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Commencement and Farewell Address
Chancellor Leo Warren Jenkins
East Carolina University
Greenville, North Carolina,
May 12, 1978



Chancellor Leo Warren Jenkins 1947 Dean and Vice President 1961 1961 President/Chancellor 1978

TO OUR FRIENDS

The 1978 Commencement Committee of East Carolina University wishes to share copies of the Commencement and Farewell Address by Chancellor Leo Warren Jenkins. The Committee feels that this final address by Dr. Jenkins embodies the philosophy and spirit of East Carolina University, as inspired by his leadership.

The Commencement Committee May, 1978



Commencement and Farewell Address Chancellor Leo Warren Jenkins East Carolina University Greenville, North Carolina May 12, 1978

Governor Hunt, Governor Sanford and Governor Scott; Congressman Jones, Class of 1978 and your families, Chairman Pate and Trustees, Members of the Board of Governors, Senator Helms and Senator Morgan, Lt. Governor Green, Speaker Stewart and other distinguished legislators and citizens here today, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with nostalgia and honor that I stand before this graduating class—the 40th such occasion since I came to East Carolina. Now, I face you at this, my final commencement as your Chancellor. We have lived a long memorable history together. In 1947, the year I arrived, 163 students received their diplomas. Today, we have Deans among us who are witnessing over two times more students graduating, within their schools alone, than the 1947 Class of 31 years ago. I would also like to note that Senator Robert Morgan was among those graduating in 1947. We are pleased that he could join with other distinguished guests in honoring the some 2800 who are receiving degrees today.

This moment belongs to the Class of 1978, their parents and loved ones; and, this is a very special day in my life. Therefore, I would like to reflect on a personal note for a minute to two.

There are far too many moments, which my family and I cherish, for me to cover in my brief time on this platform. If I were to express my feelings about each distinguished official with us today, about my 1700 associates on the staff and faculty, and about the many friends who are present in the audience, we would be here several hours.

On behalf of my family and myself, I would simply like to say to each of you, thank you for your wonderful friendship and understanding, which will live in our hearts forever.

"... the citizens of eastern North Carolina and across the state made possible the strength and resource we needed to serve to our full potential."

Our greatest resource, as is often said, is our people. My friends, this is true in North Carolina and this institution has been a major benefactor. We need only to look to our honored guests here today, on this platform and in the audience. These distinguished leaders are responsible for helping achieve the greatness we see in this University. Along with their leadership and loyal support, the citizens of North Carolina and across the state made possible the strength and resource we needed to serve to our full potential. And, there are magnificent achievements which will yet be realized, because of the faith and support held for East Carolina University.

I trust history will record that together we have done a good job in meeting our responsibilities. We have been part of a unique era in higher education in North Carolina and America, marked by rapid and successful growth. We have helped to transform college and university opportunities from a once elite enterprise to a framework fully within reach of the average citizen. We are proud and grateful that we were afforded the opportunity to serve a major role in this great transformation, in North Carolina and our Nation.

I would like to share with you some thoughts on philosophies and relationships which have become characteristic of this institution. Each of us has helped to light the beacon of hope which inspired us to reach high in what we sought to achieve.

In reflecting on this University's 71 years of history, we look back upon a great tradition of service. This tradition was established within a concept recognizing that we are owned by the people of North Carolina. The citizens have allowed us to devote our full capacity to serve this state's interests and ambitions, and to help achieve social and economic fulfillment.

Our partnership with the people has been warm and meaningful. It has helped us expand our work far beyond the confines of this campus, to meet our obligation to serve faithfully the full community which sustains us.

Our community is local, it is North Carolina, it is the nation. But it is even more than this. Our allegiance is also embodied in the larger community called fellow man. Our faculty, our graduates, and our friends have always been men and women who were conscious of these obligations and proud to meet this magnificent challenge. I am confident that this will continue.

"... a two-way street of communication with the people."

The spirit in which this University has operated is based on a two-way street of communication with the people. We have respected the right of every citizen and group from communities to come to us with ideas, suggestions and requests for assistance. Likewise, we have fully exercised our right and obligation to go into communities and extend the services of the University wherever we saw a need we could fulfill.

My fellow citizens, this has paid great dividends. I could hardly name a major program this campus has undertaken over the past three decades which does not have its origins in this two-way street of communication. We can look around us today and fully appreciate the fruits of this partnership. This convenant with the people will continue to sustain East Carolina University.

"We must never allow complexity to blur the road before us . . ."

We are known as a university which faces the future, and we can be assured that the tasks ahead will equal those that now are history.

We cannot rest on our past accomplishments. Tomorrow we face tough challenges in accommodating new circumstances and demands. We are living in fast changing times and pressures are different and more intense. Events happen faster, and our life style and culture react to the sophisticated developments of our generation. We experience this in every phase of our life—when we eat, when we travel, when we work, when we study, and in our leisure.

And, my friends, we will have to help our communities, our state and our nation reassess the way we live and think. As just one example, the society we know today evolved from a state of abundance in America. Until recent times there were seemingly unlimited supplies of energy, land and water. We now know that this abundance was never real. And, there are other new realities that pose challenge for the future. We now must undertake the difficult job of facing these changes and helping to build a still better America.

Even with tremendous change, the basic goal of education to experiment and use knowledge to improve human life has not been altered. We must never allow complexity to blur the road before us, and we must not view the future with a negative assessment. If we do, we could lose our capability to even faintly approach the problems which are thrust upon us.

So, the challenge for higher education and this University is to provide our young people with knowledge, as well as insight equal to the responsibilities society will place before them. This challenge goes far beyond the scope of a chosen field of endeavor or profession.

"... education is intertwined with democracy."

We must continue to work within the American tradition of democracy and support its principles, accepting the broader commitment to help preserve and improve the American system of government. It is important that our people understand and love democracy. They must guard the principle that democracy is the individual, and the human being is both the means and the end to our American way of life.

We must help create an understanding that education is intertwined with democracy. We have to maintain a strong commitment to place in the forefront the freedoms and benefits, and the duties and responsibilities of the young citizens who, in the future, will assure that the great American experiment continues to work.

What are some of the basic freedoms and benefits we expect from our government? We must be assured protection from our enemies, and even from government itself. We expect to be the benefactors of a system of government dedicated to individual freedom and development. We choose our profession, our hobbies, and our church. We read the free press and we listen to media airways which are unrestrained in expression of ideas and interpretations of issues of the day. And, we have grown to expect our government to be driven by the love found throughout our history, which compels us to make every effort to provide the basic human needs of the less fortunate in our land.

But there is the other side of the coin. There are responsibilities. These blessings that we take for granted cannot be sustained throughout wishful thinking and non-involvement. And, education must bear much of the accountability for meeting these responsibilities inherent in our American system.

We must help create the desire and sense of duty in our young people to participate constructively in their government and the political process. They must want to help solve the frailties and evils that may exist, and inject ideas and demands which embrace the legitimate obligations of a government by the people. History shows that if we do not have this involvement by the people, our system will not continue to work.

"... competition is a vital ingredient in our democracy..."

As we encourage citizen participation, our universities also must instill in our young people the idea that competition is a vital ingredient in our democracy—and in their lives. There are great rewards in seeking achievements which set us apart, and serve and inspire others. Young Americans must be encouraged to have a burning desire to make their profession and their business or organization the very best. We must never be satisfied unless we feel that our University, our town and our state are among the very best in America. My friends, this is what our great country is all about.

If the Class of 1978 understands this, then they will be better able to accept the reality that our system demands a tremendous amount of energy, skill and desire—from the individual. Without this awareness, so fundamental to America, then we could become a community, a state and nation without motion, stifled by old solutions which do not match the problems of the day.

"... help preserve our rich cultural heritage."

There is another major responsibility shouldered by this University and its graduates. We must nourish the opportunity for our people to enjoy and help preserve our rich cultural heritage. A glance at the past often provides a guiding light for the future. We have much proud history in our Nation and State. And, we take great pride in eastern North Carolina, which was the cradle of government, culture and commerce for this region of America some 200 years ago. As a center for culture this University must continue to communicate our past to future generations.

The throughts I have shared so far underscore our belief that education and a university are far more than a discipline of study, more than a center of learning. Scholarship is vital and must serve as the foundation for any worthy institution. However education is also the child of a free society, and bears the broader responsibility to helping assure that the bountiful blessings of Democracy are protected and nourished for future generations. I am confident that the Class of 1978 will harness the physical and intellectual resources needed to meet the wide ranging purpose which they face.

"... a great debt that we must seek to pay."

In closing I would like to express a few thoughts to some very dear people within this University family.

To the Class of 1978, I extend my thanks and my congratulations, and my challenge. Both you and I have reached an indelible milestone in our relationship with East Carolina. Both you and I owe a great debt that we must seek to pay. We have been nurtured here, have grown and developed here, and we have found excitment and learning. We, and all who have gone before us have a responsibility we cannot shirk—a duty we cannot fail. We will loyally except what we are called upon to do in helping assure that East Carolina's vitality grows.

To the students, I would like to thank you for giving life and spirit to East Carolina University. You have been a great source of inspiration for me. There is something very special about the good will and lively pride that characterizes our students, and this has spread to every activity and corner of our campus. It is a positive fever, a faith and trust, which follows into communities throughout North Carolina.

To the faculty and staff, I am indebted for your friendship and for the faithful service you have given to this University during crucial years. You have extended our horizons to national prominence. Your achievements have been so numerous that I could not possibly keep account of them. And, most importantly, you have given full devotion to the students whose lives you have affectionately imprinted forever. I will always remember the abundance of faith, trust and love you have given to me for so many years.

To the Trustees, thank you for your leadership, understanding and sacrifice reflected in every corner of this institution; in our programs, in our facilities, and in our hopes. You have labored for progress and you have helped assure our close ties with the people we serve. The debt to you can never be repaid.

To the Alumni, I am grateful for the common bond we share, which nurtures our cause. You have shown love for your Alma Mater and you have strengthened its existence through your support and through the outstanding contributions you are making to North Carolina and to the Nation. You provide the measurement of how successful this institution has been, and you brought us distinction. I am proud, indeed, to say that 85 percent of our alumni passed through the halls of this University during my 31 years here.

To Governor Hunt, Governor Sanford and Governor Scott; Congressmen Jones, to Senator Helms and Senator Morgan, to Lt. Governor Green, Speaker Stewart and other distinguished legislators here today, to President Friday and the U.N.C. General Administration, to the Board of Governors, to the citizens of North Carolina who embraced the cause of the University, I say thank you. You afforded me the rich opportunity to serve this institution and the state of North Carolina, and you gave encouragement, advice and support from which the very future of this university rested. Through your vision and steadfastness we are today awarded the great pleasure of gathering on the ground of one of America's great centers of learning.

"... the lasting commitment to answer the call ..."

To all of my friends, I will forever be indebted to you for allowing the story of Leo Jenkins to be realized. This warm community opened its door, took me in, and gave the opportunity to pursue a career richly endowed with deep personal satisfaction.

Let me say that I take with me the pride and the dreams of East Carolina University. I will forever hold closely the love and affection which flourishes within our circle, raises us above ourselves, and serves us with hope and reward. And, above all, I take with me the lasting commitment to answer the call of East Carolina—whenever and wherever I can serve.

Let us now press on.

Thank you and I wish each of you Godspeed.







