

Graduation Remarks:  
College of the Southwest May 7, 2005

Chairman Hicks, President Dill, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen and graduates of the class of 2005. It is a great pleasure to be with you today. I am honored by your invitation and am humbled to have been conferred an honorary degree.

First a word to the faculty and staff. Your very soon to be former students are before you. I know you share in their sense of accomplishment and look forward to what lies ahead for them. Congratulations.

To the parents and families. Having been in your place on several occasions I can appreciate the pride and frankly relief that many of you feel. Both are justified and I am sure the graduates will want to join me in thanking you for your encouragement, support, inspiration and sacrifice.

Graduates of the class of 2005. When I was sitting where you are, more years ago than I care to remember, I could never have imagined that I would be serving as president of a small liberal arts college in New Mexico and making remarks at the commencement of a sister college. Since I can't remember anything my graduation speaker said, my expectations of what you might take away from my remarks today are quite modest. I also realize that I am the only thing standing between you and your diplomas, so I promise to be brief.

As I was sitting in that football stadium on the hills above the Hudson River at West Point, it was a time when the Soviet empire looked invincible and containing the spread of communism was the principal national challenge. There was no OPEC and gasoline was about 30 cents a gallon (and probably a lot less around here). Measles were a childhood scourge and India was a symbol of abject poverty rather than a source of software engineers and call centers. I could never have believed the direction my life would take. Moscow, Berlin, Saudi Arabia, the Pentagon, New York and Santa Fe were far from my mind.

Likewise, none of you can foresee precisely where life will take you in the years ahead. The world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is almost certainly going to be more dynamic and unpredictable than the past -- a world of tremendous and varied opportunities but without many of the certitudes. Profound and accelerating change is taking place in virtually every aspect of human endeavor -- science, politics, economics, and technological innovation to name a few. And many of the rules and norms and organizations and institutions we have relied on in the past to manage these changes seem increasingly inadequate. Events that happen a world away touch us in New Mexico and events in New Mexico can influence the world. The job you enter upon graduation is unlikely to be the job you retire from. You will be part of this exciting new world whether you remain close by or go elsewhere.

And as you enter this world the two most valuable things you carry with you are not a specific body of knowledge or skills, they are your character and your love for learning. Both of which you have hopefully honed while you were at College of the Southwest. I know that you have been challenged to actively pursue knowledge, to seek the truth. Your professors have not focused on teaching you what to think, but how to think. The education you have received here is a precious gift -- a gift not to be used selfishly but rather as a vehicle for service. I'll say a few more words about this in a moment.

It would certainly be a terrible waste, however, if your education and learning ended when you leave campus today and enter the so-called "real world." Your time here should be only the

beginning -- a prelude. If you are going to be true to yourself and of value to others you must continue to grow intellectually, foster your curiosity, challenge your assumptions, and move beyond observation and description to thought and action. The ability to do these things is developed through reading, and I urge you to forego the convenient distractions of the television and the internet and spend time with books. They have the potential to change your life.

Some of you have been called to become teachers, helping educate future generations. This is arguably one of the greatest challenges facing this State and our Nation and I applaud you for accepting this challenge. Others of you are called to business or public service or the professions. But every one of you is called to citizenship. As citizens of our country and our world we all need to be constantly learning if we are to engage in thoughtful and informed public debate. And if we are to help formulate imaginative and workable solutions for the issues we will face in the future. So, first let me urge you to keep learning -- learning for its own sake, but also for the sake of our democracy and our world.

I also hope you will seek to strengthen your character, to exercise your moral muscle. As you may be aware the curriculum at St. John's College is based on the "Great Books," and as part of this curriculum every freshman reads and participates in seminars on the writings of the Greek philosopher Plato.

In perhaps his most widely known work, The Republic, Plato discusses the nature of the soul, which he considered to be immortal. Plato believed that the soul was divided into three parts, the rational, the spirited and the irrational, or pleasure seeking. Socrates, the principle character in The Republic, encourages the citizens of his ideal city, the republic, to strive to insure that the rational element of the soul, that which seeks justice, virtue and truth, rules over the parts which seek glory or sensual pleasure. Or, in other words, to be guided by wisdom and not by passion.

It seems to me that this admonition from ancient Greece serves us equally well at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is right and there is wrong. Seek to do right. And, how do we define right? This is a separate and much longer speech and I promised to be brief, but it begins by looking for what leads to truth and justice. In the words of the West Point Cadet Prayer, "Choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong and never be content with a half truth when the whole can be won." This is tough. But who you are, your character, is infinitely more important than your job or your position in society.

In whatever you do, do it with integrity, and remember the Golden Rule. In this regard, I often recall the simple guidance of one of my first bosses, "Be kind." Treating everyone with respect, regardless of their position, is one of the most fundamental principles of leadership. It works on the job and it works in life.

Finally, I encourage you to lead by example. Get involved. Don't be content to be a bystander. Look for opportunities for service. Make a positive difference at home, at work and in the community. Your education is an invaluable asset. I believe you have an obligation to use your education to contribute to the common good, to make your part of the world a better place. Use your talents and skills as a platform for service rather than a pedestal for power.

You don't need a large stage. The greatest good is often accomplished in small ways. As Jesus reminded his disciples in the gospel of Mark, "whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant."

Your education has prepared you for more than merely making a living; it has helped prepare you for a full life. Relish it! Make it count!  
Keep learning, build your character and lead by example.

Congratulations on achieving this milestone today. Savor and celebrate it. Then move out with gusto to make a difference. The world is waiting for your energy, creativity and commitment.  
Thank you and God bless you all.