

ASU Comm
May 1989

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ASU COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
May, 1989

Thank you very much. I am both honored and pleased to be here at this commencement. I know that it is a special occasion for those of you who are receiving your undergraduate degrees and your advanced degrees. I remember well that it is a special occasion too for all of your family members and your friends. It is a highly personal event that marks a passage in your life, but it occurs at a time in the life of our country and our state that is also a passage, and in which each of us has a role to play that will determine how well we navigate this passage.

It's important to remember as we celebrate a commencement for those of you who are graduating to realize that our state and country are also being asked to commence. It is a different era that we are now living in, just as the era that ended World War II was different, and the one that ended World War I was different and back through history. And history has a way of asking us to meet its challenges, and we are judged both individually and collectively on how well we do that.

If we stop for a minute and think about the era that is ending, which one might call the post-World War II era, I think it is fair to say that our parents and grandparents fulfilled the goals that they set for us collectively at the end of that war. Very simply, what were they? They were to preserve and expand democracy and to extend the benefits of the free enterprise system and economic activity both throughout our country

and throughout the world. At the end of World War II we stood predominant amongst all the nations in the world. We had vanquished our foes and we had assisted our allies, and we stood not just in a leadership position militarily, but economically and also philosophically. And what I think is probably a fair statement is that those goals to promote and preserve democracy in the face of great challenge and to expand economic opportunities throughout the globe have been met.

We can read in the newspapers and see on the television sets that democracy has taken hold throughout the world. In communist countries, in authoritarian regimes, the dreams of people to be free are breaking through, and economically what we see happening is that countries which could not feed themselves have learned how to do so in large measure because we helped them learn. Countries that could not manufacture or produce items that were needed throughout the globe are now in a surplus trade position because they have learned to a great extent the lessons that we wanted to teach them.

And so we have as a country been successful in those two goals, but the irony is that if we intended to promote democracy and free enterprise, we find ourselves unprepared to live in the world that we helped create. In a world where we have more economic competition, we have to be willing to work harder and be better educated in order to be competitive ourselves.

So when I talk about a changing era, I'm really talking about how we have moved from a position where we wanted the rest

of the world to understand what we had learned for over two hundred years about how to try to maximize opportunity for people, to a time when others have taken that lesson to heart. Countries that did not even exist at the end of World War II (places like Taiwan) or countries which lay in ruins (like Japan and Germany) are competing with us throughout the globe.

And what is our response? Well, our response can be to complain, to argue, to say it's not fair, to wish it would go away, to think we don't have to do anything differently because why can't the world stay the way it was; or we can say to ourselves, "You know what? We were successful at trying to help other people do better for themselves. We better make sure we do better by ourselves." And the key to doing better by ourselves is education.

We cannot pursue our personal or collective goals if we do not commit ourselves to pursuing education. And education for me is a life-long process. It starts with the children that I see in this audience who haven't even begun school yet because their parents and other family members care about their futures and begin to teach them what they need to know so that they can be successful and productive citizens. It continues through our public education system as we labor to give the kind of opportunities that children in Arkansas deserve to have so that they can have an education that is equivalent to that available anywhere else in this world. And it certainly goes on beyond high

school into all of our institutions of post-secondary education, our colleges, our universities, our vocational and technical schools. But it doesn't happen by our wanting it to happen and sitting back and waiting for someone else to do the work.

This generation that has come of age in the post-World War II era, has to meet the challenges posed to it as earlier generations have. I think we are fully capable of doing it, but it takes will and effort. It takes a willingness to work harder, to educate ourselves and be willing to make sacrifices and investments that will pay off down the road in the future.

The people graduating today from ASU are part of a minority of Arkansas students who ever get this far. We have made a lot of progress in the last six years in improving education and raising expectations, but we have to finish the job.

Education, whether we participate in it directly as students or educators, or whether we reap the benefits that come because we have more educated people, is the single most important issue in our state. And I'm hoping that as we sit here this evening and watch the graduates individually pass to receive their degrees, each one of us will think about the challenges facing our state and our country and determine in our mind what we will do to improve education here, in our own families, in our own personal lives and beyond that as citizens and taxpayers.

We cannot have the kind of education system we need if we do not invest in the educators and in the equipment and facilities

that are required to provide that education system. It's a much larger issue than just what happens in a particular school district or at a particular college. It is interrelated. What happens in those affects everything that happens throughout our state.

So I am pleased to be part of a commencement for these graduates, but beyond that, I am pleased to be part of the ongoing process of education that's represented here this evening. I hope that all here who are proud of these individuals will realize that the kind of sacrifices they have made to achieve this distinction is equivalent to what we all must make if we are going to provide that opportunity to as many of our people as we possibly can. I'm very optimistic about our future because I think we will make the commitments and the investments that are required to provide the educational opportunities in Arkansas that will enable us to have the economic future that all of us want for these young people and those who come after.

So I congratulate these graduates and ask you not just to be satisfied with your degrees but to be challenged by receiving them to be advocates for education because we need your voices.

Thank you all. God bless you, and good luck.