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EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT
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Let me say at the outset to the graduating class that I as a North Carolinian and one who is privileged to serve my country in Washington today, am deeply honored to share this treasured moment in your lives.

Commencement days are never an easy time. For the graduating senior, they usually involve some painful partings and some numbing speeches, most of which revolve around the slightly mystical theme that the world is an oyster to be plucked open and robbed of the pearl that most assuredly lies within. This is encouraging to hear, but not quite accurate. To me, the purpose of ceremonies such as this is not to promise success, but to issue a challenge. To be sure, it's a chance to say "well done" and offer whatever wisdom age and experience and survival in that vaunted "real world" can claim. Equally important, for the speaker, commencement is a learning time, an opportunity to bask in the optimism and fresh thoughts of a generation richly endowed with both.

I am very proud of the ambition and innovation and excitement that characterizes our state today. As I arrived on campus and looked out on a spring day in the Carolinas, I recalled the words of a former ECU class president. "If you were in an airplane looking down at East Carolina," he wrote, "and it had a face, it would have a big smile on it." Greenville and indeed the entire eastern portion of the state enjoy an era of economic and cultural renewal, thanks in no small part to East Carolina University.

Your time here at East Carolina University is short. But before you go away from this place, do not forget why you came -- or what you learned from one another as well as your professors and classroom instructors.

Right on this campus you have sampled the role of prophets, both ancient and modern, their commitment to moral enthusiasm, their assailing of injustice, their inspiration and hope for future betterment. On this occasion you demonstrate the reality of our nation's strength and human resources. To me you are truly an inspiration.

So I came down here today to join you in expressing my pride in this University and these graduates, in North Carolina and its role in the future of our country under what has been called the Reagan Revolution.

For those who graduate today, tomorrow will bring a leadership role in the community, the state and the nation. You will be asked to build on a foundation carefully and painstakingly laid by your elders. The humorist and columnist Art Buchwald once told graduating seniors at Vassar College, "we who have graduated before you are now turning over to you an absolutely perfect world." He said, "With all problems solved, and no dangers or uncertainties whatsoever remaining So, for goodness sake, don't you characters louse it up!" Setting humor aside, in case you haven't noticed, let me be the first to admit: we haven't solved all the problems for you. The world you face is not one of milk and honey, nor even of magnolia blossoms and mockingbirds.

It will, however, be a world of hope for the future. We have overcome these past few years the sense of pessimism about the future that tarnished the hopes and ideals of our young people in the 60's and 70's. We feel good about ourselves again. We are once more enjoying the challenge and the excitement of being a free people -- with pride in our land and confidence in our dreams.

The heart of the so-called Reagan Revolution -- with all its cuts in taxes, its determined efforts to reduce the deficit, its restraints on spending, its emphasis on deregulation and the free market and its promotion of local and individual responsibility -- is to encourage the risktakers, without slighting those who care about security as well. We must all move forward, the President has said, but we cannot leave any one of our citizens behind.

And so, we confront the old quandaries in new forms. Can we make the marketplace reflect social as well as commercial values? Can we harness the wonders of science and technology to serve our people, rather than the other way around? Can space colonies, genetic engineering, laser beams and industrial robots co-exist in a world where human values still predominate? Can we celebrate the computer chip without sacrificing the soul of modern man and woman? Can the social forces now propelling millions of women into the workforce be used to pry open genuine opportunity -- employing women in executive and decision-making roles as well as in lower paying jobs in which they are so often concentrated.

I know something about the quiet revolution going on in this country -- because I've lived so much of it in my own life. I remember vividly a day in September 1962 when I entered Harvard Law School, one of 25 women in a class of 550 eager students. I'll never forget being accosted by a male classmate on my very first day at Harvard, who demanded to know what I was doing there.

"Don't you realize," he said in tones of moral outrage, "that there are men who'd give their right arm to be in this law school? Men who would use their legal education?" Obviously, he felt I was taking the place of a man. And come to think of it, some may have felt that way when I became Secretary of Transportation.

Much has changed since then and the impact of this change has been tremendous. Today, 66 percent of women with children between the ages of 6 and 17 work. The number of women receiving masters degrees in business administration has soared by

2400 percent in the last decade alone. In my own experience, I have seen the number of women entering Harvard Law School increase from 4 percent when I was there in 1962 to almost 40 percent today.

Let me make it clear -- I think women should be able to choose their path in life. Some seek their own careers in business. Some run for political office. Others focus on the home and family. And indeed there is no more challenging career than that of homemaker and mother. What's important is that every woman has the right and opportunity to choose the role she wishes. But if a woman chooses a career, she should be able to get the education she needs and the opportunity to go all the way to the top. And it is my hope that many of the young women, and young men, graduating today will choose the path that leads to public service.

Today, when people ask me why I choose to work in the public sector, I can only tell them that -- for me -- one of the greatest satisfactions in life is the opportunity to face challenging issues, to help shape policies that affect us as a nation and most of all, to make a difference, a positive difference, in people's lives. And let me assure you, even in an institution as big as government, the individual does count. One vote can make a difference in an election, one voice an impact on public policy. One suggestion or idea can start the wheels of government turning or, conversely, one well-reasoned, well-documented argument can change the course of public action.

Service in the public arena today means confronting, face-to-face, some of the most challenging issues of our time. Whether you serve in the legislature in North Carolina, on a public commission in Washington or in the Executive or Legislative branch of our Federal Government, you are inevitably thrust into a swirling vortex of issues, analyses and decisions that can stretch you to the very limit of your being. Nothing, in my view is more exhilarating.

Public service can also be demanding. For government will be most effective when it attracts conscientious, dedicated men and women, with a real sensitivity to human needs.

Yet let us never presume that government alone can provide the full range of social services required for all those in need, that government can supplant free enterprise as the engine of our economy, or that government can summon the enthusiasm and imagination that concerned citizens can bring to bear on a stubborn problem.

For much of our history, we relied on the voluntary efforts of business, churches, foundations and other private organizations to supply jobs, income, health care, food and housing to those most in need. When the problems grew too large for the private sector to address -- during the depression of 50 years ago, for example -- government stepped in. Yet, we Americans have never needed government to instill in us compassion for our neighbors. For over two centuries, we have drawn much of our strength from our moral commitment to one another. In no other land does the volunteer spirit thrive so broadly or express itself more generously.

No doubt yours is a great adventure at a stirring time in America's history, a time when we are tossing off the selfishness of the so-called me generation and the conventional wisdom of yesterday's status quo as dated as the chauvinism of the man from Boston who could only define himself by the city of his birth.

Today we are engaged in rediscovering a national sense of community, restoring free enterprise and scaling the heights of private ingenuity. Early in his first term, President Reagan announced his strong commitment to a program of private sector initiatives -- a partnership with free enterprise to find alternative ways of helping those in genuine need, not in lieu of Federal efforts, but in addition to them. The first order of business was to restore our economy to good health. That has been accomplished far faster than even the most optimistic believed possible. We have finished our 29th month of economic growth. Now, we are again generating the millions of individual miracles that happen when men and women are given the chance to chart their own lives, harness their own ambitions, create their own futures and strengthen their own families. To enjoy, in the words of Franklin, "the magnificent challenge of being free."

So today we face new challenges -- to make the most of economic tools provided, to create new jobs while combating the old evils of poverty, neglect and urban desolation, to make the lives of our people better, brighter and safer.

The challenges on my own public service agenda, I believe, serve those purposes. In transportation, that includes selling the government-owned Northeast freight railroad, Conrail, to Norfolk Southern and putting Washington's National and Dulles airports into local hands. We want to get the federal government out of the business of owning railroads and operating commercial airports.

Public service for me means deregulation of the transportation industries, returning competition to the airline, trucking, railroad and bus industries. Because of deregulation, air travelers have saved \$10 billion since 1978. Our railroads are in better financial and physical condition than they have been in years. Truckers and shippers are negotiating rates rather than having them set in Washington. And intercity bus operators are giving the riders the benefit of competitive fares.

Public service for me means setting more realistic user fees, so that those who benefit from our highways, airways and waterways pay for a fair share of the costs. Seventy percent of my Department's current budget is paid by user fees and we hope to see that go to 85 percent in 1986.

Public service means new and improved roads and bridges; making travel safer by cracking down on drunk drivers, urging safety belt usage laws, conducting meticulous, regular inspections of the nation's entire aviation system and all modes of transportation.

In America, when we work together, there is no limit to what can be accomplished. A few years ago in Newport Beach, California, there were some lovely beachfront homes that were threatened by abnormally high tide and heavy surf -- homes in danger of total destruction. And all through a cold winter day and night, volunteers worked filling and piling sandbags in an effort to save the homes. About two o'clock in the morning, a newscaster grabbed a young fellow in his teens, attired only in wet trunks. Along with several of his friends, he'd been working day and night. No, he told the reporter, he didn't live in one of those homes they were trying to save. Yes, he was cold and tired. Why then, were he and his friends doing this, the reporter wanted to know. The young man stopped for a minute and then he answered, "Well, I guess it's the first time we ever felt we were needed."

There are no limits on the creativity or the talent of one man or woman fired with an ideal or filled with the knowledge that they, too, are needed. You are all needed. So I ask you to become involved -- whether through public service or volunteerism. And I ask you as well to embrace change, with all its uncertainty and all its potential for abuse. I ask you to manage it and make it fit within unchanging values and lasting truths.

East Carolina University was in its infancy when a great President was buried beneath a crusader's cross at the National Cathedral in Washington. Words cut into the stone of a cool, gothic bay commemorate Woodrow Wilson's commitment to peace and human potential. They deserve to be read often. They deserve to be acted upon constantly.

"The stage is set," said Wilson in submitting a peace treaty to the senate at the close of World War I. "The destiny disclosed. It has come about by no plan of our conceiving, but by the hand of God, who led us into this way. We cannot turn back. We can only go forward, with lifted eyes and freshened spirit, to follow the vision."

Wilson believed that America could show the way. His belief outlived its eloquent champion. It guides us still, in our finer moments. And it renews itself with each commencement day. The men and women who founded this college, like those who gave birth to this republic, shared that belief. Time has not disproved their faith. It is their greatest legacy to all of you. You in this graduating class stand in the reflected light of a rising sun. Your day is just dawning. I urge you to guard your legacy, defend it and use it to leave the world a better place for the next generation. Those who have sent you here expect it. Those who will follow in your wake demand it. I know you will satisfy both. God bless you all, and congratulations.

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