

REMARKS AT 300TH COMMENCEMENT
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
JUNE 12, 1987
by
Robert L. Clodius

Honored graduates, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

There are three classic statements whose truth is somewhat suspect.

They are:

The check is in the mail. No matter what happens tonight, I'll respect you in the morning. And, I'm from Washington, D.C., and I'm here to help you.

The truth of the last statement is that I am from Washington, but I am not here to help you. I am here, in this brief moment, to touch your lives and to participate with you in this time of passage, not to stress you with too much solemn thought and perhaps to inform you.

Yes, I live and work in Washington, D.C. It is both a city, our nation's capital, and a state of mind. But it really isn't a city because it is a federal district and is dominated by the Federal Government. In terms of its civic identity, people in the know refer to it as "this town," not "our" city but this town, and that should tell you a lot.

John F. Kennedy, it is said, spoke about the town as interesting because it lay between and borrowed from two cultures--it was characterized by Northern charm and Southern efficiency.

As a state of mind, federal presence is all important. We speak of the power of the Presidency, the power of the Congress, and the power of the Supreme Court. Everyone seems to be wielding power, seeking power, dreaming of past or future power, and even being , close to power is highly titillating. All of this leads to lots of fun and games, or may I say monkey business, most of which is related to politics.

As a result of all this, sometimes it is hard to know when someone is telling the truth. As a result, Washington-watchers study body language for signs of lying. If a person touches the nose, it is truthful. If they touch the ear or scratch the neck, it is truthful. But if they move their lips -----!

I do not mean to be cynical, although it is easy to become cynical in Washington. Do not become cynical. There is hope as we shall discover later in my remarks.

From my resume' you learned that I am also an economist. This is not to brag although there are braggarts among us. Nor is it to display humility although these days there is much for economists to be humble about. It is just to say that I am one. Economists are highly respected in Washington. They are very productive. If two economists are given an assignment, they will come up with three answers because one of them can't make up his mind. Harry Truman is said to have asked for a one-armed economist so he would not have to hear the statement--"Now on the other hand--." They are also much maligned. It is said that if all economists were laid end to end, they still could not reach a conclusion. The sequel came from some unkind person who said that if all economists were laid end to end, it would be a good thing.

But economists do have something going for them although I fear we sometimes overlook the forest while examining the leaf on a single tree. The word "economics" is derived from one Greek and Latin root meaning the "house" and another meaning "management" thus economics is concerned with the management of the house whether that "house" be a household, a business firm, an industry, a nation or the globe. We share with ecology this focus on the "house" in a complementary way because they have emphasized rather more the physical and biological than the social.

Now, having prepared these ideas, let us set them aside for the moment; like the Frugal Gourmet or Julia Child, we need to start working on the main dish.

You are a special class of graduates here in 1987. You are an "Anniversary Class." We celebrate the 300th commencement of the Ohio State University. Also this year we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Constitution, the 200th anniversary of the Northwest Ordinance which brought together Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and, as Woody Hayes would say, "that State north-of-here." It is also the 125th anniversary of the Morrill Act which established land-grant colleges, the 100th anniversary of the Hatch Act which first established federal support for research in the national interest through the experiment stations, the 100th anniversary of the National Institutes of Health, and the 100th anniversary of the association of state universities and land-grant colleges of which I am president.

Into what kind of a world are you all graduating? What is the status of the "house" and its management in 1987? Most of us would agree, I think, that our house is beset with problems. Problems, problems, problems everywhere.

What are some of them? We might begin with the physical environment. There is a big hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica, and as the ozone layer is depleted we suffer increased likelihood of skin cancer. Acid rain wreaks its havoc on our own lakes and vegetation while antagonizing Canada in the extreme.

Our dependency on foreign petroleum supplies increases with the passage of time. What are we going to do with hazardous wastes and residues--chemical, nuclear, and biological? Will our trash and garbage scows, like Wagner's Flying Dutchman, be doomed to sail endlessly over the oceans? How will we deal with the questions of water quantity and quality in the future?

What about social problems and problems on the human scale? There are plenty to go around. There is the problem of civic integration as the new demographics give us an increasingly diverse and heterogeneous population both domestic and immigrant. There is the question of the quality of new jobs. While the U. S. has generated more new jobs since 1973 than all the rest of the Western developed world combined, 12 per cent of the new jobs between 1973 and 1978 were low wage, but since 1978 more than one third of the new jobs paid an annual wage below the poverty line for a family of four.

There is the problem of maintaining leadership in the world whether

in matters of competition and trade, competition in the capacity to make peace, or to make war. And we continue to have problems of the diseases of the mind and body.

I hope you do not find this listing of problems to be discouraging for it is not meant to be so. Rather it is in looking at these problems and reflecting on the past that we find the main course in my remarks. It has to do with the way that problems can be solved, which is to say, by building institutions to handle them.

Building institutions as a set of principles and structured relationships to which continuing financial commitments are made, including but not limited to bricks and mortar, is a traditional, and in many senses, a typically American way of solving problems. Legal disputes are settled without bloodshed through the legal institutions of courts, judges, and juries. Problems of educating the youth, whether native-born or immigrant, were solved historically by creating the institutions of the public schools. Problems of providing access and opportunity in higher education to the larger group of students from the industrial classes were solved by inventing colleges and universities supported by the several states and by giving grants of public lands to each state to endow

such institutions. Problems of producing a food supply to support a developing nation were solved by inventing formula grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to states for agricultural experiment stations a century ago, and later for extension services.

When cholera and the diseases of entering immigrants were a problem one hundred years ago, the Congress invented the Laboratory of Hygiene with a \$300 appropriation which later become the National Institutes of Health with more than a \$6 billion budget. Now, these Institutes together with the great university medical centers provide a resource capacity that is there when needed for crises, such as Legionnaire's disease and AIDS, and there to address continuing and chronic health problems such as cancer and heart disease.

One of the greatest inventions in all history and one of the greatest institutions established in recent American history is the land-grant college of which the Ohio State University is one.

We had state universities in the 18th century. The University of Georgia was chartered in 1785. The University of North Carolina was chartered later but was the first public university to accept and

finally graduate a class. The University of Vermont was chartered in 1791, the University of Tennessee in 1794, all as public institutions. The University of Delaware was established in 1744 as a Presbyterian Academy, and Rutgers in New Jersey was founded by royal charter in 1766 as Queens College.

Up to the land-grant act in 1862, college going was primarily for the professional classes--law, medicine, teaching, and preaching with a classical education for the well-to-do. The new land-grant colleges were to change all this although it took the State of Ohio a long time to work its way through "Ohio's great land-grant sweepstakes" and finally designate OSU as the land-grant college. Another writer notes that "After having waited eleven years to open the doors of the the college that the Morrill Act contemplated, Ohio took eighteen more to provide a direct state levy." I would note from the Regents Review dated May 1987 that the Regents and the Chancellor's office are still working hard to persuade the legislature of the validity of supporting institutions for problem-solving with regard to research, new technology, and job training that will lead to increased economic productivity and competitiveness for Ohio. I'm with the Regents.

Speaking of the land-grant revolution as the Morrill Act of 1862 is a convenient way of wrapping in one package several aspects of radical reform in higher education of the 19th century. They include the following: higher education should be available to ordinary people; it should be practical and relevant to people's lives as well as classical; math and science should be essential parts of the curriculum; it should be supported by the federal as well as state governments; and it should be co-educational.

The latter, perhaps, drew more fire and fury than the others, being viewed by the opposition as the "epitome of 'reform against nature' for what God had differentiated, man should not strive to make the same." But speaking in 1871 for himself and fellow presidents of land-grant colleges, the president of Iowa State College said he was unqualifiedly in favor of coeducation. Further he said, "Some of our best students are young ladies...Sexual isolation for the purpose of culture, is contrary to nature; it makes boys rough and girls silly. Of course we have occasional troubles.....What college does not? But such troubles are far less, as I verily believe, both in number and seriousness, than occur under the old plan of separating the sexes." And college presidents have been taking that pledge ever after.

So here we are today celebrating the triumph of your graduation, the triumph of this university, and the triumph of the genius of American thought, namely to invent and support financially public universities whose mission is directed at solving problems - by educating its citizens, by doing research , and by extending the university to touch the lives of everyone. And let us pay equal tribute to those institutions whose anniversaries you share in this year--The Constitution of the United States which defined our governance and basic freedoms without which the university cannot flourish; the Northwest Ordinance that guaranteed freedom of speech, religious freedom, the right of habeas corpus, prohibited slavery, and guaranteed the right to a public education; the Hatch Act that brought the federal government in as a partner in research; the National Institutes of Health whose being guarantees a presence to work on problems of health and disease; and finally, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, the fact of whose being, gave you a president from Washington D.C. as today's commencement speaker.

Early on, I said that you should not be cynical, for there is hope, and that hope lies in our nation's genius at creating institutions to solve problems--of which perhaps the finest example of

institution-building and best hope for the future--is the university for this is where we study the several "houses" in which we all must live. We, and especially you, cannot let the Congress and the President forget, nor the Legislature of Ohio and its Governor forget, this wisdom of the past for, indeed, it is the wisdom of the future.

On behalf of the great state universities that form a common union with your alma mater, let me offer congratulations and best wishes.