GROWTH AND PROGRESS. AMERICANS BECAME ACCUSTOMED TO MORE PLENTIFUL JOBS WITH BETTER PAY. FOR THE FIRST TIME, MILLIONS OF FAMILIES, WHOSE PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS HAD BEEN ABLE TO BARELY EKE OUT A LIVING, BOUGHT THEIR OWN HOMES. FOR THE FIRST TIME, TOO, THOSE FAMILIES, WHOSE FOREBEARS HAD GRAMMAR SCHOOL EDUCATIONS --- OR HIGH SCHOOL, IF THEY WERE AMONG THE FORTUNATE --- SENT THEIR CHILDREN OFF TO COLLEGE.

AMERICA WAS THE WORLD LEADER BY ANY STANDARD. WE WERE THE STRONGEST NATION ON EARTH ... OUR TECHNOLOGY WAS THE GREATEST ... OUR FOOD PRODUCTION EXCEEDED ANY OTHER COUNTRY'S ... MEDICAL ADVANCES WERE UNSURPASSED ... WE WERE THE ENVY OF THE WORLD. OUR CUP OF CONFIDENCE RANNEETH OVER.

PERHAPS WE EXUDED TOO MUCH CONFIDENCE. OR MAYBE WE BEGAN BELIEVING WE WERE SO IMPORTANT WE FORGOT HOW TOUGH IT WAS TO

REACH A POSITION OF STRENGTH IN THE FIRST PLACE. WHATEVER THE REASON, WE LOST OUR PERSPECTIVE AND OUR COMMITMENT .

YOU ALL KNOW WHAT HAPPENED NEXT. WE BEGAN TO BELIEVE WE COULD ERADICATE ALL OUR EVILS SIMPLY BY ENACTING LAWS AGAINST THEM OR COVERING THEM UP WITH MONEY. FORGET THE FOLLOWUP. FORGET THE HARD WORK. WE DECLARED A BUREAUCRATIC PAPER WAR ON A WHOLE HOST OF NATIONAL ILLS. BUT THESE ACTIONS, WELL MEANING AS THEY WERE, DID NOT AUTOMATICALLY BRING AN END TO THE EVILS THEY WERE MEANT TO ATTACK. MANY DISADVANTAGED ARE STILL HUNGRY; PREJUDICE STILL CASTS ITS SHADOW, AND A HIGHER STANDARD OF LIVING DOES NOT GUARANTEE BETTER LIVES.

WHEN THE PROBLEMS DIDN'T GO AWAY, WHAT HAPPENED? WE BEGAN REACHING FOR SCAPEGOATS. THEN CAME VIETNAM, WATER GATE, INFLATION, IRAN --- AND ON AND ON.

EACH OF THESE EVENTS HAVE HAD THEIR EFFECT, OF COURSE, BUT NONE OF THESE PROBLEMS OR ILLS SHOULD HAVE, INDIVIDUALLY,

UNDERMINED A NATION'S RESOLVE.

PERHAPS ONE OF THE NEGATIVE FORCES AT WORK HAS BEEN OUR LEADERS TELLING US FOR YEARS WE DON'T HAVE PROBLEMS, WE SIMPLY HAVE "CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES."

THIS SEMANTIC NICETY HAS HAD SOME SEVERE IMPLICATIONS FOR ALL OF US, BECAUSE OUR MINDS INTERPRET THE WORD "OPPORTUNITY" DIFFERENTLY THAN THE WORD "PROBLEM." THE WORDS HAVE QUITE DIFFERENT CONNOTATIONS; AND EACH COMES WITH A DIFFERENT SET OF VALUES AND A VERY DIFFERENT SENSE OF URGENCY.

YOU CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES. THEY COME AND THEY GO, AND IF YOU MISS ONE, YOU CAN FIND ANOTHER, IF YOU'RE AN ALERT INDIVIDUAL. TOO, IF YOU MISS ONE, YOU DON'T CREATE A CRISIS.

ON THE OTHER HAND, A PROBLEM DOESN'T SIMPLY GO AWAY, SOMEHOW, IT MUST BE DEALT WITH, AND IF YOU DON'T, IT CAN CAUSE A CRISIS.



ALL RIGHT. WE AMERICANS ARE CONFRONTED ON ALL SIDES BY  
CRISES OF VARYING BUT FEARFUL PROPORTIONS, WHAT SHOULD BE YOUR  
OUTLOOK AS GRADUATES FOR THE FUTURE, NEAR-TERM AND LONG-TERM?  
WHAT SHOULD BE YOUR ROLE IN THE COURSE SET FOR THE NATION?

STAND BACK AND TAKE A TOTAL PERSPECTIVE BEFORE YOU DECIDE,  
DON'T LET YOUR LIFE BECOME SO FRAGMENTED THAT YOU LOSE ITS UNITY  
AND SIGNIFICANCE.

WILL DURANT SAID IT MANY YEARS AGO. "OUR CULTURE, IN MANY  
WAYS, IS SUPERFICIAL AND OUR KNOWLEDGE DANGEROUS BECAUSE WE ARE  
RICH IN MECHANISMS AND POOR IN PURPOSES."

"WE MOVE ABOUT EARTH WITH UNPRECEDENTED SPEED, BUT WE DO NOT  
KNOW, AND HAVE NOT THOUGHT, WHERE WE ARE GOING, OR WHETHER WE  
SHALL FIND ANY HAPPINESS THERE FOR OUR HARASSED SOULS."

I SAID EARLIER THAT PERSPECTIVE, OR LACK OF IT, IS CRITICAL TO ALL OF US THESE DAYS. THE GREAT ECONOMIST JOSEPH SCHUMPETER GIVES US ANOTHER EXAMPLE. HE SAID, "THE REPORT THAT A GIVEN SHIP IS SINKING IS NOT DEFEATIST. ONLY THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THIS REPORT IS RECEIVED CAN BE DEFEATIST; THE CREW COULD BE SITTING DOWN AND DRINKING. BUT IT COULD BE READY ALSO TO MAN THE PUMPS."

CLEARLY, WE DON'T KNOW HOW MANY MORE DEGREES OF LIST OUR NATION'S SHIP WILL ENDURE BEFORE WE GO TO THE PUMPS IN EARNEST, BUT I AM CONVINCED THAT WE CAN RIGHT THE SHIP --- BUT ONLY AFTER COMMITTING TO A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF GOOD, HARD WORK.

PERHAPS THE PUMPING HAS ALREADY STARTED. LAST FALL, IN THE VOTING BOOTH, AMERICANS SIGNIFIED THEIR DOUBTS THAT BIG GOVERNMENT HAS THE ABILITY TO SOLVE ALL OUR PROBLEMS. IN OUR SYSTEM, THE GOVERNMENT CAN ONLY ALLOCATE AND DISTRIBUTE RESOURCES. IT CANNOT CREATE THEM, AND IT CANNOT CREATE CAPITAL. ONLY AMERICANS, WORKING TOGETHER, CAN DO THAT.

SO I THINK THE ANSWER --- IF THERE IS JUST ONE ANSWER --- IS  
A RETURN TO THE FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS WHICH HAVE MADE OUR COUNTRY  
STRONG FROM ITS BEGINNINGS. WE MUST REAFFIRM OUR COMMITMENT TO  
HIGH MORAL AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND VALUES. MOREOVER, WE'VE  
GOT TO START BELIEVING AGAIN THAT THOSE PRINCIPLES AND VALUES  
WILL WORK. OUR NATIONAL GROWTH STOPPED FOR A VERY SIMPLE REASON;  
WE STOPPED REALLY WORKING TO MAKE OUR COUNTRY GROW AND IMPROVE.

SOME OF OUR LEADERS HAVE ASKED US TO ACCEPT LESS; I THINK  
THAT IS WRONG. INSTEAD, WE SHOULD ASK OURSELVES TO RISE TO  
GREATER ACHIEVEMENTS, AND, IN SO DOING, WE WILL HAVE MORE FOR  
ALL. TO PARAPHRASE THE ADVERTISING OF ONE OF OUR BROKERAGE  
HOUSES, I AM BULLISH ON AMERICA. I'M VERY OPTIMISTIC, FOR WE  
HAVE GREAT POTENTIAL IN OUR COUNTRY TODAY. YOU HERE REPRESENT  
PART OF THAT POTENTIAL.

IT IS TIME, ONCE AGAIN, TO DREAM DREAMS OF A BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL AMERICANS. AS PRESIDENT REAGAN SAID IN HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS: "LET US RENEW OUR DETERMINATION, OUR COURAGE AND OUR STRENGTH. AND LET US RENEW OUR FAITH AND OUR HOPE. WE HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO DREAM HEROIC DREAMS."

YOU CAN HELP WITH MAKING THOSE DREAMS A REALITY, FOR YOUR COUNTRY AND FOR YOURSELF. DON'T TURN FROM THE PROBLEMS; EMBRACE THEM EAGERLY --ONE AT A TIME --- IN MANAGEABLE PORTIONS --- AND COMMIT YOURSELVES FULLY IN BRINGING DREAMS TO REALITY. RALPH WALDO EMERSON SAID IT THIS WAY: "THIS TIME, LIKE ALL TIMES, IS A VERY GOOD ONE --- IF WE BUT KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH IT."

WITH YOUR OVER-ALL PERSPECTIVE AND YOUR TOTAL COMMITMENT -- YOU WILL KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH IT.