



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, JOHN A. VOLPE, AT ANNUAL DINNER MEETING OF ASSOCIATION OF MASTER KNIGHTS OF THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA, MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 1970, 7:15 P. M., WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

I begin tonight by reminding you of your knighthood. A knight -- in the best and traditional sense -- is a gentleman raised to honorable rank and pledged to the chivalrous qualities of gallantry, courage, virtue and honor. Gentlemen, we have need of these qualities today as never before in our history!

There is widespread concern in our land over the state of our Nation. This concern centers on our youth and the relationship of these young people to the future of our country. The concern is legitimate. One of the tests of the strength of a Nation is its ability to raise and train good leaders for the future.

We must realize in talking about youth that we are dealing with a very large group. The number of young people in our country -- the 15 to 25 year-old age group -- totals 36 million-- 36 million people. That is more people than there were in

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the United States at the start of our Civil War -- which is pretty impressive when you stop to think about it. Now what are the facts about this vast segment of our population!

The word "Dropout" is so widely used, it would seem almost synonymous with today's youth. Yet, the facts tell us differently. In 1959, only 60 percent of our youngsters were finishing high school. Only ten years later -- by last year -- that figure had jumped to an amazing 78 percent. In 1959 only 31 percent of our high school graduates went on to college. Last year that figure was up to 45 percent.

When campus disorders were at their peak two years ago, our headlines would have had us think revolution was just around the corner. Yet the facts are that major disruptions broke out on fewer than a dozen campuses. The total number of students participating in this campus violence was only 70,000 ... 70,000 out of a total college enrollment of over 7½ million. That is less than one percent. Yet despite these facts, I am apprehensive and I know that you are, too.

There is a spirit of the times to which I do not subscribe; there is an approach to life today in too many quarters that I believe is false; they might call it the "new morality," but I believe it is, in truth, immoral. And this new approach is affecting some of the leaders of our young people. I have the fear that if it is allowed to continue, it will affect more.

I can best summarize this new way of thinking as a tendency to distrust or discredit traditional values, values that you and I grew up with, values that have given purpose to our lives. I am bothered for example by a prevailing idea that all things are easy -- that effort and work are unnecessary.

I think almost all of us here tonight can look back on times of hardship and difficulty. We learned the hard way. Our times began with the depression. We came of age in a decade of despair and began our careers in a time of war. I can well remember my own youth. I cannot forget the afternoons my brothers and I were sent down to the railroad tracks to pick up lumps of coal for the stove at home. I'm sure many of you can tell similar stories. And yet, looking back, how lucky we were! I am mindful of the quotation of Sir Wilfred Grenfell, the famed explorer. "Difficulties, hard physical work and simplicity are still invaluable assets in evolving the world's most important product -- a real man."

I suggest you and I are better for these early hardships -- better human beings, better citizens.

It has enabled you to add to the foundations of this country -- to build a better Nation. We must not forget these early lessons that were learned the hard way. We must find a way to share them with others for it is evident we have failed to inculcate some of our youth with determination. We have not been able to make them appreciate that nothing that is worthwhile in life comes easy.

I am not quite sure why so many of our young people trouble us so. Perhaps it is a consequence of the surrender to weakness by some of our adult population. We claim we are the land of the free. Yet too many of us increasingly subject ourselves to unnatural dependencies -- dependency on stimulants, dependency on psychiatry, dependency on sex and dependency on handouts. We boast that we are the home of the brave and yet too many are increasingly afraid of the streets, afraid of responsibility and afraid of ourselves. Too many are letting themselves be buffeted by the winds of vast impersonal forces.

Whatever the origin, we need today a new rebirth of stamina, perseverance and determination.

I am bothered too by the tendency to diminish the importance of discipline. The cry is "to do your own thing" and let the world take its course.

Again, those of our time, were fortunate. Many of us knew the unquestioned discipline of a parochial school. All of us knew the discipline of our religious training, and most of us were privileged to know the discipline of a good, strong, loving mother and father. What a rich treasure this has proved to be! By discipline, I do not mean harshness and severity. I mean all the elements involved in training the young. This was not just discipline. This was discipline with love.

I realize discipline is only one temporary remedy to some of our contemporary ills. The only lasting and proper cure is a renewal of our love and appreciation for our heritage -- for our inheritance of freedom.

There are those who say the days of freedom and opportunity in our Nation are over. I say "hogwash!" The great American dream still lives and the opportunities are greater than ever.

I recall a statement by Eric Sevareid which puts this matter in its true light, and I quote him: "If by some magic, all barriers to emigration and immigration around the world were lifted tomorrow, by far the biggest human caravan would start moving in one direction -- our way."

America is still the great hope of the world.

It is a sad commentary that at a time when our religious freedom is one of the monuments of human endeavor that some in this country are downgrading religion -- are losing the faith. I confess I do not understand these spiritual doubters. I look around me and everywhere I see the handiwork of God.

I marvel at the miracle of creation -- at the critical and complex balance of nature. I am awed when I realize that if the earth rotated at a speed just a few miles an hour less, all vegetation would eventually disappear. If our orbit in space were changed just a few degrees, we should boil half the time and freeze solid the other half.

If the moon were 18 percent further away, there would be no tides and shallow oceans would cover the entire surface of the earth. And if the radiation of the sun increased by only one percent, all life on earth would perish by fire. And my brothers, we accept these physical facts of the world -- these blessings -- because we have faith.

Indeed, we could not function as human beings without faith. Someone once described man's ability to walk as the ability to fall forward in the complete faith of prompt recovery. In a more serious vein, the famed British physician and writer, Sir William Osler said, "Nothing in life is more wonderful than faith -- the one great moving force which we can neither weigh in the balance nor test in the crucible." And -- faith is indestructible. Faith is that which endures when even hope is lost. Indeed, the only limit to faith is fear, and if we fear not, faith will light the way for the world.

These are trying times. And the tragic element of this current assault on our traditional human values is that it comes at a time when we particularly need good and willing men ready to serve the cause of human decency and good will. We begin now a new decade and we begin it in the face of ominous challenge. Violence and disorder are reaching an acute crisis stage.

We Americans, by the sheer size of our numbers and the richness of our technology, threaten to destroy those very elements of nature necessary for our own human survival. Our major cities are fighting chaos. And we still must put an end to racial strife. The problems are many and difficult.

And yet it is at this juncture that some choose to yield to a sickness of the spirit!

It is written in the Bible that "where there is no vision, the people perish." I say the restoration of the vision of America that you and I have is the first order of business.

I ask that in these difficult times you keep in mind the words of His Holiness Leo XIII back at the turn of the century. He wrote: "All Catholics must make themselves felt as active elements in daily political life in the countries where they live. They must penetrate wherever possible in the administration of civil affairs, must constantly exert the utmost vigilance and energy to prevent the usages of liberty from going beyond the limits set by God's Law."

My brother knights, ask yourselves, is the world being enriched, or impoverished, by your passing through it? I know that your examination of conscience is more than routine -- that there is a comparison of your own success with that triumphal biblical summation of the good life that we all know so well.

Can we say: "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith."

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