

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF

COMMERCE

John T. Connor, Secretary

Washington, D.C.

Office of the Secretary

For Release at 9 AM Friday, July 29, 1966

REMARKS BY ALAN S. BOYD, UNDER SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR TRANSPORTATION, PREPARED FOR DELIVERY AT COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES FOR THE SPRING TRIMESTER GRADUATING CLASS OF PARKS COLLEGE OF AERONAUTICAL TECHNOLOGY, ST. LOUIS UNIVERSITY, EAST SAINT LOUIS, ILLINOIS, AT 9 A.M., FRIDAY, JULY 29, 1966.

It is a pleasure for me to come to the campus of Parks College of Astronautical Technology to participate in the trimester commencement exercises at this great center of learning, St. Louis University.

Congratulations are in order on two fronts here today, it seems to me.

First, I want to congratulate your college which I understand will observe the 39th anniversary of its founding this coming Monday (August 1).

Secondly, I want to extend my heartiest congratulations to this Class of 1966 which has completed its undergraduate work in a fascinating new field and is about to go forth into a world which is just as fascinating and is developing at a pace to match the space age, itself.

On occasions such as this, commencement speakers tend to discuss matters of great philosophical impact, to draw the outlines of the great society in which the listeners are about to become contributing members, or to distill their

own experience in the hope that something they have done or observed in the past will be of value to the listener's future. I shall adopt this latter course.

There is one significant characteristic of the American society today which has troubled me for a long time. And I hope to say a few words here today which may help you to recognize it, may help you to deal with it, and may help you help the Nation to dispel or at least dilute it.

That significant characteristic is fear.

As President Franklin D. Roosevelt saw it in his first inaugural address in March 1933:

"The only thing we have to fear is fear, itself."

He was speaking of fear in the context of a great and deep depression which had all but laid the Nation low, but I submit that his statement still is true as a general proposition.

I shall discuss fear in America today in a slightly different context in the hope that you will not unwittingly be drawn into it as your way of life.

First, let me issue a disclaimer. Certain fears are completely sound, but these tend to be transitory. I refer to such fears as whether one can obtain a good job; whether one can find and marry a true soulmate, and fears for the health and welfare of a loved one who is ill.

Obviously at a time of graduation from college or university, all but the few with absolute self-confidence have some fear as to whether or not they will achieve success in life. To some extent this can be resolved only by time and circumstance. It depends, too, on whether the pattern has been cut to fit the cloth. Few of us ever have the chance to be President or the genius to emulate Thomas Edison. Happily, few of us set our goal or standard of success at these levels.

The fears with which I am concerned are at their most virulent in the area of political philosophy. The terms, "Communist," "Fascist," "Leftist," "Red," "Reactionary" are epithets symptomatic of these fears.

Too many of us are Don Quixote tilting at some windmill of our imagination. Too many of us see some formless monster of conspiracy about to take away our freedom or our property.

These people, dominated by a sense of fear that knows no understanding, see our elected officials as mere puppets to the great conspiracy. To them, the people who manage our business enterprises are part and parcel of the plot. The fact that these leaders and entrepreneurs are our neighbors who send their kids to school with ours, attend the same churches, have the same charge accounts, means nothing at all.

Everyone with whom they disagree or don't understand becomes a plotter against them.

This has a way of growing and has grown to a point where a very substantial number of our people fear the power structure -- whatever its political bent -- as an enemy to personal and corporate welfare.

We are all guilty of letting fear substitute for reason. How many times have you picked up your daily paper to read about some outbreak of violence around the block from your home or in some distance place in the world?

If it's an eruption difficult of explanation -- as most of them are -- it's a safe bet you'll read some where that "the communists are heading this" . . . or that "communists inspired the uprising if they aren't actually directing it."

We give this political concept far too much credit. It is undoubtedly responsible for some, but certainly not all, the ills of the world. The world, itself, and mankind, itself, regardless of political faith, have little trouble manufacturing their own turmoil.

This fear, this failure to understand, this ignorance, this kind of bigotry shows itself in many other ways. As you leave school and travel across this land of ours, your journey may be jolted by big, expensive roadside billboards which cry out for the impeachment of respected public officials.

It's hard to believe that in this land that has come to be known as the bulwark of democracy, that in this Nation which spends more on education than any other in the world, this kind of bigotry, obviously born of fear, can muster that kind of support. But these billboard impeachers don't take the trouble to weigh issues and try to understand, they just want somebody's scalp regardless of the fact that the men they shout against have long since proven themselves and have often won the endorsement of the electorate.

Even our Nation's highest tribunal, the Supreme Court of the United States -- one of the great works of man -- can't escape this kind of venom. And why? Because it issues the common sense decision that all children, regardless of color or creed, are entitled to equal educational opportunity.

Every man is entitled to his own opinion, of course, but by the same token, everyone of us is obligated to make that opinion worth something, make it stand for something, make sure it is worth defending -- and then to have the will and guts if you will, to defend it against all comers.

All is not bleak in this regard, however. The Nation currently is engaged in a great debate or discussion of this country's involvement in South Vietnam.

I don't want to line myself up with the hawks or the doves from this podium, but I do want to make it clear that I am not arguing with my President over technicalities or metaphors at a troubled time such as the country is now going through.

The point I wish to make, however, is that the debate that rages demonstrates the very strength of the Nation. I don't agree with those long-haired devotees of the tattered sweatshirts who dot most picket lines today. But I'm not afraid of them because I think I understand them. And rather than hate them, I must admit at least a measure of respect for them because some of them, I am sure, believe in what they are doing and have at least bestirred themselves enough to have an opinion -- even though it seems to me they have chosen a rather unorthodox way of expressing it.

My concern is that one cannot fear our institutions and the actions that flow from their operations while maintaining a belief in our democratic process. My concern is that fear of people and of ideas -- dissent if you will -- leads to hatred and ultimately to support for even dictatorship. This fear nurtures a desire for decisive leadership to effect simple answers to our problems and to strike down the enemy once and for all.

As part of this psychosis, we are faced with slogans, mottoes, creeds and catchwords, meaningless, undefined but calculated to repel or attract. Unfortunately, this has become a widespread phenomenon of American life not limited to political processes above.

The simple fact is that ours is a very complex society maintaining an unavoidable role of leadership in a rapidly changing world. There are no simple answers and there are no permanent answers in a dynamic society. Our strength as a democratic nation is in our diversity of background, interests, opportunities and desires. Our freedom of choice permits the pursuit of almost any goal or idea within reason.

In this environment strong, purposeful leadership seems possible only when the Nation is subjected to clear and pressing danger. Such a case occurred during the Cuban missile crisis. The evidence was convincing that we were all literally "under the gun." It was quite possible for anyone in the Continental United States to conjecture that he might be killed any minute -- and many of us did so conjecture. At that stage, it was appreciated that if anyone knew how to straighten out the situation, it was the President. He had available all the information and all the resources. The President had unified public support for his leadership. And President Kennedy fully confirmed the trust we placed in him.

Compare the public attitude at the time of the missile crisis with that on any major public issue of today. The many points of view on any one issue combine to create great dissonance. Respected columnists, bankers, public officials, historians, economists and manufacturers take diametrically opposed positions and belabor each other mightily with tongue and pen. If we can assume these are generally reasonable men (and I think we can) two conclusions may be drawn.

One is that the issues are complex by their nature. Each of the participants is seeking the correct answer in the light of his understanding of the values of America.

The second is that rather than fearing the success of any point of view we should cherish the opportunity to be informed; we should insist on it.

Decisions must be made in any organized society. In the nature of things, most decisions are made for the future and are usually based on less than complete knowledge. The human race is noted for its imperfections. It should be anticipated that many decisions will turn out to have been less than ideal. But in our America, decisions DO represent the consensus or the will of the majority.

President Truman was a great disciple of the credo that if the people are given the facts, they can be trusted to make the right decision. I must admit to being a camp follower of that down-to-earth idea.

We have a greater percentage of educated citizens with each generation. We have an efficient postal system for communicating views. We have an open society. Except for the security affairs of government, our activities tend to be public. We have a well informed press. Radio and television provide almost instantaneous coverage of debates. Great libraries throughout the country contain vast stores of knowledge. We are provided ample notice of when issues are to be decided and our public officials are available to see and hear interested citizens.

Under the circumstances, it appears safe to ignore those who fear the giant conspiracy. Our political system functions only because it has public support. It helps to recall that every generation of Americans has received dire warnings by the fearful of imminent catastrophe. The subjects that were calculated one-hundred years ago to scare people out of their wits are still with us.

In the meantime, we have become healthier, wealthier, better educated and housed, with more leisure time and with no loss of our personal freedoms.

The moral of my story is that fear of the action of our political system is irrational. For some, fear of an imaginary enemy provides a kind of neurotic thrill. It is the partner of ignorance and bigotry in too many instances.

Fear is fantasy so long as you and your contemporaries are interested in the kind of world in which you live. So long as you are willing to participate in making decisions, the future is yours.

As President Johnson has suggested, we should "beware of those who fear and those who doubt, and those who rant and rave about the dangers of progress."

The late, great Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Dag Hammarskjold had a word to say on this subject in an address delivered at the 180th anniversary of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, from which sprung this Nation's own Bill of Rights. Said Mr. Hammarskjold:

" 'Freedom from fear' could be said to sum up the whole philosophy of human rights."

Great men and philosophers down through the ages have given their attention to this subject, discussing it from every angle, applying its impact to virtually every walk of life.

There is a thought running through most of these writings that shedding the light of truth, of knowledge, on such fear is the best antidote of all. This has been said in many ways in many tongues, but was never better put, I suggest, than by our own former Ambassador to the United Nations, Adalai E. Stevenson.

Commenting on an incident in which he was roughed up and spat upon by pickets opposed to the idea of a United Nations, Ambassador Stevenson said of his tormentors:

"I don't want to send them to jail, I want to send them to school."

Well, you in this audience have been to school. And what I am trying to say to you today is that we are looking to you and millions of your contemporaries throughout the country to help shed a little light from the knowledge you have gained, to participate actively in the developing issues of your day, to help us find a way to make sure that reason is behind our judgments -- not hate and fear.

In his splendid inaugural address, President Kennedy counselled us:

"Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate."

If I may be permitted to paraphrase those immortal lines, in closing, I would say:

"Let us not fear responsibility. But let us not fear to be responsible."