



U.S. Department of
Transportation

News:

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

Contact: Dale A. Petroskey
Tele.: 202-366-4570

REMARKS PREPARED FOR PRESENTATION BY
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE
WHEATON COLLEGE
COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
NORTON, MASSACHUSETTS
MAY 23, 1987

I've been looking forward to this since I first received your invitation. You see, I have heard so many good things about Wheaton College both in the press and by word of mouth. I know Wheaton by the reputation of its graduates. My friend, Lesley Stahl, gives great credit to this school for the success she has achieved and for the contributions she has made to electronic journalism.

And it's always a delight to be in Massachusetts. I can't help but think back on my school days near here, when I was at Harvard Law School. The first day that I walked into class back in 1962, I was one of 25 women in a class of 550. When I entered Harvard, walked into the library, and one of my male colleagues came up to me and said "Elizabeth what are you doing here? What are you doing in this law school? Don't you realize, there are men who'd give their right arm to be here? Men who would use their legal education?" Of course the implication was that I was taking the place of a man. And come to think of it, some may have felt the same thing when I was nominated Secretary of Transportation.

I was on the cutting edge of a social revolution, a quiet revolution. Today, the Harvard law class is almost 37 percent female. Ten years ago, 15 percent of all students receiving a law degree were female; today the number is 38 percent. Thirteen percent of medical school graduates were women in 1975; the most recent group included 30 percent women. Women preparing for a career in dentistry soared by 690 percent, and those in business administration by 269 percent. We are seeing a revolutionary change in our society and perhaps we don't realize just how significant it is because we are living it.

- more -

Women in the '80s comprise a diverse group with varied interests. Some seek their own careers in business or the professions. Some run for political office. Others focus on the home and family. And some seek to do all these things. In today's society, no role is superior to another. What's important is that every woman has the right and opportunity to choose the role she wishes. Truly, if one word could sum up the vast progress made by women in the past 15 years, it would be choice.

More and more, women are choosing to start businesses or take jobs in traditionally male-dominated industries. I know a little bit about this because the transportation industry is one of the best examples. You only have to look at the traditional work force in highway construction, shipbuilding or the air traffic control profession to realize this -- although most certainly we are working to increase the number of women in the transportation fields.

When I arrived at the Department of Transportation, I asked how many of our employees were women. I was told 19 percent. Then I asked what was the percentage when the Department was established in 1967? The answer: 18.5 percent. They'd come up only a half percent point in all those years. It didn't take long for us to design a program to change all that. Now we are helping more women enter our work force, and we're preparing more women than ever to assume managerial positions and to expand existing skills -- for example, to become air traffic controllers and move into more skilled and higher paying jobs. In a Department of over 100,000 people, that vision of change is indeed a challenge. It takes many women to move the female percentage up even one point, but in the years since we began our program, the number of women employees in the Department has increased to 22 ½ percent. Recently a pilot told me "I flew into a major city and I was really amazed. There were three distinct voices on the air traffic control system. All three were female voices." I said "great, our program is working."

But we are also using the skills of women in another way at the Department -- by contracting with them for goods and services needed in transportation. We are contracting with women-owned businesses to the tune of \$434 million in 1986 in direct and federally-assisted highway and transit contracts -- and that's up 32 percent from FY 1983. I'm proud of this record. Under those contracts, women are providing goods and services ranging from construction machines for use on railroads and clearing railroad wreckage to outreach assistance for women-owned businesses -- helping them with marketing, bonding and insurance problems.

And last, but I hope not least, I've found my own little footnote in history at the Department of Transportation. I am the first woman to head a branch of the Armed Services -- the U.S. Coast Guard. And how proud I am of the Coast Guard's work in search and rescue missions and drug interdiction. In 1986, the Coast Guard seized 154 vessels, and prevented around 42 billion worth of illegal drugs from entering America's cities. Earlier this month, on a search and rescue mission off the coast of St. Croix, the Coast Guard

stopped a 28-foot fishing boat from the Dominican Republic. And this turned into the largest cocaine seizure in the Coast Guard's history -- 2,791 pounds of cocaine were confiscated from the tiny fishing boat. And, on another subject, the Coast Guard was the first to open its academy to women.

So, yes the numbers of the past decades speak eloquently of progress for women. But who among us can argue that we have completely eliminated discrimination, or totally banned that insidious brand of prejudice -- what I call the tyranny of perfection.

Social critic Marya Mannes put it best, I think, when she wrote: "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."

In other words, you, too, can be treated the same as a man -- so long as you out-perfect him. Nor are such perceptions the only roadblocks that yet remain on the path to prosperity and job satisfaction. Much of society continues to perceive women as consumers instead of producers. We have made great progress, but we've not reached the millennium.

I remember as a young college graduate dropping in on Senator Margaret Chase Smith, the lady from Scowhegan, Maine -- the conscience of the Senate -- for a little career advice. She advised me to take up law, as a background for public service. When young women seek my counsel, I want to respond as willing as she, for we still need one another to share experiences to point out potential pitfalls to help those women who would follow in our footsteps in public service. My door is always open.

Today, as you begin a major new phase of life's journey, you enter a world bright with promise and filled with many choices. It was 200 years ago just last week that the foundation for this journey was laid down in Philadelphia. Fifty-five men gathered in what was then known as the Pennsylvania State House to consider alternatives to the existing Articles of Confederation. History tells us that what we know as the Constitutional Convention didn't get underway on time. In fact, it started two weeks late -- because the roads to Philadelphia were so bad! It took George Washington four days to travel by carriage from Mt. Vernon to Philadelphia. Today, that same trip on the Metroliner takes one hour and thirty seven minutes. Of course, if the convention were held today, there'd not only be men representing the colonies, but also women!

Two hundred years after the Constitutional Convention, we pause to remember the men of Philadelphia. Yet it isn't their daily debates that we recall, nor even the individual signers, most of whom are lost in the pages of time. No, it's the idea behind the document -- the idea that America was different because here, we the people would rule ourselves.

The drafters of the Constitution drew up a challenge as well as a charter. They fashioned a popular government, knowing that the only way it could survive was to enlist the energies and devotion of the people themselves.

Recently, I happened to come across a speech on citizenship and democracy which I gave in 1978, when I was a member of the Federal Trade Commission. In that speech, I indicated my concern that many citizens seemed to have lost the sense of pride and commitment to the ideal of America that once prevailed among our people. I spoke of a decline in national confidence, and the rise of public apathy in its place. Sadly, many Americans no longer felt that as individuals they could make a difference. And if they stopped believing in themselves, I wondered, then how could they believe in the American dream of individual effort and national service? As our citizens turned inward, we were in danger of turning out the lights in America. Little wonder that writer Thomas Wolfe dubbed the 1970's the "Me Decade."

Happily, I stand before you nine years later to report what you already know -- all that has changed. The "Me Decade" has been replaced by the "We Decade," as citizens all across America have regained confidence in themselves and in the mission of their country to serve as a beacon of hope to an oppressed planet.

Today, we are witnessing nothing less than an American renaissance, a grassroots revival of those fundamental principles that give character to our land and reality to our dreams. We are renewing the ancient ideals of hard work, pride of family, love of freedom, and trust in God. We have rediscovered our roots -- and we are reaching for the stars.

There's a famous story about Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who once found himself on a train, but couldn't locate his ticket.

While the conductor watched, smiling, the 88-year old Justice Holmes searched through all of his pockets without success. Of course, the conductor recognized the distinguished Justice, so he said, "Mr. Holmes, don't worry. You don't need your ticket. You will probably find it when you get off the train and I'm sure the Pennsylvania Railroad will trust you to mail it back later."

The Justice looked up at the conductor with some irritation and said, "My dear man, that is not the problem at all. The problem is not, where is my ticket. The problem is, where am I going?"

Where, indeed. That's a good question for you who are graduating to ask yourselves as you prepare for the next chapter in your lives. It's a question every American should constantly ask himself. This bicentennial year of the Constitution offers a special opportunity to ponder the meaning of that sacred document, and the challenge it poses to your generation and

to mine. For the decisions we make today can affect the lives of other people as dramatically as the Founding Fathers have affected us.

As a people who have lived with freedom under the guidance of the Constitution for two centuries, we can forget how precious and rare that freedom is. All of us have an obligation to participate actively in the system of self-government the Constitution establishes. It is an obligation we owe not only to ourselves, but to the framers of our government -- men and women who risked everything for freedom, brave men and women who have bonded this nation with their blood, their toil and their sacrifice. And graduates, you are now being given the opportunity to help shape the character of your country and your times. The inheritance into which you are entering includes a land in the throes of national renewal -- an America born again, yet, as never before, in need of leaders whose character is matched by their commitment. In the words of another great American, Woodrow Wilson, "We should not only use all the brains we have, but all that we can borrow."

Today, America herself applies for a very special loan -- borrowing not only the brains assembled here today, but the character, the sensitivity and the courage that guides them. To be sure, as a nation we require all the breakthroughs of which modern thought is capable. We need inventive thinkers to guide our economy, protect our environment, secure our rights and establish our place in the world. But most of all, we need individuals -- committed men and women, for whom conscience is the North Star by which they guide their steps -- and those of the nation they love.

I invite each of you to make your own contribution, in your own special way, to the land and its people. I especially hope you will consider the life of public service. For while you may not get rich, you will enrich the lives of millions of your countrymen. Your rewards may not be material, but rather the satisfaction of service -- making a difference -- a positive difference -- in people's lives.

In closing, let me share with you an experience that Bob and I had when we visited the Soviet Union a few years ago for the U.S.-USSR Trade Conference -- an experience I will never forget.

At our embassy in Moscow, I talked to members of two families from Siberia, who had sought asylum from the religious persecution they had encountered in their own mother country.

In attempting to reach our embassy's gates, one of the young sons was caught by Russian guards, beaten in full sight of the two families, and then dragged away. Not until three weeks later did they learn that he had been thrown on a train back to Siberia. It was nearly five years -- separated from their friends and family and living in the basement of that embassy -- before the Soviet government allowed those families to emigrate to Israel.

As we drove up to the airport to begin our long trip home and I looked at that airplane sitting on the runway with "United States of America" emblazoned on its side, I just thanked God I could come home to a country where freedom and democracy are more than just hollow spaces.

Every citizen has a stake in government that lives up to its noblest promises. Each one of us is obliged to pass on to our children the freedoms that the men of Philadelphia entrusted to us. They created something unique in the annals of history. Let us not only preserve their past -- let us make certain that the present is worthy of preservation, so that in another 200 years, our descendants can say as proudly as we do today, "I am an American."

Congratulations, and God bless each and every one of you.

#####