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GENERAL RUSSELL DOUGHERTY'S ADDRESS
AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT
BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY
9 MAY 1975

What a thrill it was for me to receive President Downing's invitation to share this unique and this memorable occasion with you -- to congratulate each of you on your achievements and to share with the faculty, with your families, and with your friends the special meaning of this day.

The opportunity to return to my and to my wife's University, my father's University, my brother's University, my cousin's, my nephew's and my niece's University at this 111th annual commencement occasion, filled me with excitement -- with pride -- with nostalgia, of course -- with considerable humility:

- what could I say?

- what should I say?

- what useful contribution could I make to those years ahead of you, and particularly those of you finishing your undergraduate period?

Samuel Langhorne Clemens helped me find the answer . . . and taking my cue from him, and paraphrasing "Mark Twain," I concluded "Just tell the truth . . . it will surprise some people and it will astound the rest."

Well, I have no intention of surprising or astounding you today -- graduation itself is traumatic enough . . . But I do want to discuss with, and share with you, my reflections on some things that I take to be truths -- truths that may be helpful as you pass through the exit of your undergraduate experiences and step across the threshold of your post-graduate years.

It's easy to tell the truth about absolute things -- quantifiable facts, things that have metes and bounds and that can be verified, indisputable verifiable physical facts . . . but these are not the truths I want to discuss for a few minutes today. I want to delve into some far more subjective "truths" that I see as affecting you and me and our country very deeply -- things that transcend a perceived or an individual experience, and take on a fundamental reality that affects all Americans . . . and that in fact affects our world.

The first of my "truths" is that the post-graduate world you are entering in 1975 is going to be dramatically different from anything any of us has ever experienced before! No one knows what the future holds for us, of course. Even Alvin Toffler may have understated the extent of future shock -- for the changes under way about us are truly exponential. And the rate of change is unlike anything ever seen before.

Just this month the United States concluded a decade of involvement in an intense, but limited, conflict in Southeast Asia and concluded it in

a tragic, forlorn manner -- a tragedy without parallel in our two-hundred-year history. The implications for our nation's future -- both internal and external -- are at best uncertain. We are even divided emotionally in our country over the disposition of the political refugees who like thousands of others in decades before have turned to us for succor.

The uncertain international balance of trade, the unusual shift in the distribution of monetary credits, the unpredictable business future, the rampant unemployment and inflationary spiral in our national economy -- all are without precedent in our experience.

The so-called energy "crisis" is at least that -- and, in October '73 we had just a glimpse of both the political and the practical implications of our increasing dependence on foreign petroleum. For those of us who went through this period in Western Europe, the dependence is far more apparent -- and the alternatives even fewer.

The balance of military power between the Communist and the Free World as those words are understood is also undergoing an ominous change -- a shift in relative strengths without precedent in our Twentieth Century. The unquestioned margin of military superiority possessed by the United States throughout our lifetimes has now given way to an objective of "essential equivalence" with the Soviet Union, and that is the best we can hope to achieve. Any many of our countrymen are seriously debating whether we even need to try to achieve equivalence!

The NATO Military Alliance, the most far-reaching international experience in collective security ever achieved in modern history, is undergoing a period of extreme turbulence and major internal readjustment with futures that are also uncertain.

We have little or no experience in this uncertain world that promises to be so vastly different from that we have known throughout our lifetime. And all of this was emphasized in typical manner by comedian Bob Hope when he was delivering the commencement address at his son's graduation from Georgetown University several years ago. After Mr. Hope outlined some aspects of the unknowns for the new graduates going out into the uncertain post-graduate world, Mr. Hope concluded by quipping, "Don't Go!" But as Mr. Hope knew then, and as we know now, you are going . . . and you are going now . . . so let's look at a more positive and a more encouraging "truth."

So the second of my "truths" is that, as changing and as different as this emerging world will be, we are far better prepared to cope with it than any comparable group or nation has ever been. Our basic qualifications -- our people, our Nation, our resources, our economy, our heritage -- all of these things converge and serve to equip us to handle change and challenge and to handle it far better than any nation or civilization before us. Our government was born in revolution and for two centuries we were the unquestioned masters of change and the change of earlier established values.

You graduates -- and millions of college graduates like you -- have been treated by your heritage and by your university to a resplendent smorgasbord of educational opportunities and enriching experiences . . . you have had a thorough exposure to the world of ideas, ideals, and values. You are the men and women of modern America and you have been exposed to the richness of higher education. And, you are not alone -- you join in a vast group of highly-educated and talented countrymen, fortunately steeped in those same ideas, ideals, and values.

Possibly from a similar personal experience, you may be able to share with me a very vivid memory from my college days here at Western when the richness of study and education suddenly expanded my horizons . . . and gave me a personal inspiration and an expansion of my personal horizon that has stood the test of time and stress.

I have been told that there is present today a most lovely and respected professor, Miss Frances Richards, a revered and respected English teacher by many and certainly by this student of hers, -- and, for years, the faculty adviser to the College Heights Herald. Miss Richards had a way of filling her students with the richness of the subject, of inspiring them in this case with the genius and beauty of Shakespeare's writings. And to this day -- and throughout the intervening 36 years -- I have remembered how Miss Richards highlighted the useful, the reflected wisdom in the advice of the Bishop as he counselled King Richard: "My lord, wise men ne'er sit and wail their woes, but presently prevent the ways to wail."

What a magnificent formula for individual success, for national success in the face of adversity! Don't sit and wail your woes -- be up and a-doing -- working to eliminate the cause of your trouble! This advice has stood me in good stead through the years, and I commend it to you . . . as would Miss Richards if she were here just as she did to me.

In your years at Western, you have had exposure to learning experience -- academic, of course, extracurricular, and interpersonal learning experiences. Fortunately for our country this experience that you have had is no longer unique among our fellow citizens. The college-level exposure to higher learning is now a wide-spread experience for a large percentage of our young men and women. Our Nation is made stronger by the virtue of this rich base of educated and prepared people-- and we should be better prepared to respond to the uncertainties of changing times.

I hope this process of learning and growth will never cease for you -- it certainly hasn't for me. I remember a line from a prayer by one of our military chaplains just within the past month; as he prayed he said, "Lord, forbid that we shall ever cease to wonder." For it is wonder that is the stimulus to learn and to reason -- wondering about the uncertainties and the unknowns that are continually encountered throughout our lives. In the decades ahead -- as never before in the history of man -- that continuously creative process of wondering, of learning and

reasoning will be challenged severely. But you have the basic prerequisites for this challenge.

This richness of personal preparation for the future that we enjoy is also matched by the inherent strength and vitality of our country. Ours is truly a great nation -- and it is made even greater in the eyes of those of us who have had opportunities to see, to study and to live in other nations of the world, and the incomparable capacity and potential of our people fortunately is matched by the vastness of our national resources.

True, we are experiencing a very disquieting, turbulent social process in our country -- old orders and social values are under attack, new ones are emerging. Increasing rights and freedoms are being extended to millions of Americans. Traditional, legal, economic barriers are falling . . . as are discriminations among our races and between the sexes. Many are clinging doggedly to the earlier social values, while others are pursuing change with the unrestrained ardor of a revolutionary. But no one can deny that the social orders are changing, and we must adapt to these changes.

The real test for us as a nation will be to see if we, as a nation, can adapt to the changing social values of our times without losing our precious democratic heritage that made it possible to change! And you will be in the midst of this period of transition.

The third "truth" -- and one that I recognize to be far more argumentative, is that, internationally, we are in a period of unusual disarray that is trying the soul of our nation and its diverse, pluralistic citizenry. We have had thrust upon us the realization of our profound dependence on other nations -- and are just beginning to understand, reluctantly, that we truly are an interdependent world and not the master of our fate. We have validated John Donne's admonition that "No man is an island unto himself." We are bound up in a web of complex and inescapable obligations and interdependencies that are causing frustrations -- that disrupt our domestic aspirations and portend a weakening of national security.

As a nation, we have had to accept great nation responsibility -- simply because we are a great and leading nation. And we can't avoid this leading role . . . our own security and our freedoms are totally involved. If we drop the ball of leadership in the Free World, there is no one else to pick it up -- not on our side, at least. And this is an inescapable fact -- and it's an immutable reality.

We cannot afford to retreat from or relinquish this international role of leadership -- even though the role is burdensome and not an easy one to play. To isolate ourselves in some form of "fortress America" is not really a choice that is now ours . . . time and circumstance of history have progressed to where this choice is not available to us. For, if we try to isolate ourselves, we will not be more free, we will not be more secure, or we will not be less burdened -- but the risk will be greater,

our burdens will increase and our fundamental values will be endangered. We are in and of this world, and time has long passed when we had the isolationist's choice of disengaging from our world and withdrawing to our shores and behind our oceans. Changed circumstances have just eliminated the option.

In my judgement, we will be as a nation soon be put to the test to see if we can continue to live up to this role of leadership in this complex international milieu -- unlike any that we have ever experienced before. And, our Administration and our Congress will be put to the test as they represent us -- as they have never been tested before -- the test of living up to the dual obligation of our government (as that dual obligation is set forth in our Constitution) to "promote the general welfare" and "provide for the common defense." Notice the choice in the Preamble to the Constitution is not "either/or" -- it is not a choice of whether we will have domestic social programs or we will provide the essentials for defense . . . The Preamble declares that we must do both! And we must; for the alternative is too awesome to contemplate.

One of the hallmarks of our form of democracy -- and one that has set the United States apart from other experiences in democratic government -- is that, while the majority has the right to govern, it must do so with full recognition and protection of the rights of the minority. The majority must restrain itself in order that the minority is not suppressed.

But there is another significant aspect of our particular democracy, an aspect that is often overlooked . . . and that is the obligation of the minority to respect the right of the majority to govern and to rule.

Now this is the rule of responsible people acting responsibly under law. This is what has made our government and democracy great, and what has sustained it over two hundred years, this interaction of the rights and obligations of minorities and majorities.

These basic ingredients of greatness are still here. And, if properly used, they will enable a responsible majority and an equally responsible minority to concert our efforts -- as we must -- in solving the serious domestic social problems of our nation while, simultaneously, providing for the continued security of our nation from intimidation and coercion, and even outright attack.

These domestic pressures of today -- this aftermath of Vietnam -- the problems of our economy . . . all are serious. But we must not -- either by drift or by mistaken choice -- fulfill Winston Churchill's sardonic prophecy concerning the weakness of traditional democracies. In the final volume of Churchill's history of World War II, Triumph and Tragedy, he wrote: ". . . and so the great democracies triumphed, and were now free again to resume the follies which has so very nearly cost them their lives." Are we going to resume those follies?

Well, the fourth, and final, "truth" that I want to discuss is that we as Americans are unique among democracies and uniquely blessed with a

two-hundred year tradition of individual freedom as it has never been known. This is a brand of individual freedom of thought and action unlike that ever enjoyed by any other nation and certainly for any other period of two centuries . . . strong enough to survive countless tests - - to overcome centuries of racial discrimination, and to stand as the model for the world. But we must recognize that individual freedom is not free . . . and it is not absolute. It must be protected zealously, and it will not be assured if we ignore the continuing price of freedom and the burdensome obligations that we have to accept to keep it as a birthright for our American progeny.

In Gulag Archipelago, writing from the wretched depths of a soul and body filled with the anguish and with misery of a total loss of freedom, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote the most poignant phrase I have ever heard - let me share it with you: "Free men do not know the value of things!"

Yet ours is a world full of "things" . . . most of us have or will spend a lifetime getting, making, using things. Things for our own benefit -- things for the benefit of others. This morning you will be getting a very important "thing" -- your degree or your post-graduate degree. Things are all about us -- it's how you get them, and it's how you use them, and the relative value you place on things that are the proper subjects for your judgement.

We can easily become slaves to things -- and they can take on a value that is inordinate and transitory - things must be put in proper perspective with the transcendent value of individual freedom and dignity.

We would be wise indeed to heed the counsel of Solzhenitsyn -- who's an authority on the tyranny of totalitarianism.

The history of man's civilization is replete with the stories of people and nations who became absorbed in and sated by their prosperity -- their accumulation of things. They trusted the material trappings of their affluence and their culture to secure them like a talisman. And, if you dig deeply enough into the ruins and the wastelands, you can find these rotting artifacts and "things" of these fallen civilizations.

Let's not repeat the mistakes of these lost civilizations and the destroyed nations of the past who found that their brilliance and their high standards of living didn't offer one bit of protection from uncouth, armed hordes with low standards of dying. Let's not let our nation and our civilization suffer corruption from within and corruption and atrophy of our basic institutions and erosion of fundamental values . . . that destroy from within, and that make us incapable and unwilling to stand up concerted against intimidation and coercion from without.

So, on this 111th Commencement of our great University, I offer you the prospect of participating directly in the preservation of our free society. And what a challenge this is . . . and what an even greater challenge it promises to be in the future. I urge you to use to the fullest the experiences, the wisdom, the maturity and the valuable interpersonal relationships -- nurtured here at Western and culminated by this graduation ceremony. Be aware of your environment, immerse yourselves in the

complex involvements of our Nation's social programs, our security programs, and the extensive human relationships that underly all that we do. Bring informed, responsible opinions to bear on the issues of our times . . . and present them responsibly. It is easy, it's even popular, to criticize and find fault . . . to tear things down. The real test of responsibility in time of change is to be constructive -- not only replace the old with something new, but make sure it is something better -- and better for all of our people.

The majority of you will live to carry the principal responsibilities of our nation well into the 21st Century. The responsibility for our economy, our social programs, our security policies, and our human relationships will soon fall on your shoulders. The continued freedom and prosperity of our nation will rest in your hands.

"Free men do not know the value of things." May that devastating judgment of Solzhenitsyn never be passed onto you . . . nor passed on to our country. Rather, may your things -- and the value you attach to your things, and the thing that you do as your thing -- make you and keep you and our country free.

Thank you Dr. Downing and thank you, graduates for the honor of sharing this very special morning with you . . . May God bless you.