

ADDRESS BY VICE PRESIDENT

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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN COMMENCEMENT

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It is a privilege to participate in this ceremony and to pay tribute to the Class of 1978. And I am deeply honored to be among the three to receive honorary degrees. For those of you graduating today your degrees took several years to earn. Mine took just a few minutes. But, I suspect that some of us did just about the same amount of work.

I want to dispel the rumor that I have come here today to return the Little Brown Jug to its rightful owner. You've got to let us have it once in a while. When I grew up in Minnesota I thought it belonged to us -- now in my state there's no one under twenty-one who's ever heard of it.

The hardest thing about being Vice President is that the duties of my office are not clearly defined. And so the other day I decided to go see the President in the Oval Office and straighten it out. I said, "Mr. President, do you think it would be a good idea if I went up to the Hill to meet with the leaders of Congress and work out our Congressional program?"

He said, "No."

"Well," I said, "Mr. President, don't you think it would be a

good idea if I went out to the Pentagon and met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and developed a coherent military security program?"

He said, "No."

So then I said, "Well, Mr. President, why don't I go to the Supreme Court and talk to the Chief Justice of the United States about legal problems in this country?"

And the President said, "No." He said, "Fritz, I want you to be at the center of power at all times."

And that's why I decided to come to The University of Michigan today.

I was assured that if I came to Michigan it would be interesting, but they forgot to describe what they meant. If the plea is for social justice and human rights there could be no more compelling and decent plea than that. But, speaking as one who spent his entire life in the cause of human rights and civil rights, let me say this -- there is no hope nor will there ever be any hope of social justice in human liberty except in an environment of decency and civility. Never.

I am delighted to join you on this campus which has long been the shelter of scholarship and the witness of human endeavor. As you may know, following this speech I will begin a 30,000 mile mission to five countries in Asia and the Pacific. Among the countries I will be visiting are a number whose cultures predate those of most of our ancestors from Western Europe. Yet in economic

terms, several of them must be called "emerging" or "developing" nations.

It is fitting that I should begin such a tour on this campus, which has always played a vital role in our growing consciousness of human need. This is the University which conferred a law degree upon my dear friend, the late Phil Hart, and which houses his public papers among the Michigan Historical Collections. Phil was a rare and peaceful man, who saw before their time the great issues which touched our conscience -- of civil rights, of nuclear proliferation, and environmental protection. And in his life of commitment and compassion can be seen a reflection not only of this campus, but of the great tradition of public service which has always characterized the land-grant universities of the Big Ten.

There is a kindred spirit among those colleges, which transcends the competition of sports or academics -- a spirit of public service. And as a graduate of the University of Minnesota, and the beneficiary of a lasting bond with its brother and sister schools, I am deeply honored to be here today.

This campus has been more than the home of social consciousness and commitment. It was here that John Kennedy first challenged young people to recognize the stark conditions of developing countries, and asked them to fight famine and disease. In October of 1960, at this campus, Kennedy announced the concept of the Peace Corps. And, he said, "On your willingness to contribute part of your life to

this country. . . will depend the answer to whether a free society can compete."

And it was here on this campus -- four years later -- that President Johnson described his vision for a Great Society. He asked us to see and feel the needs of poor people within our own country -- to match our wealth and power with justice and compassion.

Both men understood that the power of government rests fundamentally with the commitment of its citizens. And both knew that more than any other institution, our universities are the crucible in which public understanding and commitment are forged.

John Masefield once said, "There are few earthly things more beautiful than a University. . .A place where those who hate ignorance may strive to know, (and) those who perceive truth may strive to make others see." There is on this campus a precious skepticism -- a denial of orthodoxy. There is no wisdom which cannot be questioned -- no truth so weak it merits escape from scrutiny. In that spirit of inquiry and progress, there have come from our universities not only new notions of science and creativity, but of politics and policy as well. As Franklin Roosevelt once said, "Many of the old answers are not the right answers." And now we have reached another point in our history today which demands new thought and vision.

More than a decade has passed since Kennedy and Johnson visited this campus with their visions of a New Frontier and a Great Society. We did not know then that our generation of public leaders in that

era would also bear the shame of failing to see and act quickly enough to prevent the tragedy of Vietnam.

There are lessons to be learned... and that I believe we have learned from that tragedy. While we maintain our commitment to the principles of human liberty I believe this generation of Americans is less arrogant about our ability to dictate solutions through force. We have learned to be skeptical about secret conclusions, secretly reached by those entrusted in the Executive Office and more respectful of the independent role of the press, the Congress and the judgment of a free people in making the decisions of our country.

While we recognize these grievous errors, we must never forget some remarkable accomplishments.

In the 60's we tried to build a legislative framework to protect the civil rights of all Americans. And we did. We tried to take a first step toward reversing the defilement of our air and land and water. And we did. We pledged -- on this platform -- to give the poor and dispossessed a decent chance to find some measure of dignity and self-respect. We have much more to do, but, in fact, because of that millions of American families today live in greater dignity and hope as a result of those efforts. We learned in those years that it matters when government acts or fails to act.

And that is a lesson for our time because the issue of human rights and social justice are issues for all time. They will lan-

guish in the counsels of defeatism and cynicism -- they will perish in the vast complexities of a modern and changing age -- unless we apply what we've learned in schools like this one to the precious values we share as a free society.

The agendas of the New Frontier and the Great Society remain unfinished. And we must modify our programs and our policies to heed the lessons of experience. But our administration remains fully committed to opening opportunities and removing the barriers which bar citizens from full participation in America because they are poor, or sick, or old, or handicapped, or because they suffer discrimination. And we remain committed to promoting throughout the world the basic principles of human rights and of individual liberty.

But we must also call on Americans to face a new generation of different and complex issues -- but problems that are nevertheless vital to the future of our society. We are, in a sense, at a turning point. For today we face few clear and overwhelming threats at home and abroad. Yet failure to act now on a broad range of overriding issues could leave us unprepared to meet future challenges.

Persistence, in a sense, is really the question. When issues do not lend themselves to a crusade mentality a great effort of will is required to fashion solutions to problems -- which though less visible -- are no less urgent and demanding of our attention. And today we face adversaries less visible and monolithic -- and threats less immediate or perceptible. But our challenge remains the same --

to resurrect the values we once took for granted -- to protect our country, ourselves and our children in a lasting and meaningful way.

Energy is a classic example. For today we face a global problem of dwindling natural resources, of which the current debate over energy is only one aspect. Every day we consume 18 million barrels of oil, more than the consumption of almost half of the people living on this continent. And half of that comes from foreign supplies which may limit the flow, raise the prices, or barter it for advantages.

There are no continuing shortages today. But few of us would doubt in our more honest moments that in a few years world demand will overtake supply.

We must have the courage to act not only through legislation but in our personal lives -- to end the waste and to conserve, before we are faced with the catastrophe of an energy-deprived and crippled economy. We must commit our resources and talents to produce clean and renewable supplies of energy -- such as solar and geothermal power. I am proud that the nation is now standing up to that issue. And we are hopeful that the Conference Committee which is now acting on the energy program will report out a strong bill.

Secondly, we face a global challenge of population growth and demographic changes. Forty years ago, when the Social Security system was founded, and you can never mention Social Security without mentioning Wilbur Cohen, and I know he's on the program here today.

When that was founded forty years ago, when Wilbur was just a very young man, there was one retired person for every seven active workers in America. Twenty years from now there will be only two active workers for every retired person.

We have taken action to re-establish the integrity of the Social Security trust fund. We did so because Americans care about those who have given a lifetime to raise their children, pay their taxes and keep our country strong.

But we must face as well the profound changes that will take place in our society with these demographic shifts. And we must recognize that approaches which bar those over 65 from employment -- and segregate the older Americans from participation in community life -- are actions which waste human resources in a manner intolerable and dangerous to our long-term national interest.

Third, knowing of the inexhaustible need of this nation for the energies and the talents of its citizens, we must reject the notion that America is condemned to an eternal trade-off between excessive unemployment and massive inflation.

We cannot afford the waste of college graduates unemployed or underemployed. We cannot afford to abandon millions more who are less fortunate to drift in and out of the welfare system in an endless and degrading cycle of dependence. In a democracy founded in its commitment to the opportunity to work, we must find ways to generate productive employment and at the same time develop tech-



niques to assure a stable dollar.

And in our country's foreign policy, there is a basic question which lies at the heart of our recent debate over the Panama Canal. The issue is whether we as a people have the necessary self-confidence and belief in our own strength and security, to apply the same principles in our relations to smaller countries, that we set forth so proudly in our own Declaration of Independence.

We are a country of great power -- economically, militarily, and politically. And let no one doubt that we are prepared to stand firm when our national security is at stake.

But those interests are not served by jingoistic sabre rattling or by clinging to old colonial doctrines. Rather we must show by our actions that we cherish human rights, and above all the rights of other people to determine their own destiny. Without reckless intervention -- in our relations with the countries of Africa and elsewhere -- we can make clear that we are on the side of human freedom and majority rule -- even when that challenges powerful economic and political interests.

Above all we must take immediate action to meet the urgent problem of nuclear arms control. There are two aspects of that problem. Failure to do so is truly frightening.

We must reach agreement to end the build-up of nuclear armaments among the superpowers, and work for reduction and eventual elimination of their deadly arsenals.

And at the same time, we must prevent the worldwide spread of commercial processes which result in the production of weapons-grade materials, and could lead to dozens of new nations gaining nuclear arms capability, and the frightening specter that such material could reach the hands of terrorists or madmen.

Of all my fears for my generation and for yours, none is more stark and sobering than the risk of unrestrained growth of nuclear weapons, and the unrestrained spread of weapon-grade material. It could literally destroy mankind and the deadly menace must be stopped now.

None of these problems are beyond our ability to solve. In cases where we do not know the answers, we can see the conflicts, we can explore and test alternatives, we can devise new approaches if we have the will to try. For us the challenge is to learn from, and then we willing to move beyond, the past.

Robert Kennedy once spoke to this dilemma of a society struggling to come to grips with change, and the special role of the young when he said:

"We will not find answers in old dogmas, by repeating outworn slogans, or fighting on ancient battlegrounds against fading enemies after the real struggle has moved on. We ourselves must change to master change. We must rethink all our old ideas and beliefs before they capture and destroy us. And for those answers America must look

to its young people, the children of this time of change."

And I think it is especially important to remember those words at a time when it is so often said of your generation that it is intensely personal, introspective, and concerned alone with self.

As you leave this campus I would hope you would resist the counsel of those who argue that you ought to turn completely inward...that neither we as individuals nor our government can make a difference. We must reject the notion that this generation of Americans is condemned to an era of cynicism and defeat.

Government in our democracy can symbolize a people at its best -- as public servants like Phil Hart -- so clearly proved. And I hope there will never come a time when his fight and ours for social justice becomes unfashionable in America.

The choice is yours to make. We can stand up to the problems of energy and dwindling natural resources, of providing greater opportunities for economic and social progress, of arms control and human rights. Our country can deal with these issues. But we will succeed only if you are willing to make a personal commitment to take part in the process by which these decisions are made.

I hope you will become involved because no one will be affected by the outcome of our choices more than each of you taking part in today's graduation.

It is your commitment that matters most. Because fundamental changes don't begin first in the halls of Congress; nor in the

vast machinery of government, nor even in the Oval Office. They begin in communities like this, in universities like this by men and women who have the courage to think, to care and to help build a better future for our great nation.

As John Gardner once observed:

"A nation is never finished. You can't build it and then leave it standing like the Pharoahs did the Pyramids. It has to be built and then rebuilt. It has to be recreated in each generation by believing, caring men and women. And it is our turn now. If we don't believe, if we don't care, nothing can save our nation. But if we do believe and do care, nothing can stop us."

Thank you very much.