

REMARKS BY SENATOR PHILIP A. HART
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN COMMENCEMENT
Saturday, December 12, 1969 - 2:00 p.m.

Thank you for inviting me. I am, as always,
impressed by the size of the graduating class. And
I am mildly surprised to see faces on the campus that
I do not recognize. I had the distinct impression
that this university's entire student body was sleeping
on my living room floor during the Mobilization weekend.

Now after saying that, I'm sure that some of you
who were my house guests will come up afterwards to
test my memory. And I accept the challenge...
providing that you are wearing a sleeping bag.

And if Peg Cameron is in the audience, I apologize
for not being able to deliver the telephone message
that came for you at 6 a.m. that Saturday.

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The caller gave me a very clear description but I tried to explain that everyone was in sleeping bags and at that hour it would be sort of bad policy to... ah...ascertain measurements. He was understanding and said he'd look for you on the mall...somewhere around the Washington Monument... and I hope it all worked out.

But this is a solemn occasion and I must match it with a solemn lecture. If you've ever wondered why politicians are so popular as commencement speakers, it's because the faculty planned it that way.

If the last address to the student body is made by a politician, then the comparison leaves the graduates convinced that those classroom lectures were pretty darned brilliant after all.

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First of all, I'm going to tell you that you are moving into a society that is under threat. Now that phrase is a clear signal to any audience that the serious part of the speech has begun and one can safely doze off without fear of missing anything.

Societies are always under threat. And political leaders are always ready to pontificate about some threat --sometimes leaving the notion that their re-election will provide the only sound solution.

But the only real danger comes when there are a number of threats and a myopic society guards against only one of them. And for a number of years our nation has nursed the myth that it faces no threat that does not originate in some foreign capital.

We are a nation so busy keeping its armor in repair that its tumors and rashes go neglected.

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We can all be sure that if we shake any Pentagon official awake in the middle of the night and demand to know the purpose of our military might, he is going to answer without hesitation that it is there to guard our liberty and security.

Fine. That's precisely what it should do. And so the Russians are not stealing our liberty. But someone is. The residual store of liberty and security is being drained away by something.

If an American is afraid to walk in his own neighborhood at night -- and a survey shows that most Americans are -- then he is certainly not enjoying a high level of security.

If a housewife is afraid to shop downtown, then her liberty has been diminished. If PTA meetings and public libraries can't draw crowds at night, hasn't the quality of life been reduced?

If citizens find less and less unpolluted water for swimming and fishing, then surely their choices are being restricted.

If a child's mind is forever dulled because he was undernourished as an infant, how many freedoms are really left to him?

Across the country, 300 million households keep guns in the hope that they will protect against intruders. That is not the index of a secure society.

For some 30 years, the primary concerns of the federal government have been the national defense, the conduct of wars and foreign policy, the growth of the economy and -- most recently -- the conquest of space. Those items take up about two-thirds of the federal budget.

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After World War II, we really became convinced that two of those items -- a strong defense and a strong economy -- were the essential keys to survival. It became almost unpatriotic to suggest that anything else counted.

Congress too often automatically appropriated what the Pentagon asked for, sometimes even more. And when there were cries for economy, the cuts were made in domestic programs. Right now, actual appropriations for health, education, housing, pollution and law enforcement are running about five billion dollars below amounts that Congress had previously decided were needed.

I find it difficult to have too many harsh words for what we call the military-industrial complex. The generals and the industrialists were given an assignment at a time when we were convinced -- on what seemed good evidence -- that an aggressive, united Communist monolith was out to destroy us.

The generals were encouraged to protect against every contingency. And they were told that America would be somehow threatened or embarrassed unless it was superior in everything... unless it had more missiles than anyone, more planes, more carriers, more guns.

That philosophy fails to understand the policy of deterrent force. Deterrent force is having enough to wipe out an enemy that attacks us... or having enough to inflict unacceptable damage in response to an attack... and making sure the enemy knows we have enough. When you have reached that point, further spending to enlarge stockpiles is wasteful.

Congress has resembled a family building a home with no regard for its other budgetary needs.

It's as if a family here in Ann Arbor commissioned an architect to build the safest house possible, one that will stand the test of every contingency... every contingency.

And soon the family finds itself in a home that is tornado-proof, immune to sand storms, walled against tidal waves, protected against hail and African termites, barred against invading cougars, beamed against falling trees and fenced against bands of roaming Bedouins. But the family is hungry.

We have overspent. The Russians build an ABM system... we must build an ABM system. And we don't even ask if the Russians are wasting their money.

We even convince ourselves that our security and liberty are threatened unless we hasten to the aid of a non-Communist -- although undemocratic -- government in South Vietnam.

But I don't want to talk about Vietnam today. I want to talk about after Vietnam.

Then what will we see as the major threat to our liberty and security?

Tomorrow, in your newspaper you will see a Washington dispatch about the latest recommendation of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence.

I can make this prediction safely because I am a member of that Commission and helped construct the report.

Indulge me please while I read one paragraph from that report. It says:

"We as a Commission solemnly declare our judgment that this nation is entering a period in which our people need to be as concerned by the internal dangers to our free society as by any probable combination of external threats."

That says it, flat out.

And the Commission goes on with a recommendation.

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It urges that with the conclusion of that ugly conflict, the twenty billion a year being spent there be diverted to meet today's real threat to liberty and security.

Education. Pollution Control. Housing. Parks. Food for the hungry. Training for the poor. That's where that twenty billion dollars ought to go. That's the way to put our national priorities into some sort of sensible order.

That's the way to retain those most cherished of national institutions: liberty and safety.

We must understand that we will not reward ourselves if we celebrate the end of that war with a huge tax cut.

We will not reward ourselves if we save money while our cities rot, our environment decays and our people live in fear.

There are many who do not share my confidence,
but I have a feeling the nation will go the right way.

You know how tradition demands that commencement
speakers always declare their audiences to be the
hope of the world? Well, I'm not going to cheat you
out of a tradition.

I'm going to read, as my conclusion, the last
two sentences of the Violence Commission report.

They say:

"A new breed of American is emerging with the
energy and talent and determination to fulfill the
promise of America. The young -- idealistic but
earnest, inexperienced but dedicated -- are in the
vanguard, and millions of ordinary Americans are
joining their ranks."

I hope and believe that the ranks will be strong
and deep indeed. Thank you.

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