



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE
TO THE ALLIANCE COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT CEREMONIES, CAMBRIDGE SPRINGS,
PENNSYLVANIA, SUNDAY, JUNE 4, 1972

I congratulate you members of the class of 1972. Four years ago, you began a long voyage and now you have arrived. You are to be commended. I must, too, bow to your parents and your professors who helped to make this possible. If being a student is more difficult than it used to be, being the parent or teacher of a college student is also more difficult, and -- I might add -- much more expensive!

I should also like to bring to you the very best wishes of President Nixon. I met with him before he left on his trip and mentioned my visit here to Alliance. He asked me to bring you his congratulations and when I mentioned the College's interests in Polish-American affairs, he added, "I may have some news for them." It looks like he was right!

I would certainly like to congratulate the more than 300,000 members of the Polish National Alliance. I am personally impressed by that organization and by its part in founding this College. The founding of a college at any time is a tremendously exciting event, but the story of Alliance College is particularly thrilling. Look back sixty years ago when the dream became a reality. How many of the first students realized that this college was not just for them but for those who came after? And how many of them were so very poor with only a few cents that they could put away at the end of each week? I know these people for they were of my parents generation and I know how difficult their lives were. Yet these early members of the Polish National Alliance had the vision -- the dream -- of having a college and they had the faith to start to work. Time has proved them right and they have my admiration. I am learning more and more about the Polish spirit.

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We have during the past year been working on a number of projects with the Polish Government. This work began when I visited Poland last Fall and met with the Prime Minister and a number of other Ministers. During my stay, I signed a United States-Poland Memorandum of Understanding on research co-operation in transportation. I learned while I was there the Poles are particularly alert to all transportation problems -- particularly highway safety. And here -- in auto safety, particularly in the area of human factors -- is the best area for joint Polish-American research co-operation.

And while in Rome, I also met with Cardinal Wyszyński who was attending a Synod of Bishops there. He was in great form and very sharp and keenly interested in Polish-American affairs. The Polish spirit is as strong as ever!

I wish for you young graduates today many things in the future. I hope you have been imbued here with some of the faith and daring of the men and women who dreamed and founded this school.

So today we hold a graduation ceremony, don't for one minute think that you have reached the last page of the book of knowledge and now can close the covers. No, my friends, you've just about reached the end of the last chapter in the first book on the shelf. You have learned how to learn -- and the real 'fun' is just beginning.

I have a number of college degrees on my office wall. They're honorary degrees, And for the sake of argument, let me admit a sense of pride in those framed documents. But there is one other degree that I possess -- a degree that I would not exchange for all the others that could possibly be bestowed upon me. It is a degree from a two-year College of Study.

It is a degree that represents not a Springtime afternoon, with academic robes and a commencement oration.

Rather, that degree represents the Son of Italian immigrants; a young man who trudged through Boston's snow and slush with books and drafting tools to a small technical school called Wentworth Institute.

It represents classroom hours during which I thought I'd never make hide nor tail out of what the Professor was trying to explain. It represents falling asleep over textbooks in my Mother's front room -- while my neighborhood pals were out on the town.

It represents two years of work -- two years of learning how to learn and today you have reached the conclusion of four years of similar work. Be proud of those years! And be proud of this school where you spent that time!

I talked of your time here as being a process of "learning how to learn." Keep that well in mind. As you go out into the world of commerce or the professions -- as you take up other formal education pursuits, if that is in the cards -- be the best in everything you do. Even if -- at the beginning, it's only a file clerk.

You will find very soon that your superiors recognize that here is a person anxious to do an outstanding job. And you won't be a file clerk for long. You will be advancing. You will be assuming increasing responsibility.

And this will happen because you have never stopped learning.

And speaking of doing something with your lives, let me get away from the rhetoric for a moment and put in a plug for a field of endeavor that I know will benefit from your involvement. I speak of the field of public service.

Now I don't mean I expect every one of you to go out and run for President or campaign for the United States Senate. I'm sorry, it just doesn't work that way. But I most certainly expect each and every one of you to register to vote; and I expect you to always know the candidates and the issues -- even in small town school committee elections. I certainly expect each and every one of you to know how candidates are selected, and to participate in that selection within the party of your choice.

I expect you to speak the truth and live the truth and repudiate those who do not have the courage or the faith to work with the system.

I expect you to consider that our problems are not really those of a failing society -- but rather, flow from the conscience of an expanding one. Our descendants -- generations in the future -- may well look back on the decade of the 1970's as a real turning point in history; they may well take note of an ancient people known as the 'Americans' who accepted their responsibility to lead the human race toward a new era of progress. "A new awakening took place in that decade," the textbooks might say. "Americans turned the tide as they sharpened their outlook on what the future could be if they really wanted to make a difference -- if they really wanted to get involved."

The trail that lies ahead has been blazed by men of extraordinary vision. Among these was Joseph Wood Krutch, scholar and drama critic who forsook New York City for the Arizona Desert -- there to live with his books and thoughts and to commune with nature much in the manner of a modern day Thoreau.

Shortly before his death in 1970, Krutch wrote: "The 70's may be the beginning of the end, or the beginning of a new civilization. If .. the latter, it will not be because we have walked on the moon or learned how to tinker with the genes ... but, because we have come to realize that wealth, power, even knowledge are not good in themselves but only instruments of good or evil."

There, I submit is sound wisdom expressed in simple Christian words. Their meaning is crystal clear -- your generation holds the power to destroy all life. Or the power to create a far better world.

I would remind you of the words of St. Vincent De Paul, who wrote, "Perfection does not lie in ecstasies, but in doing well the will of God."

I can't imagine a better interpretation of Christian duty in the secular world.

It reminds public servants like myself, of course, that we have a two-fold responsibility; to be a dual servant of God and of the people, to know what belongs to Christ and what belongs to Caesar.

And when you appreciate this difference, this separation, you as individuals can have great impact on the world of public affairs. You can be open to change, yet rooted in certainty. You will be committed to learning and living creatively -- without rancor, bewilderment or greed.

Yes -- keep learning to learn. Retain your passion for love and for truth. Have confidence in yourselves, have hope in mankind, have faith in God. Re-dedicate yourselves to the realization that alone we can do nothing, but with faith in God and with his help -- and with a determination to live up to his Commandments -- there is nothing we cannot do.

And as you venture forth into meaningful lives, remember always what it means to be young. Remember always what it means to want to stand up and be counted.

Remember that these years were some of your best years, and they have helped shape your future lives.

You have my very best wishes for a bright future filled with genuine happiness and progress.

God speed.

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