

REMARKS OF SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

HONORS ASSEMBLY
ANOKA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
ANOKA, MINNESOTA

May 10, 1976

It is a special pleasure to be with you today to honor these graduating seniors who have achieved academic excellence in their careers at Anoka Senior High.

You young men and women have brought honor to yourselves, your families, and to your school. I congratulate you! I salute you!

Occasions like this offer the perfect opportunity to reflect on the past and -- more importantly -- to gaze into the future. It is a time to dream and a time to plan.

What should your dreams be? Should they be anchored in the past -- or should they ignore the past and only press forward?

This question faces not only graduating classes all over America. It is a question which confronts Americans of all ages.

I believe this question must be discussed in the context of the national character.

Now that the Bicentennial is in full swing, each of you no doubt has heard a great deal about the revolutionary period -- when Americans faced great adversity in severing our colonial ties with Great Britain.

But there is a time in early American history that describes our national character in even more relevant terms than the revolutionary period.

Ten years after the Declaration of Independence, the unity that bound the states together during the War had all but vanished. There were bitter divisions among the States. Commerce was nearly at a standstill. Accusations and recriminations resounded in Congress, and the Articles of Confederation offered no system for resolving these bitter disputes.

The optimism and confidence that launched our experiment in self-government had all but vanished. A federal convention was called for May, 1787, to consider how the Articles could be made to work.

The political crisis that led to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 was a far greater test of the American character than the War of Independence. The Founding Fathers expressed a mixture of despair and self-confidence.

Yet despite their monumental differences of opinion and interest, their attitude never was one of defeatism or discouragement.

To the contrary, the Founders seized the moment to design a new system of government capable of bringing order and justice to the United States.

These men had been charged only with amending the Articles of Confederation. So in setting about to draft a Constitution they took a great risk. They were willing to risk the consequences because they knew it was necessary to save our fledgling democracy.

It was the Founders' willingness to risk, buttressed by their optimism, faith and confidence in the ultimate wisdom of their actions, that saved the Union -- scarcely a decade after the separation from Great Britain.

It has been these two characteristics -- a sense of adventure and a willingness to risk -- combined with self-confidence and optimism, that historically have been at the roots of the American character.

But one more ingredient was essential in the spring and summer of 1787 in Philadelphia: a willingness to compromise on the substance of the new Constitution -- compromise between the interests of the large and small states, the agricultural and manufacturing states -- to compromise on the framework of the Federal government and its relationship to the States.

To their surprise, the Framers found that compromise solutions could be hammered out.

I mention these events surrounding the writing of the Constitution because I believe they are at the heart of America's continuing experiment in self-government -- a willingness to risk, to pioneer -- a sense of optimism and self-confidence -- a capacity for compromise and accommodation.

Time and again, these three characteristics have brought us through national trials and difficulties far more imposing than anything that confronts us today.

They brought us through the secessionist movement in the early 1800's.

-- through the perilous period of frontier settlement and the establishment of new States;

-- and through a long, bloody, and divisive Civil War.

These elements of our national character brought us through world wars and domestic scandals;

-- they helped us to survive depressions and civil unrest;

-- they have helped us develop cures for dread diseases and put a man on the moon.

We have survived adversity and progressed as a free nation by taking great risks, by retaining our self-confidence and optimism, and by learning to compromise what seemed to be totally hostile and incompatible points of view.

As a result, the injustices were rooted out, our democracy was refined, and the security and happiness of our people were advanced.

But what of the American character today?

What is the mood of the American public? I believe we can learn a great deal from a New York Times survey which was published less than a week ago.

The Times polled some 1,856 college freshmen in a Survey of Historical Knowledge and Attitudes.

Given a list of 10 traits and asked how characteristic they thought each one was of the span of American history, the students generally chose terms like "opportunity" and "democracy" as representative of American history.

They felt that events like the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the drafting of the Constitution, and the Emancipation Proclamation were more revealing of our national character and history than scandals and assassinations.

This should say something to those who believe that the national attitude has changed -- that our national mood is negative and apathetic.

Following on the heels of one of the most scandal-ridden periods of American history, the majority of our young people have a firm grasp on the principles of America.

I believe this represents the other side of the American character that doesn't get reported as often.

It is an America that openly acknowledges failures and imperfections, but that also recognizes our country's continuing ability to learn from its mistakes.

It is an America that advances out of its setbacks -- that uses adversity as an instrument for progress.

These were the attitudes that sustained our Founding Fathers in 1787. And I believe they will continue to sustain our Nation as we move into the third century of independence.

But we must realize that surely as our national character is not perfect, so indeed is our government imperfect.

It was an Englishman -- Winston Churchill -- who summed it up in these words: "...Democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

A nation of 215 million people, and a government that serves those people, cannot be perfect. So we must strive for excellence, rather than perfection.

--We must strive to see that every American who wants a job has a chance to get one.

-- We must strive to see that every American family is able to have a decent home.

-- We must strive for peace abroad and a genuine sense of "community" at home.

-- In short, we must work to fulfill the promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness -- to establish justice, and to promote the general welfare.

There are those who say we shouldn't make too many promises.

-- Maybe we shouldn't promise every American an education.

-- Maybe we shouldn't promise good health care at reasonable cost.

-- Perhaps we're promising too much when we look for a day when every form of discrimination and bigotry is removed from the face of America.

But I submit that the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution -- and, yes, even the Bible itself -- are promises.

They are glorious, noble, and idealistic promises.

Yes, and they are unfulfilled.

But it is in the effort to make good on these promises that we will progress and prosper as a Nation.

A nation that gives up its dreams and abandons its promises robs its citizens of hope and condemns future generations to stagnation and mediocrity.

From our country's earliest moments, our willingness to take risks, supported by a robust self-confidence and faith, and tempered by a capacity to compromise, have been the decisive factors in sustaining America's grand experiment in democracy.

It was Franklin Delano Roosevelt who said: "I do not believe that the era of the pioneer is at an end. I only believe that the area for pinoneering has changed. Our country needs bold, persistent experimentation."

You are in the spring of life. You are better equipped to tackle the problems we face than any generation in American history.

You ought to have a great sense of purpose and idealism as you step forward to explore the future.

Call on our American character -- draw from it as you begin to prepare yourselves for leadership.

You can make a difference if you are willing to take the risk.

And I want you to remember 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."

#

Age
1955
Freedom
55
16 months '70

Crisis in America - The American Character

- Decl of Independence - won war - then
 Dissension
- constit. Convention - - war 1812
- civil war - Emancipation Procl.
- opening a continent
- Great Depression
- Vietnam - Watergate - Corruption

REMARKS OF SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

Is it soft, timid,
hesitant, cynical

- ✓ Pioneering
- ✓ Adventurous
- ✓ Optimism

The American Character

HONORS ASSEMBLY

Honors Assembly

ANOKA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Future - Search for Peace - Nuclear - 3rd world

Quality of life - Security - work - Environment - Jobs

Human Rights

MAY 10, 1976

Arthur Uebel - Doözl Principal

Howard Casney - State Commissioner of Educ

Lee Fench - Supt Schools - Anoka

Chuck Drury - Pres. School Bd - Dist 11

Don Scarborough - Mayor

~~member Board of Educ~~

✓ Arch
Board
State
School
Board

IT IS A SPECIAL PLEASURE TO BE WITH YOU TODAY TO HONOR
THESE GRADUATING SENIORS WHO HAVE ACHIEVED ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
IN THEIR CAREERS AT ANOKA SENIOR HIGH.

YOU YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN HAVE BROUGHT HONOR TO YOURSELVES,
YOUR FAMILIES, AND TO YOUR SCHOOL. I CONGRATULATE YOU! I SALUTE
you!

OCCASIONS LIKE THIS OFFER THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT
ON THE PAST AND -- MORE IMPORTANTLY -- TO GAZE INTO THE FUTURE.
IT IS A TIME TO DREAM AND A TIME TO PLAN.

WHAT SHOULD YOUR DREAMS BE? SHOULD THEY BE ANCHORED IN THE
PAST -- OR SHOULD THEY IGNORE THE PAST AND ONLY PRESS FORWARD?

THIS QUESTION FACES NOT ONLY GRADUATING CLASSES ALL OVER
AMERICA. IT IS A QUESTION WHICH CONFRONTS AMERICANS OF ALL AGES.

I BELIEVE THIS QUESTION MUST BE DISCUSSED IN THE CONTEXT OF
THE NATIONAL CHARACTER.

NOW THAT THE BICENTENNIAL IS IN FULL SWING, EACH OF YOU NO
DOUBT HAS HEARD A GREAT DEAL ABOUT THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD --
WHEN AMERICANS FACED GREAT ADVERSITY IN SEVERING OUR COLONIAL TIES
WITH GREAT BRITAIN.

↳ BUT THERE IS A TIME IN EARLY AMERICAN HISTORY THAT DESCRIBES
OUR NATIONAL CHARACTER IN EVEN MORE RELEVANT TERMS THAN THE
REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD.

↳ TEN YEARS AFTER THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, THE UNITY
THAT BOUND THE STATES TOGETHER DURING THE WAR HAD ALL BUT VANISHED.
THERE WERE BITTER DIVISIONS AMONG THE STATES. COMMERCE WAS NEARLY
AT A STANDSTILL. ACCUSATIONS AND RECRIMINATIONS RESOUNDED IN

CONGRESS, AND THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION OFFERED NO SYSTEM FOR RESOLVING THESE BITTER DISPUTES.

THE OPTIMISM AND CONFIDENCE THAT LAUNCHED OUR EXPERIMENT IN SELF-GOVERNMENT HAD ALL BUT VANISHED. A FEDERAL CONVENTION WAS CALLED FOR MAY, 1787, TO CONSIDER HOW THE ARTICLES COULD BE MADE TO WORK.

THE POLITICAL CRISIS THAT LED TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION OF 1787 WAS A FAR GREATER TEST OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER THAN THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE. THE FOUNDING FATHERS EXPRESSED A MIXTURE OF DESPAIR AND SELF-CONFIDENCE.

YET DESPITE THEIR MONUMENTAL DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AND INTEREST, THEIR ATTITUDE NEVER WAS ONE OF DEFEATISM OR DISCOURAGEMENT.

TO THE CONTRARY, THE FOUNDERS SEIZED THE MOMENT TO DESIGN A NEW SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT CAPABLE OF BRINGING ORDER AND JUSTICE TO THE UNITED STATES.

THESE MEN HAD BEEN CHARGED ONLY WITH AMENDING THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION. SO IN SETTING ABOUT TO DRAFT A CONSTITUTION THEY TOOK A GREAT RISK. THEY WERE WILLING TO RISK THE CONSEQUENCES BECAUSE THEY KNEW IT WAS NECESSARY TO SAVE OUR FLEDGLING DEMOCRACY.

IT WAS THE FOUNDERS' WILLINGNESS TO RISK, BUTTRESSED BY THEIR OPTIMISM, FAITH AND CONFIDENCE IN THE ULTIMATE WISDOM OF THEIR ACTIONS, THAT SAVED THE UNION -- SCARCELY A DECADE AFTER THE SEPARATION FROM GREAT BRITAIN.

IT HAS BEEN THESE TWO CHARACTERISTICS -- A SENSE OF ADVENTURE AND A WILLINGNESS TO RISK -- COMBINED WITH SELF-CONFIDENCE AND OPTIMISM, THAT HISTORICALLY HAVE BEEN AT THE ROOTS OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER.

BUT ONE MORE INGREDIENT WAS ESSENTIAL IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER OF 1787 IN PHILADELPHIA: A WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION -- COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE INTERESTS OF THE LARGE AND SMALL STATES, THE AGRICULTURAL AND MANUFACTURING STATES -- TO COMPROMISE ON THE FRAMEWORK OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE STATES.

TO THEIR SURPRISE, THE FRAMERS FOUND THAT COMPROMISE SOLUTIONS COULD BE HAMMERED OUT.

I MENTION THESE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE WRITING OF THE CONSTITUTION BECAUSE I BELIEVE THEY ARE AT THE HEART OF AMERICA'S CONTINUING EXPERIMENT IN SELF-GOVERNMENT -- A WILLINGNESS TO RISK, TO PIONEER -- A SENSE OF OPTIMISM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE -- A CAPACITY FOR COMPROMISE AND ACCOMMODATION.

TIME AND AGAIN, THESE THREE CHARACTERISTICS HAVE BROUGHT US THROUGH NATIONAL TRIALS AND DIFFICULTIES FAR MORE IMPOSING THAN ANYTHING THAT CONFRONTS US TODAY.

THEY BROUGHT US THROUGH THE SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT IN THE EARLY 1800's.

-- THROUGH THE PERILOUS PERIOD OF FRONTIER SETTLEMENT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW STATES;

-- AND THROUGH A LONG, BLOODY, AND DIVISIVE CIVIL WAR.

THESE ELEMENTS OF OUR NATIONAL CHARACTER BROUGHT US THROUGH WORLD WARS AND DOMESTIC SCANDALS;

-- THEY HELPED US TO SURVIVE DEPRESSIONS AND CIVIL UNREST;

-- THEY HAVE HELPED US DEVELOP CURES FOR DREAD DISEASES AND

PUT A MAN ON THE MOON.

WE HAVE SURVIVED ADVERSITY AND PROGRESSED AS A FREE NATION
BY TAKING GREAT RISKS, BY RETAINING OUR SELF-CONFIDENCE AND
OPTIMISM, AND BY LEARNING TO COMPROMISE WHAT SEEMED TO BE TOTALLY
HOSTILE AND INCOMPATIBLE POINTS OF VIEW.

AS A RESULT, THE INJUSTICES WERE ROOTED OUT, OUR DEMOCRACY
WAS REFINED, AND THE SECURITY AND HAPPINESS OF OUR PEOPLE WERE
ADVANCED.

BUT WHAT OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER TODAY?

WHAT IS THE MOOD OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC? I BELIEVE WE CAN
LEARN A GREAT DEAL FROM A NEW YORK TIMES SURVEY WHICH WAS PUBLISHED
LESS THAN A WEEK AGO.

THE TIMES POLLED SOME 1,856 COLLEGE FRESHMEN IN A SURVEY OF
HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES.

GIVEN A LIST OF 10 TRAITS AND ASKED HOW CHARACTERISTIC THEY THOUGHT EACH ONE WAS OF THE SPAN OF AMERICAN HISTORY, THE STUDENTS GENERALLY CHOSE TERMS LIKE "OPPORTUNITY" AND "DEMOCRACY" AS REPRESENTATIVE OF AMERICAN HISTORY.

THEY FELT THAT EVENTS LIKE THE SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, THE DRAFTING OF THE CONSTITUTION, AND THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION WERE MORE REVEALING OF OUR NATIONAL CHARACTER AND HISTORY THAN SCANDALS AND ASSASSINATIONS.

THIS SHOULD SAY SOMETHING TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THE NATIONAL ATTITUDE HAS CHANGED -- THAT OUR NATIONAL MOOD IS NEGATIVE AND APATHETIC.

FOLLOWING ON THE HEELS OF ONE OF THE MOST SCANDAL-RIDDEN PERIODS OF AMERICAN HISTORY, THE MAJORITY OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A FIRM GRASP ON THE PRINCIPLES OF AMERICA.

I BELIEVE THIS REPRESENTS THE OTHER SIDE OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER THAT DOESN'T GET REPORTED AS OFTEN.

IT IS AN AMERICA THAT OPENLY ACKNOWLEDGES FAILURES AND IMPERFECTIONS, BUT THAT ALSO RECOGNIZES OUR COUNTRY'S CONTINUING ABILITY TO LEARN FROM ITS MISTAKES.

IT IS AN AMERICA THAT ADVANCES OUT OF ITS SETBACKS -- THAT USES ADVERSITY AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR PROGRESS.

THESE WERE THE ATTITUDES THAT SUSTAINED OUR FOUNDING FATHERS IN 1787. AND I BELIEVE THEY WILL CONTINUE TO SUSTAIN OUR NATION AS WE MOVE INTO THE THIRD CENTURY OF INDEPENDENCE.

BUT WE MUST REALIZE THAT SURELY AS OUR NATIONAL CHARACTER IS NOT PERFECT, SO INDEED IS OUR GOVERNMENT IMPERFECT.

IT WAS AN ENGLISHMAN -- WINSTON CHURCHILL -- WHO SUMMED IT UP IN THESE WORDS: "...DEMOCRACY IS THE WORST FORM OF GOVERNMENT EXCEPT ALL THOSE OTHER FORMS THAT HAVE BEEN TRIED FROM TIME TO TIME."

A NATION OF 215 MILLION PEOPLE, AND A GOVERNMENT THAT SERVES THOSE PEOPLE, CANNOT BE PERFECT. SO WE MUST STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE RATHER THAN PERFECTION.

--WE MUST STRIVE TO SEE THAT EVERY AMERICAN WHO WANTS A JOB HAS A CHANCE TO GET ONE.

-- WE MUST STRIVE TO SEE THAT EVERY AMERICAN FAMILY IS ABLE TO HAVE A DECENT HOME.

-- WE MUST STRIVE FOR PEACE ABROAD AND A GENUINE SENSE OF
"COMMUNITY" AT HOME.

-- IN SHORT, WE MUST WORK TO FULFILL THE PROMISE OF LIFE,
LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS -- TO ESTABLISH JUSTICE,
AND TO PROMOTE THE GENERAL WELFARE.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO SAY WE SHOULDN'T MAKE TOO MANY PROMISES.

-- MAYBE WE SHOULDN'T PROMISE EVERY AMERICAN AN EDUCATION.

-- MAYBE WE SHOULDN'T PROMISE GOOD HEALTH CARE AT REASONABLE
COST.

-- PERHAPS WE'RE PROMISING TOO MUCH WHEN WE LOOK FOR A DAY WHEN
EVERY FORM OF DISCRIMINATION AND BIGOTRY IS REMOVED FROM THE FACE
OF AMERICA.

BUT I SUBMIT THAT THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, THE
CONSTITUTION -- AND, YES, EVEN THE BIBLE ITSELF -- ARE PROMISES.

THEY ARE GLORIOUS, NOBLE, AND IDEALISTIC PROMISES,

YES, AND THEY ARE UNFULFILLED.

BUT IT IS IN THE EFFORT TO MAKE GOOD ON THESE PROMISES THAT WE
WILL PROGRESS AND PROSPER AS A NATION.

A NATION THAT GIVES UP ITS DREAMS AND ABANDONS ITS PROMISES
ROBS ITS CITIZENS OF HOPE AND CONDEMNS FUTURE GENERATIONS TO
STAGNATION AND MEDIOCRITY.

FROM OUR COUNTRY'S EARLIEST MOMENTS, OUR WILLINGNESS TO TAKE
RISKS, SUPPORTED BY A ROBUST SELF-CONFIDENCE AND FAITH, AND TEMPERED
BY A CAPACITY TO COMPROMISE, HAVE BEEN THE DECISIVE FACTORS IN
SUSTAINING AMERICA'S GRAND EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY.

IT WAS FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT WHO SAID: "I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE ERA OF THE PIONEER IS AT AN END. I ONLY BELIEVE THAT THE AREA FOR PINONEERING HAS CHANGED. OUR COUNTRY NEEDS BOLD, PERSISTENT EXPERIMENTATION."

YOU ARE IN THE SPRING OF LIFE. YOU ARE BETTER EQUIPPED TO TACKLE THE PROBLEMS WE FACE THAN ANY GENERATION IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

YOU OUGHT TO HAVE A GREAT SENSE OF PURPOSE AND IDEALISM AS YOU STEP FORWARD TO EXPLORE THE FUTURE.

CALL ON OUR AMERICAN CHARACTER -- DRAW FROM IT AS YOU BEGIN TO PREPARE YOURSELVES FOR LEADERSHIP.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IF YOU ARE WILLING TO TAKE THE RISK.

AND I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER 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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