

**Dr. Michael R. Hayden's Convocation Speech: University of Alberta  
June 4, 2009**

Eminent Chancellor, Madame President, Mr. Chairman of the Board, graduates, friends and family.

I am happy to join the other members of the Class of 2009 as a recipient of a degree from this admirable institution and I am honored to have this opportunity to provide some words of celebration and counsel.

I realize that the scope of a convocation address is broad and unfettered and in the wake of the celebrations and fulfillments of this day, few will remember what I say.

So feeling somewhat unconstrained, I propose to share with you my hopes for you today.

Firstly, let me reflect on the significance of this very moment. I know that all of you; graduates and family members and friends have worked so hard, and have overcome many barriers to reach this important day. Many of you have made profound sacrifices to be here, both private and public, and what a wonderful celebration it is to be in this moment and bask in its glory. I want to acknowledge on behalf of your parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, friends and partners who have helped you get to this day.

You stand today on the frontier between the world of ideas and the world of action. The challenge for each of you, is to preserve this balance as long as you can, and not allow the world into which you are about to enter, to bury the world from which you have just come.

I personally have had the good fortune to be able to keep a foot and indeed my spirit in both worlds- as a professor, a clinician scientist with space to explore ideas, concepts and learn from my patients and in the world of business to create opportunities here in our community and translate these ideas into products and services for patients here and throughout the world.

I was only a young school boy when I was exposed to words that have guided me throughout my life. This was 1966, 43 years ago, when Robert Kennedy visited South Africa in the darkest days of apartheid, defying the will of the SA government. My mother took me out of school to stand on the steps of the University of Cape Town to hear him give his now famous "Ripples of Hope" speech. In it he expressed the belief that "High aspirations and deep convictions are not incompatible with the most practical and efficient of programmes - there is no inconsistency between ideals and realistic

possibilities, no separation between the deepest desires of heart and mind and the rational application of human efforts to human problems.”

All of you graduates have spent many years learning and delving into the scientific process, and as such I am sure you are well acquainted with failure and setbacks. Failure is routine, if not inevitable in what we do. Failure has taught me things that I could not have learned any other way. I have learnt survival skills and to appreciate the value of friendship which helped me through difficult times as you learn to know yourself more deeply, knowledge that is a true gift. This is why the time you have likely spent at this great university has been an education not only of the mind but also of the heart. *I hope that you will continue to learn to trust the wisdom of your heart to enrich the evidence generated from your scientific endeavors.*

As you ponder your next move in moments of understandable self doubt and insecurity, I urge you to have the courage and self confidence to choose to immerse yourselves into questions and issues that truly matter. I encourage you to choose risk, dare to fail greatly, because only in that way will you ever achieve greatly. Our country needs you, particularly in these times to bring innovative solutions to some of the major problems facing us in the fields of energy, the environment and health care, both here and globally. And what you achieve can indeed make the profoundest difference.

To do this, you may have to incur the disapproval or resistance of your peers, parents, colleagues and many in our society. But this courage will always be essential, if we are going to unlock the secrets of nature, which can be so unyielding to our efforts.

We all know these are times of danger and uncertainty. What a privilege it is for us to sit here today in the peace and abundance of this university, province and country while so many elsewhere live in darkness and fear. It is however these very times that particularly call for the creative energy of young men and women trained in the sciences and public health to contribute to a new order.

As you go on this path, you may feel very alone with the difficulties, choices, and challenges to be faced, but as you enter this new phase you will find new companions in every corner of the world. You may be separated by language or culture, but you are united by a common humanity and purpose with people struggling with similar issues and as determined as you to build a better future. As you form these new alliances, do remember how so many of us in the past, including more recently your own President and I were welcomed to this ever enlarging circle, were embraced and invited to drink from what in First Nations culture is referred to as our common bowl, a bowl which has given life support to our dreams in Canada. With that consciousness, you will also realize that each of you can give life support to the dreams of others, and in doing so support other newcomers and others in need. You have much to offer.

How fortunate it is that you have been trained in Science- because the scientific approach that yields unambiguous evidence is one indispensable way to solve human problems. As Sydney Brenner, a prior Nobel Laureate has said- "Magic does not work, religion is unreliable but science works." And what a thrill constantly to live on the edge of knowledge, and to explore the next question. Science is not a luxury but essential for our prosperity, our health and quality of life. And for those of you graduating with degrees in public health, we have again been reminded of our shared stake in science and research with the emergence most recently of swine flu. The threats are global and your work will have global implications.

For that scientific endeavour to be most vibrant and successful, be open to dissent, foster questioning, and discussion and recognize that you may often learn much from unexpected places. Always maintain your composure and consider how knowledge generated can be used for the well being of our fellow human beings and around the world.

And as you get older, you will realize that the world needs your qualities of youth so evident today. You will all have met people older in age but young in openness to adventure and new ideas. Youthfulness is not measured by the date on your birth certificate, it is rather a state of mind, a victory of imagination over timidity and a willingness to learn new things and follow your passions and to have great fun along the way. In Bob Dylans words, May you all stay forever young.

And finally one last wish for you, I am almost finished. The friends who sit next to you today or whom you have met on this path will hopefully remain close forever. These will be uncles and aunts to your children, and people you turn to in times of trouble. You are bound today by a time that will never come again, but hopefully what you have experienced inside and outside the classroom will provide you with strength and comfort to ride the waves that come your way.

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