

THE VICE PRESIDENT  
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REMARKS FOR  
VICE PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH  
ALBION COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT  
ALBION, MICHIGAN  
SATURDAY, MAY 9, 1987

Whether you're going on to graduate school or to a job or to the Peace Corps as I know Michael Doyle is, I want to talk today about your future, the kind of world you're going to be taking on. The differences between the 1970's, the 1980's and what we can expect in the 1990's will require a very different outlook on the part of your leaders in Washington, and on your part as well.

The question, of course, is how do we manage the changes that are coming. And my message today is very simple. We cannot deal with the future unless we let go of the past. As we approach the 21st Century, America's leaders must ask their fellow citizens to do what Americans have done since our pioneer ancestors crossed the prairies in covered wagons -- we must leave some things behind so that we can reach our destination, a place of new hopes and new opportunities.

I realize letting go of the past isn't easy. It's unsettling. It's confusing. At times, it's painful. Yet if we keep our national values, our heritage, our tradition, we won't lose our way. Our moral compass will continue to point toward what is right and what is wrong. We are, after all, the freest, fairest, most generous nation on earth.

I don't mean we should turn back on the past, or the present for that matter. Some things must remain as markers so that we know where we come from as a nation and who we are as a people. Here at Albion, these markers are your commitments to voluntarism, to citizenship and ethical behavior, and, of course, your commitment to scholarship and education.

Education is one of those areas where we must let go of the past and accept new ways. The child entering kindergarten today will graduate from Albion in the year 2004, so the future is already here.

Education has always been the ladder up, but it's more than the means for individual or family betterment. In the future, education will also be America's most effective economic program. It will be our most powerful trade program. It will be our most

productive jobs and anti-poverty program. Education will be the way we outcompete the Japanese and the South Koreans and the West Germans.

Everyday in this country, businesses are restructuring to meet the future. They are becoming more competitive, more responsive, more in touch with the public's needs. Should our educational system do any less to meet the needs of the future? Should it be any less sensitive to change?

Our educational system is antiquated -- its technology and its calendar are those of the last century; its incentive and reward structures are outdated; its thinking is restrictive; and its costs keep rising without equal results. We spend far more per student than any other country in the world. Yet, 13% of our 17-year olds are functionally illiterate.

To give you a personal example of the thinking that holds us back: The year we moved to West Texas, I tried to ~~volunteer~~ to volunteer to teach night courses -- I can't remember whether it was the high school or the new community college -- but my Phi Beta Kappa in economics wasn't good enough for Ector County, Texas because I didn't have the required education courses. I think I would have made a good teacher, but I wasn't allowed to contribute.

Although this is a private college and most education is a state and local responsibility and must remain so, in the future, education must meet national expectations and national goals, as well as local ones.

I also believe an education system must become innovative and entrepreneurial if it is to carry the load it must carry in the years ahead. I spoke earlier of the markers we must have so as not to lose our way. I believe that our educational system should teach what some of those markers are, in other words -- the basic values, the differences between right and wrong.

You often hear that you can't teach values. I don't buy it. I know those of you associated with Albion don't buy it either. And you have ethics programs and even the Gerald R. Ford Institute for Public Service to prove you don't buy it.

I think Americans are in fairly general agreement as to what constitutes good character and ethical behavior. It includes such qualities as decency, fairness, honesty, duty, tolerance, courage, self-discipline and respect for law. Yet for two decades, many schools have gone out of their way not to teach values. They have sought to remain value neutral. A New York Times article quoted educators who said they deliberately avoided telling students what is ethically right and wrong.

The article told of one counseling session involving 15 high school students. In the session, the students concluded that a fellow student had been foolish to return \$1,000 she'd found in a purse. When the students asked the counselor's opinion, he told them he believed that the girl had done the right thing, but that, of course, he wouldn't try to force his values on them. "If I come from the position of what is right and what is wrong," he explained, "then I'm not their counselor."

Well, in the words of Bill Bennett, our Secretary of Education, once upon a time, a counselor offered counsel. He knew that an adult doesn't form character in the young by being neutral toward questions of right and wrong or by merely offering "choices" or "options."

Many in this country still have much to learn about right and wrong. Recently, we've seen stories about illegal insider trading schemes on Wall Street and improper influence peddling in Washington. We've seen instances of those in privileged positions failing to uphold the trust that was placed in them.

Our own Administration has been the victim of individuals who haven't had the judgement or integrity to put the public's business above their own selfish self-interest. And if they're accurate, I find these reports of people setting up meetings at the White House for large sums of money especially disturbing. Those of us in leadership positions in government, and in all walks of life, must make something very clear: Greed is not a legitimate force in this society.

Our nation believes in enlightened capitalism. We believe in bettering ourselves and pulling ourselves up. And we believe in free enterprise, not just because of the economic opportunities it provides, but because history shows that economic freedom is a condition for political freedom.

But just because we support free enterprise doesn't mean we can't be critical of its excesses. And as for those who go over the line into criminality, I say throw the book at them.

I say treat white collar criminals as you would treat any other criminal. Lock 'em up. They have broken the law and they belong in jail. A college education should not mean a suspended sentence. In fact, you should be held to a higher standard because you are among the best and brightest America has to offer.

And it doesn't matter what you do in life, from time to time you will be tested on your values of right and wrong. I am confident that the overwhelming majority of you, like the overwhelming majority of most Americans, will make the right decision.

Education and ethics go hand-in-hand. Like education, ethics are essential to a free society. They're essential to our future. Our democratic institutions and our free enterprise system require a high degree of trust and confidence. If that trust and confidence are missing, regulation and legislation have to fill the void.

You know, someone once defined the future as that period when our affairs prosper, our friends are true and our happiness is assured. I may not be that optimistic, but I am very positive about what's to come in the years ahead.

And yet no matter how many studies I presented to you, no matter how many policies I offered up, no matter how many experts I quoted, each of us here have to find our own reasons for believing in the future.

So I'd like to talk a moment, not as Vice President of the United States, but as a father and a grandfather. And I'd like to tell you in personal terms why I'm confident about your future, as well as the future of my children and my grandchildren.

I've seen some remarkable things in my life. An amazing thing happened at the funeral of Soviet leader Brezhnev. Things were run to a military precision; a coldness and hollowness pervaded the ceremony -- marching soldiers, steel helmets, Marxist rhetoric, but no prayers, no comforting hymns, no mention of God.

The Soviet leaders took their places on the Kremlin Wall as the Brezhnev family silently escorted the casket around to its final resting place. I happened to be in just the right spot to see Mrs. Brezhnev. She walked up, took one last look at her husband and there -- in the cold, gray center of that totalitarian state, she traced the sign of the cross over her husband's chest.

I was stunned. In that simple act, God had broken through the core of the communist system. And it became clear to me -- decades, even centuries of harsh, secular rule can never destroy the intuitive faith that is in us all. And in that I find optimism for the future.

Several summers ago, at our family's home up in Maine, Barbara was planting a flowering bush that a friend had given us. The instructions were very clear: Dig a deep bed, put in mulch and fertilizer, set the plant in carefully with the roots very deep, cover with soil and water. If you do this, the instructions said, the plant will not bloom the first year, but it will bloom the next, and the next and for a hundred years to come.

And as she was there on her hands and knees, she said she realized that she was planting for her children and her grandchildren and her great grandchildren. In spite of all the problems we face in the years ahead, I don't think Barbara's

planting was futile. Yes, we have a trade deficit, and yes, the Soviets are in Afghanistan, and yes, the world has the weapons to blow itself up, but something just tells me my great grandchildren are going to pick those flowers.

So, in closing, as you graduates go forth, I urge you to take the values of the past, take the opportunities of the present, and then take the risk -- take the dare the future holds.

Thank you for inviting me and thank you for your hospitality.

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