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"Today's Challenge" by Fred Aandahl: June 8, 1958

Fred G. Aandahl

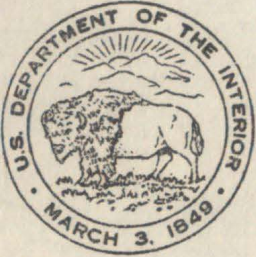
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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA, BY FRED G. AANDAHL, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA, JUNE 8, 1958

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

It is most pleasant to participate in the events of this memorable occasion. To be commencement speaker at the 75th Anniversary of my Alma Mater is a cherished privilege. It is not only a privilege; it is also a challenge to attempt to say something of enduring significance. This is emphatically true at a time when, although we as a Nation have enjoyed unprecedented prosperity and all our people have improved their material standards of living, the period can be called the most critical in the entire history of the world as we now go about determining how to use man's newest discovery, the unleashing of the potentials of nuclear energy.

Sober thought, however, reveals that the words spoken at this exercise can be no more than small fitted grains in the pillar of your college education. Yet as such they have an historic and traditional value.

An anniversary is a time when we reflect on the past and project the fruits of those thoughts into an inspiration for the future.

Seventy-five years ago this University was founded. Some then thought the founding documents to be little more than scraps of paper. Others saw the vision of this great institution in the image of what had been done in older communities. Since then, many changes have taken place. People who now ride in automobiles were riding on bicycles in 1883, and those who now fly through the air were riding in buggies or on horseback. The West has been settled and well developed and the opportunities of new land compellingly diminished. New horizons, however, have opened, more embracing and stupendous than ever before contemplated. The air over the then unconquered poles now has become literally a highway of travel.

Consider for a moment recent strides in industry.

Because of research and development, about 70 percent of Procter & Gamble's consumer volume last year came from products that did not exist only a dozen years ago. Eighty percent of RCA's business in 1955 was in products and services that did not exist commercially ten years ago. Passenger air travel now is moving from coast to coast in eight hours and soon will be down to four and a half hours. On the farm, with modern equipment, two men can now produce as much as six or more could twenty years ago.

Space travel and nuclear power constitute a new achievement almost limitless in constructive possibilities. These same scientific achievements also have a destructive potential challenging to the security and even the very continuity of not just segments, but of the entire human society. People worldwide are becoming more and more subjected simultaneously to events that now through communication, transportation, and fall-out have globe-circling impact.

Before the graduate of today unfolds the panorama of a Nation and a world bursting in research, in scientific discovery, and in the processes of adaptation to the fruits of inventive genius but still uncertain whether the results of these achievements will bring greater human comfort, more abundant living, broader understanding, deeper confidence, and expanding good will on the one hand or total human destruction on the other. The potential for either faces us.

Never before have college graduates faced a greater challenge. The world is gearing itself to new technical knowledge and new scientific revelations. The change is far-reaching. It affects farming, merchandizing, manufacturing, professional pursuits, personal services, and social and political work. College education is as essential in this new world as eighth grade was just a few years ago. The horizon is broad and the opportunities to work and to achieve are impelling. This then is the challenge of today--a challenge to the graduates of 1958, a challenge to the mothers and fathers and friends everywhere, a challenge to all Americans.

These developments call for education to meet the technical needs of this era. But education in the technical and economic affairs of the age is not sufficient in itself. In addition, personal dedication is needed to the same moral, spiritual, and ethical values which are the foundation upon which the pioneer citizen of this State--and of this Nation--built the structure of our own free and dynamic society. This is now our heritage.

It is to this new environment that the graduate and all of us must adapt to provide for our own economic well-being and to improve the security of all. There is no dearth of opportunity or of tasks to be performed. The only question is how are we to meet this challenge?

In the theme of our 75th Anniversary year, "Intelligence, the basis of Civilization," we find a key to action. Intelligence is much more than knowledge, although it helps to make knowledge possible. Intelligence is the capacity to evaluate knowledge and put it to good use. It places our fears, our joys, our affections and our dislikes under the modulating control of good judgment. Intelligence in part is innate but more important, it is the fruit of conscientious effort. It brings to the individual humility, thoughtfulness, consideration, appreciation, and capability.

Self analysis is a deterrent to defeat and a tonic to success. Soul-searching should be a part of each day's routine. Our lives should give expression to the qualities that characterize intelligence. Let us analyze each of them.

Humility is the quality of not being too good for any of the incidents of life as they unfold from time to time. Education does not disqualify a person for any task, no matter how menial it might be. Often times something quite different and less than that contemplated during college becomes a pleasant and profitable intermediate step or even the foundation of an illustrious career. While education does not disqualify for any task, it does qualify for highly specialized responsibilities and should be used to the utmost in fulfilling the call for such ability. Great admiration goes to the individual who can use his brain to think and his hands to work.

Thoughtfulness is the quality of being able to reflect and to evaluate. Under the pain of difficulty a common expression is, "If I had only stopped to think." Of course some thought is always given to the routine processes of the task immediately at hand, but how much thought is given to the broad aspects and all of the associated implications of what is being done? In the face of uncertainty, thought replaces wild plunging with calculated risks. It brings definite and accurate answers where the subject is determinable.

Consideration is the quality of recognizing the rights and feelings of others. In all of its details, it is hard to define and hard to apply. Consideration springs from deep concepts of sympathy and justice. It is the human quality that brings happiness, contentment and is the foundation without which deep personal friendships are limited and world peace cannot be approached.

Appreciation is the quality of enjoying that with which we come in contact. It is gratitude for what we are and what we have. Many things are unpleasant and undesirable. There can be joy and satisfaction, however, in overcoming adversity. In fact, all of life is pretty much a competitive struggle with which we learn to live and by so doing grow strong. The much larger side of appreciation, however, is that of counting our blessings. For us in the United States they are innumerable and taken as a whole are unsurpassed. That fact gives us satisfaction, confidence, and inspiration in both work and play.

Capability is the quality of being able to achieve given assignments. Capability is measured by both quality and quantity of output. It is dependent on physical and mental fitness and training, plus an important underlying element which I am going to call individual responsiveness. Individual responsiveness embraces ambition, hard work, courage, and determination which together constitute an unconquerable will to move forward.

I have outlined in very commonplace language what I hope are acceptable qualities of intelligence. We here today are, I also trust, a group of intelligent people, approaching the vicissitudes of post college living. In the light of these facts there are two deep-seated American concepts that should be basic to our conduct.

I will call the first, "The Individual's Responsibility for His Own and His Family's Economic Well-Being." It is essential in meeting this duty to become productively and remuneratively employed, either in the operation of one's own business or on a salary. This step should be associated with whatever might be the required degree of frugality to keep the cost of living, with rare exceptions, well below the earning capacity. In this way, part of the income constantly can be building up the individual's capital investment or his interest earning reserve. Savings strengthen earning capacity. Live within your income no matter how humble at times that living may appear to be. Oh yes! We need some venture capital and some daring in shaping the course of many phases of industrial and business accomplishments but seldom should they encroach on the security of the family's well-being. People often feel that they need to hold a certain pace of living in recognition of their position or to establish a position. The most enduring and satisfying position, however, is that which stands the test of time and carries the continuing financial solvency of the individual.

The second basic concept I am going to call, "The Individual's Inescapable Association with Government." Our birth and our death with many incidents in between are recorded in the archives of Government. Our human and our property rights are defined, maintained, limited, and protected by Government. Everyone pays taxes, either direct or indirect, and many pay very heavy taxes. This University is a Government institution, as are most of our schools. Traffic laws and their enforcement, of which we are all constantly conscious, are the products of Government action. Our national defense program with military service is determined and directed by our Government and is necessitated in part by the action of the governments of other countries. Ours is a Government by the people with elections designed to let the voice of all the people speak, and we are struggling to keep it as such. Statesmanship is the art of putting into effect government programs of enduring value.

Today the imperative need for international law and order, a function of government, stands out as greater and, I believe, more difficult to attain than the intercolonial need in 1787, which seemed baffling and insurmountable but yet was monumentally resolved at that time.

These very general statements merely remind us of everyone's inseparable association with government. In a people's government, we the 165,000,000 American people are the government. We have the best government in the world. It has protected our human freedoms and given us economic opportunities found nowhere else. Even while we were engaged in world wars, our people have been privileged to travel the breadth of our great Nation from border to border, go to school and to church, freely assemble for numerous other purposes, write letters and issue

publications of all kinds without question or direct surveillance by public officials. Today with six percent of the world's population and seven percent of its area, we have and are using 72 percent of the automobiles, 57 percent of the telephones and 41 percent of the electric power.

The goods that we use with very slight exception are produced, processed, transported, and marketed by private enterprise. The founders of our country in writing the Federal Constitution established a pattern of government for this Nation and its political subdivisions, the basic purpose of which was to give all the people human liberties, economic opportunities, personal and property protection, and international security. Competitive private enterprise offers the maximum of economic opportunity and is the only economic system under which there can be both abundant production and the preservation of human liberties. We have only to look at the production lines in countries with totalitarian governments to see how other economic systems are made to work.

To understand and to feel deeply these basic concepts are immeasurable aids to the individual's success.

Generally speaking, graduating from college is something like moving out from under the parental roof. The graduate takes it upon himself first to make a living and second to become a part of the community life where he lives. He has reached voting age and his community life with respect to government also takes on a new and broader meaning.

Because of his education he is especially trained to work into positions of leadership in both of these functions. His success in both will closely synchronize with the degree to which there are established in him the qualities of intelligence.

The urge to make a living is almost automatic in any red-blooded American, and his work to implement that purpose will be a contribution to the economic strength of the Nation.

Less spontaneous, perhaps, is the response to government, although its proper functioning is vital to all of us. Each of us should understand it and help to make it successful. Only a few can or need to be office holders or government employees. Each citizen under a people's government, however, has an important part to take.

To illustrate, may I reflect in a humble way on my own personal reaction. I became of voting age in April 1918. Since that time I have cast a ballot at our county~~my~~ voting precinct, Svea Township, Barnes County, at every primary and fall election. There has not been a single miss. When I drive by our local rural consolidated school and when I visit this University, I am proud that I am paying taxes to support such institutions. When I drive on our improved highways, I am glad that I paid gas tax and license fees to help build them. When I see a highway patrolman helping to make travel safe and uncongested, I feel that my driver's license fee is serving a good purpose. When I attend a political convention or

discuss governmental policy and programs with my neighbors, helping to develop my own and a public opinion, I feel that it is the least that I can do to maintain a people's government.

In our type of government we need the ever alert vigilance and participation of all the people. It should be their purpose to hold as many as possible of the functions of government at local levels. That brings the best government and the greatest freedom for the people. The action of public officials and the effect of Government programs must be evaluated by their long-term influence on basic concepts and fundamental purposes rather than by the immediate benefit or hardship they will bring to the individual. Individually we must have confidence in our own ability to roll with the swells and the troughs of day to day variations in the elements of economic prosperity and social justice and in that confidence find strength to support the long-term right as we see it. Many years ago my brother sent me a plaque which has constantly hung on the walls of my home, quoting these thought-provoking words of Theodore Roosevelt, "Aggressive fighting for the right is the noblest sport the world affords."

Today, you, the members of this University class of 1958, receive diplomas and enter upon a new phase of life's experiences. Before you is a world of opportunity and challenge, both greater than they have ever been before. To help cope with this broader assignment your education and wealth of specific information have been sharpened and enlarged by the worldwide achievements of recent years.

I constantly marvel at the vitality, the ambition, the resourcefulness, the strength, and the sheer ingenuity of youth, and have confidence in what it will do for the future. Your part will be strengthened if you pledge yourselves to be considerate and thoughtful at all times, to recognize the rights of others, to be appreciative and grateful for the advantages that are yours and to strive to be responsive in mind and body to the challenges of today.

From a brochure of facts and ideas dealing with its business and published by Republic Steel Corporation in 1957 I quote, "Mind-power brought us where we are. Mind-power designed the tools of research and production. Mind-power will use these tools to build the world of tomorrow. The promise of the future is the creative potential in the minds of men."

Our country, founded in the search for and the establishment of human freedom and predicated on abundant individual economic opportunities, constitutes the ideal environment for the intelligent functioning of mind-power. The intelligent functioning of mind-power reflects in social conduct, in religious understanding, in governmental purpose, in economic production, and in the control of the character determining emotions of mankind.

You have my congratulations on your achievement and your heritage and my best wishes for your happiness and success as you emerge from the constructive and guiding influence of our University into the more rigorous fields that lie ahead.

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