

Remarks by
ROBERT MORGAN
Attorney General

Raleigh Toastmasters 843
December 5, 1970

ON POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CITIZEN-TOASTMASTER

I am delighted to be here today and to take part in your program. You know, we gather here today at a time when we have just completed another election; at a time when we have chosen representatives for this State and Nation of ours; a time when we Americans do have valid reasons for concern. Economic trends are a little frightening and foreign affairs, as usual are perplexing. In short, all of us are looking for hope and encouragement, for reassurance, for a return to the optimism and enthusiasm which have always been so much a part of our nature and made possible by our sustained State and National progress which has boosted our sometime sagging spirits.

Today I want to talk to you, rather seriously, about some of the things which concern all of us and which, thankfully, I think we as individuals can begin to correct. As Toastmasters you have each worked long and hard to master the art of public speaking. In many cases you have been motivated to develop this art because your jobs or professions require you to engage in public speaking throughout the State.

The abilities which you have developed are not, however, limited to public speaking. Rather, your Toastmaster training has increased your general ability to communicate with others. In times such as these, when every question has so many "pros" and "cons" and the cry for "meaningful dialogue" is being raised on all sides, your abilities to communicate with your fellowman cannot be overemphasized.

A community of free citizens such as ours must be a community of politicians for only when a citizen exercises his political responsibilities can he really be a citizen and patriot. As individuals trained in the arts of communication and persuasion, you must bear a greater part of the responsibilities of citizenship than the average person.

You can do a great deal to convince our fellow citizens that the methods of debate, discussion and persuasion are the legitimate vehicles for change in a democratic society, not violence and turmoil.

It is your duty as speakers with a great deal of public exposure to encourage citizen participation in day-to-day affairs of government and the election of those who seek to serve in public office. As individuals trained in the arts of communication and persuasion, you must bear an unusually heavy part of the burden of convincing our fellow citizens to exercise their rights in a positive and constructive manner.

You, as public speakers, must help to close our fellow citizens' ears to those who preach despair, for we all know that despair breeds despair. You can put to a test those who make vicious attacks on our government - local or national - by making them offer workable suggestions for improvement. You have the talents to convince our fellow citizens to accept those persons who through reason will lead us and to reject those who with fiery speeches and much emotion would stampede us into hasty and regrettable action.

I am deeply concerned that we live in a time when so many people are genuinely suspicious of the motives of all men who seek public office, and feel that no one in their government should be trusted. Many have lost confidence in their government's ability to govern economically, to regulate commerce, to protect the consumer, to serve the needy and to promote international tranquillity. You, as public speakers, are especially well qualified to help erase this suspicion and to restore confidence where confidence is merited.

The Constitution of both the United States and North Carolina guarantee that the people have a right to assembly together peaceably to consult for their common good, to instruct their representatives, to petition the government for redress of their grievances, and to vote their representatives out of

office whenever they fail to perform their duties to the voters' satisfaction. These are the methods of democracy, all of which are dependent upon the ability of people such as yourselves being able to communicate with each other and with their representatives. Whenever such methods are available to the people, we know no man needs to turn to threats, violence, and disruptive conduct as a means of protest.

It has been said that we should cease to take ourselves so seriously and begin to take our civic responsibilities seriously. Ladies and gentlemen, I agree. Democracy and its methods can only work when citizens take their political responsibilities seriously; when they not only have respect for, but take part in, politics; when they not only criticize, but make constructive contributions; when they formulate and present reasonable alternatives; when they encourage their best to seek political office and then provide the public support necessary for them to serve effectively.

Let us each resolve here today to do these things. The alarm has been sounded, but let us remember that to sound the alarm is not to panic. To sound the alarm is to call for cool thinking, for careful and deliberate speech and action, for moderation, for mutual support and common resolve to move forward with progress even in the face of difficulties.

This decision must lie, in the final analysis, with each of you individually.