

THE VICE PRESIDENT
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ADDRESS BY VICE PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH
AT THE OHIO STATE SPRING QUARTER
COMMENCEMENT CONVOCATION
COLUMBUS, OHIO
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Good morning. I'm very glad to be here sharing this important day with you.

Before I came out I called up Jim Rhodes and asked him if he had any thoughts on this address today. All he said was, "Keep it short, Bush."

Now that is an awfully hard thing to ask a politician to do; but I'm grateful that you asked me here today, so I'll try my best. I remember that at my own graduation the speaker also promised a short address. Forty-five minutes later he was still talking and I hadn't understood a thing that he said. I'll try to do better.

I've been to a lot of graduation ceremonies in my day, and in my experience the usual thing is for the speaker to get up and say what a lousy job his generation has done and what a horrible mess they've made of the world -- and then he lays the whole thing on the graduating class: It's the responsibility of your generation, he says, to succeed where we have failed, etc., etc.

Personally, I think that's a cop-out. I don't even think it's accurate. The world isn't a horrible mess; it is, in many ways, better off than it has ever been before. Now I'm not going to tell you that the world is perfect. But what I want to do today is bring you a message of hope because although I know that today is a happy day for each of you, it marks a difficult time of transition in all of your lives, and many of you are probably looking ahead with some uneasiness.

Your most immediate concern is probably the economy. Most of you will be leaving here to go out and look for jobs, and while I can't promise it will be easy, I can tell you that the overall economic picture looks better than it has in a long time.

We are finally escaping from the vicious cycle of recession and inflation. All the indications are that this recovery that we're in the middle of now is strong and will be lasting -- and this time it looks as if the recovery won't be accompanied, as it so often has been in the past, by inflation.

I know this State has suffered hard from unemployment. Unfortunately, unemployment is always one of the last things to come down in a recovery -- but a significant decline has already begun. There are now 800,000 more people working than last December. Our economy is basically sound; by many measures -- the number of business starts, and the dramatic increase in venture capital, for instance, -- our economy is remarkably strong.

But I think for your generation, your anxieties may be broader based than just worries about the economy. You grew up and came of age at a time when this country was still demoralized from the bitterly divisive experiences of Vietnam and Watergate.

Just a few years ago, officials at the highest levels of our government were saying that there was a malaise in this country, in essence, that America was sick at heart.

In government, the media, and in some universities, the prophets of doom held sway. They told us to accept a future of ever diminishing expectations, that we could expect to be poorer than our parents and our children poorer still. And in influential papers such as the Club of Rome's "The Limits to Growth" and the government's own "Global 2000" report, they explained that the world was running out of resources -- we were washed out and used up, they said.

Well, to paraphrase Mark Twain, when he saw his own obituary prematurely printed in the newspaper, the reports of our death have been greatly exaggerated. As it turns out, those reports were wrong in almost every respect. Their dire predictions were based on faulty premises and much of their data suspect. "The limits of Growth" has been thoroughly discredited -- an object of derision in the scientific community. It was even repudiated by its sponsor organization, The Club of Rome; and the same fate is now befalling the Global 2000 study.

The fact is that the world is growing richer, not poorer. Ours is a compassionate country; as long as people anywhere in the world go hungry or want for proper shelter or medical treatment, we will not turn our backs. But it's important to look at the other perspective, too. Because of advances in technology and agriculture -- what is called the green revolution -- and improvements in health and sanitation, people all over the world are eating more and living longer than ever before; they are less subject to famine and disease. In every material respect, they are better off in some areas -- certainly not well off -- but better off -- and we can expect the present positive trends to continue.

But what about the world's resources? Aren't we steadily depleting them; won't they be soon used up? Hard as it may be at first to believe, by any meaningful measure, the world's resources are becoming more plentiful all the time. The fact is that new technologies are not only allowing us to use our old resources more efficiently -- they actually create new resources.

I guess you have to ask yourself what a resource really is. On the material level, of course, a resource is only something you can make use of. The fossil fuels which drive our industry and have helped produce, in our era, wealth -- that was unimagined in the last century -- all that oil was only so much foul-smelling, sticky liquid in holes in the ground before the invention of the internal combustion engine. In other words, the internal combustion engine and, even more important, Henry Ford's mass production of automobiles -- these technological advances truly created a new resource.

Right now we are undergoing a technological revolution which will affect almost every aspect of our material lives. In its potential benefits for mankind, it has perhaps its only historical parallel in the industrial revolution of the 19th century.

The fuel of this revolution is a little chip -- and it's growing smaller all the time -- this chip is made from the most abundant substance on Earth, sand. In Silicon Valley in California, in Hong Kong, in Japan, throughout the world we are literally building new empires out of sand.

I suppose that if things stayed exactly the same, if there were never any changes or growth, we would have good reason to despair. More people in the world would just mean less of everything to go around.

But things do change. We are constantly expanding our horizons -- from the infinite stretches of outer space to the infinitely minute interiors of the computer chip.

I hear that Ohio State University, together with the Chamber of Commerce and the Columbus Public Schools, has just instituted one of the country's most far reaching "computer in schools" programs, with 10,000 people already enrolled. And I might add, parenthetically, they did this without spending one dollar of federal money.

Now I want to make it clear that I'm not about to write off our basic industries. I'm convinced that our great automobile and steel industries will not only survive into the future, they will continue to grow. But they will do so -- they are already doing so -- by adapting to the technological challenge and by incorporating the latest, most up-to-date scientific advances.

Don't be afraid of change. Embrace the future and all the possibilities it offers. The greatest danger that we as a nation now face is the psychology of fear of retrenchment -- that means giving up on the promise of the future, holding on tightly to the past, even as it steadily shrinks and dwindles in our grasp.

You know, there's something self-fulfilling about that kind of psychology. Remember the "oil crisis" of '73 when the gas lines stretched for miles and miles and a whole chorus of voices arose calling for gas rationing. They prophesied the end of the oil age. We were running out and the only solution was for government to try to divide fairly what little gasoline we had left. Today, almost every economist attributes much of those severe shortages to government controls which distorted the natural allocation of resources that would have taken place under free market conditions.

It is free markets and free trade which make us flexible enough to respond to the challenges of the present and which enable us to reap the rewards of the future. Look at the free market countries of Asia. Japan is not the only success story there. Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, The Phillipines, Taiwan, Indonesia -- since World War Two these countries have developed to a point where they now rival the industrialized nations of North America and Europe.

Meanwhile, the planned socialist economies have languished way behind. Just to give one example, by no means the worst: the north of Korea used to be the center of Korean industry before that country was divided. Now South Korea out produces the North by more than 4 to 1.

Martin Luther King said "I have a dream." Well, we live in an age when dreams can come true. Even as we strive to fully realize Dr. King's noble dreams of social justice and human equality, we are fabricating material dreams in Silicone Valley in California and hundreds of other locations around the country -- indeed around the world -- that will bring a better life to everyone.

I'm not saying all is well with the world. There is still much suffering and hardship. Children still die of hunger and diseases that could be prevented; much of the human race lives under totalitarian regimes that deny what we would consider the most basic and elementary human rights.

But our means to solve the problems of poverty and want are steadily growing. The world as a whole is getting richer, not poorer. We will not be fighting over smaller and smaller pieces of a steadily shrinking pie, but sharing the benefits of a constantly growing, expanding one.

I won't be like Dr. Pangloss and tell you that this is the best of all possible worlds, then send you off like so many innocent *candides* -- even if such innocence were possible in this day and age. No, this isn't the best of all possible worlds. It could be much better. There's a lot left to do. Great things to be imagined, great things to be done. You've all accomplished a fair amount already: you've won diplomas from one of the finest universities in the country. And I'm sure that I speak for your parents and your teachers when I say we are all proud of you.

The future is a challenge, but seeing you all here today gives me an unshakeable faith that that challenge will be met, and met successfully.

Thank you.

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