

REMARKS OF SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
A PRESIDENTIAL CLASSROOM FOR YOUNG AMERICANS
GRADUATION BANQUET

Washington, D.C.

February 6, 1976

It's a pleasure to be here with you this evening and to offer congratulations on your participation in the Presidential Classroom program.

I first visited this city some 40 years ago. At that time, there were few organizations capable of providing the kind of intensive seminars and first-hand exposure that forms the base of this program.

Yet I still can remember my first visions of Washington -- the buildings, the people and the debates. And needless to say, I was quite taken with the workings of the federal government, particularly the Congress.

Since that time, tons of paper and millions of words -- too many of them mine, some might say -- have added to the complexity of this government. I am sure that after your experience here, you can better appreciate the competing and conflicting pressures and interests which are the substance of American politics.

Few Americans have had the opportunity to reach out and touch the very structure of their government. Washington is a mystical city which enthralls most of its visitors. The bright and bristling buildings which house our government have become the very symbols of this Republic.

And one of the principal tasks of any student is to separate the form from the substance, to learn how to differentiate appearance from reality. That's something no one can fully accomplish in one week, or in one lifetime. But it is an effort that must be undertaken by every citizen.

So I hope that each of you has been testing your assumptions about the federal government. Washington is the place to test your impressions of history against the realities of the present and your hopes for the future.

I hope that your minds are open to the new information you have gained. I hope your thoughts are being challenged, worked over, and measured against what civics books say government in our democracy should be.

Fortunately, no other government on this earth operates in such an open manner. This is, and must be, a government with its processes and decisions open for public inspection.

But an open government without an informed citizenry simply is not accountable. We ask you then, not simply to trust government, but to be informed about its work and the problems with which it is grappling, and then make your own judgment.

The perspective and appreciation you have for the immensity of this government should serve you well throughout your lifetime. Time and again, this country will be faced with divisive, controversial issues. With problems that have no simple answers.

We find this day after day in the Congress. Issues of international affairs -- arms control, the Middle East, detente -- each presents complex problems to policy makers. As a result, honest division exist between men and women of goodwill as to what actions will resolve the conflicts and secure domestic and international justice.

Further complicating this situation is the fact that we have no perfect people to make and administer the decisions adopted by a majority. We simply are human beings, with ample faults and strengths.

This, of course, is why the ultimate decision must rest with all the people. We have no single sovereign in America, no one source of power, no final single arbiter. Every citizen must be that final judge and, in a sense a politician.

That is why, regardless of age, every American must be willing to exert some kind of leadership, a measure of political responsibility. And although we sometimes forget, it is that sense of individual responsibility and citizenship that allows us to celebrate this Nation's Bicentennial.

The 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence on that hot, humid July day in Philadelphia were effectively putting their names to their own death warrants.

During

During the War of Independence, nine of those men died of wounds or hardships, five were captured as traitors, twelve had their homes ransacked or burned, and the sons of many others were killed, wounded or captured.

But the job they did was worth the price they paid, for they had set in motion the most powerful force for human freedom since the dawn of time. They had lighted for the world a beacon of hope that still shines today.

I continue to be impressed over how relatively young these men were. Nineteen of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence were in their 40's. Sixteen were in their 30's. Two were only 27.

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson was 33, James Madison was 25, Alexander Hamilton was 21.

George Washington held the position of public surveyor of Fairfax County, Virginia, at age 17. When he was only 20, he was sole manager of a 4,000 acre tobacco plantation, while simultaneously holding a commission as a Major of adjutant of one of the four military districts of Virginia.

At 21, he was entrusted with a critical diplomatic military expedition to the French positions in the Ohio Valley. The report which he wrote was published in Virginia and England and helped alert the British government to the encroachment of the French into the Western areas of the colonies.

At 22, Washington was a Lieutenant Colonel, and a year later he was made Commander-in-Chief of all Virginia militia.

When Alexander Hamilton was 20, he was an impassioned and effective pamphleteer in defense of colonial policies. A year later he was a Lieutenant Colonel on George Washington's personal staff.

Two hundred years ago we the people came together to form a more perfect union. We took a risk that never had been taken before in the history of mankind.

It was not the risk of rebellion, for many rebellions had been tried and failed. Rather, it was the risk of a grand experiment in democracy -- of forming a government under which all the people were sovereign as well as subject, rulers as well as ruled.

The risk was that of union, a union of persons who -- whatever their station in life, their level of income, their education, or their background -- were to be regarded as equal in creation and in their protection under the laws.

The document which those 56 men took a risk in signing -- the Declaration of Independence -- affirmed that there are certain God-given, inalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And, to secure these rights, a government was instituted, deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed.

But it was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who effectively translated for our time the demand for a new pioneering leadership to make the promise of the Declaration of Independence a reality.

"I do not believe that the era of the pioneer is at an end," he said. "I only believe that the area for pioneering has changed." He then went on to say that "our country needs bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something!"

Those who are young ought to have a great sense of purpose and idealism as they step forward to explore the future. And traditionally it has been part of the American character to be optimistic -- to have faith and confidence in the future.

That is why I am deeply concerned when I see some of our young people reflecting a more pessimistic, negative mood -- when they seem unwilling to take a risk on the future.

Our whole history is filled with adventure and pioneering. Americans through the years have opened up a continent -- developed a new nation. We have showed the world new technologies in agriculture, medicine, education, transportation -- yes, in every aspect of life.

You are in the very spring of life. Today, you are better equipped to challenge old assumptions and the traditional way of doing things than any generation in human history. Now is the time to question and to probe -- to gain new understandings and to live each day to its fullest.

I sense a new spirit dawning in America. I find it no matter where I travel. A long nightmare of confusion and dashed hopes for all too many Americans is going to end, because at the root of the American experience is a determination not to lower expectations, but to engage in bold experiments.

We are not a Nation that seeks the certainty of sure stability. No, we are a people who thrive on exercising free choice.

So, test your knowledge and your ability to the utmost. Continue your education and your political involvement throughout your lifetime. Trust in your own judgment and remain open to new ideas. You can make a difference if you take the risk of becoming informed and involved.

In closing, I want to remind you of what that great philosopher, Victor Hugo, said:

"The future has several names. For the weak, it is impossible. For the faint-hearted, it is the unknown. For the thoughtful and valiant, it is ideal. The challenge is urgent. The task is large. The time is now."

REMARKS OF SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

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GRADUATION BANQUET

WASHINGTON, D.C.

FEBRUARY 6, 1976

my first visit to D.C.

IT'S A PLEASURE TO BE HERE WITH YOU THIS EVENING AND TO
OFFER CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE PRESIDENTIAL
CLASSROOM PROGRAM,

L I FIRST VISITED THIS CITY SOME 40 YEARS AGO; AT THAT TIME,
THERE WERE FEW ORGANIZATIONS CAPABLE OF PROVIDING THE KIND OF
INTENSIVE SEMINARS AND FIRST-HAND EXPOSURE THAT FORMS THE BASE
OF THIS PROGRAM.

L YET I STILL CAN REMEMBER MY FIRST VISIONS OF WASHINGTON --
THE BUILDINGS, THE PEOPLE AND THE DEBATES, AND NEEDLESS TO SAY,
I WAS QUITE TAKEN WITH THE WORKINGS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT,
PARTICULARLY THE CONGRESS,

L SINCE THAT TIME, TONS OF PAPER AND MILLIONS OF WORDS -- TOO
MANY OF THEM MINE, SOME MIGHT SAY -- HAVE ADDED TO THE COMPLEXITY
OF THIS GOVERNMENT.

I AM SURE THAT AFTER YOUR EXPERIENCE HERE, YOU CAN BETTER
APPRECIATE THE COMPETING AND CONFLICTING PRESSURES AND INTERESTS
WHICH ARE THE SUBSTANCE OF AMERICAN POLITICS.

FEW AMERICANS HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH
THE VERY STRUCTURE OF THEIR GOVERNMENT. WASHINGTON IS A MYSTICAL
CITY WHICH ENTHRALLS MOST OF ITS VISITORS. THE BRIGHT AND
BRISTLING BUILDINGS WHICH HOUSE OUR GOVERNMENT HAVE BECOME THE
VERY SYMBOLS OF THIS REPUBLIC.

AND ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL TASKS OF ANY STUDENT IS TO SEPARATE
THE FORM FROM THE SUBSTANCE, TO LEARN HOW TO DIFFERENTIATE
APPEARANCE FROM REALITY. THAT'S SOMETHING NO ONE CAN FULLY
ACCOMPLISH IN ONE WEEK, OR IN ONE LIFETIME. BUT IT IS AN EFFORT
THAT MUST BE UNDERTAKEN BY EVERY CITIZEN.

L So I HOPE THAT EACH OF YOU HAS BEEN TESTING YOUR ASSUMPTIONS
ABOUT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, WASHINGTON IS THE PLACE TO TEST
YOU IMPRESSIONS OF HISTORY AGAINST THE REALITIES OF THE
PRESENT AND YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE,

L I HOPE THAT YOUR MINDS ARE OPEN TO THE NEW INFORMATION
YOU HAVE GAINED ^{and} I HOPE YOUR THOUGHTS ARE BEING CHALLENGED,
WORKED OVER, AND MEASURED AGAINST WHAT CIVICS BOOKS SAY GOVERNMENT
IN OUR DEMOCRACY ^{is and} SHOULD BE,

L FORTUNATELY, NO OTHER GOVERNMENT ON THIS EARTH OPERATES
IN SUCH AN OPEN MANNER. THIS IS, AND MUST BE, A GOVERNMENT
WITH ITS PROCESSES AND DECISIONS OPEN FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION.

L BUT AN OPEN GOVERNMENT WITHOUT AN INFORMED CITIZENRY
SIMPLY IS NOT ACCOUNTABLE,

WE ASK YOU THEN, NOT SIMPLY TO TRUST GOVERNMENT, BUT TO BE
INFORMED ABOUT ITS WORK AND THE PROBLEMS WITH WHICH IT IS
GRAPPLING, AND THEN MAKE YOUR OWN JUDGMENT.

THE PERSPECTIVE AND APPRECIATION YOU HAVE FOR THE IMMENSITY
OF THIS GOVERNMENT SHOULD SERVE YOU WELL THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFETIME.

TIME AND AGAIN, THIS COUNTRY WILL BE FACED WITH DIVISIVE, (Part)
CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES. WITH PROBLEMS THAT HAVE NO SIMPLE ANSWERS.

WE FIND THIS DAY AFTER DAY IN THE CONGRESS, ISSUES
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS -- ARMS CONTROL, THE MIDDLE EAST,
DETENTE -- EACH PRESENTS COMPLEX PROBLEMS TO POLICY MAKERS.

AS A RESULT, HONEST DIVISION EXIST BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN OF
GOODWILL AS TO WHAT ACTIONS WILL RESOLVE THE CONFLICTS AND
SECURE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE.

L FURTHER COMPLICATING THIS SITUATION IS THE FACT THAT WE
HAVE NO PERFECT PEOPLE TO MAKE AND ADMINISTER THE DECISIONS
ADOPTED BY A MAJORITY. L WE SIMPLY ARE HUMAN BEINGS, WITH AMPLE
FAULTS AND STRENGTHS.

L THIS, OF COURSE, IS WHY THE ULTIMATE DECISION MUST REST
WITH ALL THE PEOPLE. L WE HAVE NO SINGLE SOVEREIGN IN AMERICA,
NO ONE SOURCE OF POWER, NO FINAL SINGLE ARBITER. L EVERY
CITIZEN MUST BE THAT FINAL JUDGE AND, IN A SENSE ^{the} A POLITICIAN.

h THAT IS WHY, REGARDLESS OF AGE, EVERY AMERICAN MUST BE
WILLING TO EXERT SOME KIND OF LEADERSHIP, ^{and} A MEASURE OF
POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY. L AND ALTHOUGH WE SOMETIMES FORGET,
IT IS THAT SENSE OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CITIZENSHIP
THAT ALLOWS US TO CELEBRATE THIS NATION'S BICENTENNIAL.

Four Fathers

The 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence on that hot, humid July day in Philadelphia were effectively putting their names to their own death warrants.

During the War of Independence, nine of those men died of wounds or hardships, five were captured ^{by the British} as traitors, twelve had their homes ransacked or burned, and the sons of many others were killed, wounded or captured.

But the job they did was worth the price they paid, for they had set in motion the most powerful force for human freedom since the dawn of time. They had lighted for the world a beacon of hope that still shines today.

Pillar of an Idea

I continue to be impressed over how relatively young these men were. Nineteen of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence were in their 40's.

SIXTEEN WERE IN THEIR 30's. TWO WERE ONLY 27.

average Age 36

h IN 1776, THOMAS JEFFERSON WAS 33, JAMES MADISON WAS 25,
ALEXANDER HAMILTON WAS 21.

h GEORGE WASHINGTON HELD THE POSITION OF PUBLIC SURVEYER OF
FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA, AT AGE 17. WHEN HE WAS ONLY 20,
HE WAS SOLE MANAGER OF A 4,000 ACRE TOBACCO PLANTATION, WHILE
SIMULTANEOUSLY HOLDING A COMMISSION AS A MAJOR ~~OF ADJUTANT~~
OF ONE OF THE FOUR MILITARY DISTRICTS OF VIRGINIA.

h AT 21, HE WAS ENTRUSTED WITH A CRITICAL DIPLOMATIC MILITARY
EXPEDITION TO THE FRENCH POSITIONS IN THE OHIO VALLEY. THE
REPORT WHICH HE WROTE WAS PUBLISHED IN VIRGINIA AND ENGLAND AND
HELPED ALERT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT TO THE ENCROACHMENT OF THE
FRENCH INTO THE WESTERN AREAS OF THE COLONIES.

AT 22, WASHINGTON WAS A LIEUTENANT COLONEL, AND A YEAR LATER
HE WAS MADE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF ALL VIRGINIA MILITIA.

When ALEXANDER HAMILTON WAS 20, HE WAS AN IMPASSIONED AND
EFFECTIVE PAMPHLETEER IN DEFENSE OF COLONIAL POLICIES. A YEAR LATER

HE WAS A LIEUTENANT COLONEL ON GEORGE WASHINGTON'S PERSONAL STAFF.

yes almost
TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO "WE THE PEOPLE CAME TOGETHER TO FORM
A MORE PERFECT UNION." WE TOOK A RISK THAT NEVER HAD BEEN TAKEN
BEFORE IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND,

It WAS NOT THE RISK OF REBELLION, FOR MANY REBELLIONS HAD
BEEN TRIED AND FAILED. RATHER, IT WAS THE RISK OF A GRAND
EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY -- OF FORMING A GOVERNMENT UNDER WHICH
ALL THE PEOPLE WERE SOVEREIGN AS WELL AS SUBJECT, RULERS AS
WELL AS RULED.

↳ THE RISK WAS THAT OF UNION, A UNION OF PERSONS WHO -- WHATEVER
THEIR STATION IN LIFE, THEIR LEVEL OF INCOME, THEIR EDUCATION, OR
THEIR BACKGROUND -- WERE TO BE REGARDED AS EQUAL IN CREATION AND
IN THEIR PROTECTION UNDER THE LAWS.

↳ THE DOCUMENT WHICH THOSE 56 MEN TOOK A RISK IN SIGNING -- THE
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE -- AFFIRMED THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN
GOD-GIVEN, INALIENABLE RIGHTS, INCLUDING LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE
PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. AND, TO SECURE THESE RIGHTS, A GOVERNMENT
WAS INSTITUTED, DERIVING ITS JUST POWERS FROM THE CONSENT OF
THE GOVERNED.

↳ BUT IT WAS PRESIDENT FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT WHO EFFECTIVELY
TRANSLATED FOR OUR TIME THE DEMAND FOR A NEW PIONEERING LEADERSHIP
TO MAKE THE PROMISE OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE A REALITY.

"I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE ERA OF THE PIONEER IS AT AN END,"

HE SAID, "I ONLY BELIEVE THAT THE AREA FOR PIONEERING HAS CHANGED,"

HE THEN WENT ON TO SAY THAT "OUR COUNTRY NEEDS BOLD, PERSISTENT

EXPERIMENTATION. IT IS COMMON SENSE TO TAKE A METHOD AND TRY IT.

IF IT FAILS, ADMIT IT FRANKLY AND TRY ANOTHER. BUT ABOVE ALL, TRY
SOMETHING."

THOSE WHO ARE YOUNG OUGHT TO HAVE A GREAT SENSE OF PURPOSE
AND IDEALISM AS THEY STEP FORWARD TO EXPLORE THE FUTURE AND
TRADITIONALLY IT HAS BEEN PART OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER TO BE
OPTIMISTIC -- TO HAVE FAITH AND CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE.

THAT IS WHY I AM DEEPLY CONCERNED WHEN I SEE SOME OF OUR
YOUNG PEOPLE REFLECTING A MORE PESSIMISTIC, NEGATIVE MOOD -- WHEN
THEY SEEM UNWILLING TO TAKE A RISK ON THE FUTURE.

h OUR WHOLE HISTORY IS FILLED WITH ADVENTURE AND PIONEERING,

L AMERICANS THROUGH THE YEARS HAVE OPENED UP A CONTINENT --DEVELOPED

A NEW NATION. WE HAVE SHOWED THE WORLD NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN AGRICULTURE,

MEDICINE, EDUCATION, TRANSPORTATION -- YES, IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE.

h YOU ARE IN THE VERY SPRING OF LIFE, L TODAY, YOU ARE BETTER

EQUIPPED TO CHALLENGE OLD ASSUMPTIONS AND THE TRADITIONAL WAY

OF DOING THINGS THAN ANY GENERATION IN HUMAN HISTORY. L NOW IS

THE TIME TO QUESTION AND TO PROBE -- TO GAIN NEW UNDERSTANDINGS

AND TO LIVE EACH DAY TO ITS FULLEST.

h I SENSE A NEW SPIRIT DAWNING IN AMERICA L I FIND IT NO

MATTER WHERE I TRAVEL. L A LONG NIGHTMARE OF CONFUSION AND DASHED

HOPES FOR ALL TOO MANY AMERICANS IS GOING TO END, BECAUSE AT THE

ROOT OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS A DETERMINATION NOT TO LOWER

EXPECTATIONS, BUT TO ENGAGE IN BOLD EXPERIMENTS.

WE ARE NOT A NATION THAT SEEKS THE CERTAINTY OF SURE
STABILITY. No, WE ARE A PEOPLE WHO THRIVE ON EXERCISING FREE CHOICE.

SO, TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND YOUR ABILITY TO THE UTMOST.

CONTINUE YOUR EDUCATION AND YOUR POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT THROUGHOUT
YOUR LIFETIME. TRUST IN YOUR OWN JUDGMENT AND REMAIN OPEN TO
NEW IDEAS. You CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IF YOU TAKE THE RISK OF
BECOMING INFORMED AND INVOLVED.

IN CLOSING, I WANT TO REMIND YOU OF WHAT THAT GREAT
PHILOSOPHER, VICTOR HUGO, SAID:

"THE FUTURE HAS SEVERAL NAMES. FOR THE WEAK, IT IS
IMPOSSIBLE. FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED, IT IS THE UNKNOWN. FOR
THE THOUGHTFUL AND VALIANT, IT IS IDEAL. THE CHALLENGE IS
URGENT. THE TASK IS LARGE. THE TIME IS NOW."



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