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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION  
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UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE COMMENCEMENT  
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President Handler, members of the Class of 1983, distinguished guests, parents and friends of the graduating class: I am delighted to be with you in New Hampshire, for I spent many happy days in this state and in New England during my years as a student at Harvard. I still remember the beginners ski slope at Sunapee-Sunny Slope. It looked like the biggest mountain in the world to a Southerner who had never seen a pair of skis. I have not had the rare pleasure, though, as you have, of relishing the unique traditions of this university -- all of which are not rooted in ivy or housed in granite. The times you have spent at the "Wildcat" or the "Pizza Den," for example, are as memorable and rewarding in their own way as the hours devoted to research in the library or to study in the depths of McDonnell Hall.

But surely, what you have learned here in the Granite State affords you a unique insight into that special quality called character -- the fuel of personal and public achievement, and the essence of what a university exists to deepen and direct.

New England retains much of the scenic splendor that greeted Champlain, Captain John Smith and other early 17th century explorers who walked these woods and scouted these mountains. This is also a diverse area, of mill towns on the Merrimack and high technology industries in and around Nashua and Boston. It is an area of Irish and Italian and French Canadian communities co-existing with the white clapboard churches and bean suppers of Yankee tradition. And the contributions of New England to American history far exceed its physical size.



In fact, history attends this ceremony, as much as faculty members or the parents who invest their love and confidence in you. It was at the Mount Washington Hotel where the world gathered four decades ago to hammer out an international monetary system we still call Bretton Woods. A century earlier, New Hampshire sent forth Daniel Webster to speak the language of Union at a time when national unity was endangered and the Constitution itself under attack.

One of your greatest gifts has come in the field of the arts. In Jaffrey Center, behind a white meetinghouse built with the labor of local residents, there stands the plain white headstone of Willa Cather. Born in Nebraska, drawn to Greenwich Village, at home in the 17th century more than the 20th, Miss Cather had her artistic flowering here, in the shadow of Monadnock. And when she died, this chronicler of prairie life and individual values chose to lie in New Hampshire. She asked that some words from her greatest novel, "My Antonia," be cut into the stone that marks her resting place.

"That is greatness," it reads, "to be dissolved in something complete and great."

This ceremony, like the efforts that have preceded it and the challenges that will follow, is very much in the spirit of Cather's admonition. For each of you will be dissolved into a life that demands the best you have to give. A life that will pose challenges our parents could only dream of. And each of you will be asked again and again to summon the character of your forebears as you grapple with a world light years removed from their society of hoop skirts and candlelight, stagecoaches and waterwheels. Indeed, the only certainty associated with the years ahead is the theme of change, both constant and accelerating.

I am reminded of a story about a young woman who was a clerk in a grocery store. A man came in and asked to buy a half a grapefruit. "Half a grapefruit," she said. "Yes," he responded. "I would like to purchase a half a grapefruit." Never having been confronted with such a request, the clerk hurried to the backroom of the store and said to the manager, "There is this crazy nut out there -- this man who wants to buy half a grapefruit!" As she said it, she noticed from the corner of her eye that the man had followed her into the backroom. And without a moment's hesitation, she turned and said, "And this gracious gentleman has agreed to buy the other half!"

Certainly life after graduation will require of each of you just such flexibility. We must be willing to adapt old ways -- old loves, if you will -- to the new season of change dawning all around us. Fortunately, you are well prepared to preserve the best of the past, while making the present worthy of preservation.

Your time here is short. I will prolong it but briefly. 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.

Here you have gained the time-honored strengths that enable the descendants of Webster and Frost to survive, to succeed and to lead. Those deeply-engrained traits helped your ancestors survive hard times and the slow death of crucial industries. They helped our forebears tame a wilderness, and strengthened another generation to build an economy and survive the Great Depression. They made this region, and especially this state, a leader in growth and a voice of hope for America's future.

Here, you have sampled the majesty of the White mountains and the pristine beauty of mountain streams and unspoiled woods. You have seen for yourselves the irresistible lure that brought Thoreau and others to relish the New Hampshire landscape



for themselves. And you have learned the primary truth of education -- that so long as books are kept open, minds can never be closed.

For those who walk across the stage today, tomorrow will bring a leadership role in the community, the state and the nation. You will be asked to build on a foundation painstakingly laid by your elders.

I hope you will forgive me for quoting from a fellow southerner, Thomas Jefferson, who in his first inaugural address raised the issue of individual rights and moral responsibilities. "Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself," he told the infant Republic. "Can he then be trusted with government of others?" Let history answer this question.

The history of the American Republic is a still unfolding answer to Jefferson's dilemma. It was his generation, a band of thinkers and patriots, who proclaimed a new government. They frankly feared that even a popular government was subject to abuse -- financial, political, and military. Jefferson defined his own ideal government as "wise and frugal." It should, he wrote, "restrain men from injuring one another ... and leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement."

For most of our history, we adhered to this vision. When economic or political forces abused it and claimed excessive authority for themselves, we passed anti-trust laws, reformed electoral procedures, busted trusts and diluted the power of privilege by extending a suffrage severely restricted in colonial times. We became a truly popular democracy, with a central government acting as umpire to the conflicting forces within. Its chief role, we told ourselves, was to guarantee equality of opportunity to those who would run the great race of life. Government was sworn to maintain the track on which the race was run. It was pledged to make each runner as nearly equal as possible in training, even while recognizing distinctions in talent. It would abide by the outcome; it would not hold back the swift nor press the laurels on a privileged class.

Life was a contest in which all participants were to be encouraged, and education was meant to redress the imbalances of birth and blood. It was freedom for which the first Americans fought and argued -- not the freedom to starve, but the freedom to rise in the world, each according to his own talents and labors.

This was the heart of New England democracy -- a philosophy of opportunity that still flourishes as an example for the rest of us to follow.

Government in America encouraged such trends. It cheered on the risktakers; it extended a helping hand to those abandoned to the outskirts of hope. Then, half a century ago, the rules of the race were changed forever by the Great Depression. Desperate people turned to Washington for food, for housing, for jobs and for hope. Washington responded, and government graduated from a mere umpire to an active membership on the team itself. Whatever the ideology involved, it reflected our own compassion and grit.

But nations evolve. The standards appropriate to an emergency can become the shackles placed upon a succeeding generation. Government can supplant the governed in ordering priorities. It can place the cart of social justice ahead of the economic horse, denying the role of a healthy private sector in underlying our sense of social commitment. When government inflates our currency, it hurts most those it claims are its special concern, the poor and disadvantaged. For they must spend a disproportionate share of their meager income on the necessities of life. And they must bear the brunt



of hard times when high taxes or excessive regulation drain off capital otherwise available for new plants, more competitive products and, ultimately, a more broadly dispersed wealth.

And if government is imperfect, then what of the capitalist system it seeks to regulate? For capitalism, like any other system, including democracy, is a faithful reproduction of those who give it life. It has produced robber barons as well as visionaries. It has exploited as well as appealed to the consumer. It has invited government's control without always emulating either its efficiency or its moral conscience. Today's capitalist faces a new challenge -- to use his economic tools to create new jobs and combat the old evils of poverty, neglect and urban desolation. In cutting taxes, restraining spending and promoting individual and local responsibility, we seek not merely to encourage the risktakers -- we wish to master change in our economy and in our world, lest it master us.

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 the lower paying jobs in which they are so often concentrated.

I can identify with the frustrations Marjorie Karowe must have felt when, as a young attorney, she stood before the bench to enter a not guilty plea on behalf of her client, a young man accused of a minor crime. "Well, who are you?" the judge demanded, "his mother?"

Today Marjorie Karowe is a partner in a New York law firm and president of the Women's Bar Association of New York.

I can identify, too, with Sandra Day O'Connor, who upon completing law school, was offered a job as a legal secretary and, of course, went on to break the type -- as the first woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. 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?" And come to think of it, some may have felt that way when I became Secretary of Transportation.

Much has changed since then. Much of the change has been dictated, not by government edict, but by the marketplace. For instance, the double digit inflation of the 1970's forced millions of mothers into the workforce for the first time. Divorced women joined the economy at the same time, until we reached the point where 63 percent of women with children between six and 17 were in America's labor force in 1982. During the last decade alone, the number of female MBA candidates in this country has soared by nearly 800 percent.



Yet even now, less than one-sixth of those employed in my own field of transportation are women. Fewer than eight percent of all America's executives and one percent of college level teachers are female. And women are nine times as likely to provide administrative and clerical support as technical support in the health, science or engineering fields. Yet in this emerging era of satellite disks and instant communications, the old barriers to professional advancement are beginning to give way.

And this trend, I am confident, will continue. For as our economy evolves away from its traditional reliance on smokestack industries, as we come to place our faith in services and communications and managerial skills, then women who were previously barred from steel mills and auto factories will find themselves in ever greater demand. In the foreseeable future, we will even graduate from the misguided perfectionism best described by author and social critic Marya Mannes, who writes: "Nobody objects to a woman being a good writer or sculptor or geneticist if, at the same time, she manages to be a good wife, a good mother, good-looking, good tempered, well-dressed, well-groomed, and unaggressive."

Let us hope that this most insidious of double standards is about to go the way of whale-oil lamps and horseless carriages. It is that evolving nature of the work force, an increasing acceptance that one's sex or race or creed need play no part in an individual's opportunities, which contributed to my own good fortune in public service.

And speaking of change, I have found at D.O.T. my little footnote in history. I am the first woman to head a branch of the armed services -- for the Coast Guard is a part of my responsibilities. I hasten to assure you that if, heaven forbid, we were to become involved in war, I would not be leading the troops into battle, for the Coast Guard transfers in that instance to the Navy Department. But indeed, change is the order of the day at my department. One of the priorities of my 102,000-person staff is the modernization of our air traffic control system, described as the biggest undertaking since the Apollo Man-on-the-Moon Program. The new system will eventually double our capacity in the air through the year 2000; it will cost 9 billion dollars but save \$25 billion through the end of the century. It will weather-proof our airways and through the most precise landing systems and equipment to prevent mid-air collisions, it will provide the safest possible air system. And we are changing behavior through a massive campaign against drunk driving, the mad killer of 25,000 people each year on our highways.

And who knows -- along with our responsibilities for air, waterways, railroads, buses, trucks, and barges, we may soon be overseeing space travel!

Yes, those who graduate today have been prepared for a new and different world. Even as you leave the University of New Hampshire, you will find yourself caught up in a country awash in change, in self-discovery, in excitement, and in the throes of rebirth.

I could hardly leave today without issuing my own invitation to each of you to become involved in the joy of public service -- the panoply of American democracy.

Contentious and colorful as it is, it remains the best way to make life better --and thus to me, by far the best way to make a living. So I ask you to become partisans for democracy, to become a part of history in the making. 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 well, and to make it fit within unchanging values and lasting truths.



I close with the words of a great friend of New Hampshire, who used to spend his summers at an impromptu White House not far from here. He was Woodrow Wilson, and the words cut into stone on his memorial, deserve to be read frequently and acted on constantly.

"The stage is set," Wilson said 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, and it guides us still.

As you graduate from the University of New Hampshire, you 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 deserve nothing less. Heartiest congratulations, and God bless you all.

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