

Speech by:
ROBERT MORGAN
Attorney General
North Carolina

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I want those of you who are graduating here tonight to know that you are in the presence of some very distinguished persons. Those persons are your parents, and certainly they are some of the most remarkable people ever to walk on earth.

They are the ones who have made it possible, along with many others along the way, for you to have made this very important achievement. Your parents, and the members of their generation, are the same people who have in just five short decades increased the life expectancy of the average American by approximately fifty percent.

These people, who have helped make your education possible, are the same people who during their generation have helped cut the average working day by at least one-third while at the same time doubling the productivity of the average American worker.

These parents, and friends of yours who have gathered here tonight, are among those who have helped make this world a healthy world and a better place to live than the world that they found. And, because of this fact, you need not have any fear of an epidemic of flu, typhus, scarlett fever, mumps and perhaps many other diseases that I could mention that plagued their generation but no longer plague yours. You and I know that polio is no longer a dread disease, and tuberculosis is almost unheard of in our society today.

These remarkable people, who are also here tonight to share your joy in this event, lived through one of the world's worse depressions. Many of them know what it is like to be poor and many of them know what it is like to be hungry, and because of their experiences, they were determined that they would give you a better life and a better world than they had.

Because they were materialistic in many ways, and perhaps some young people are somewhat inclined to criticize them for this - but, because they were materialistic, to some extent, you will have to work fewer hours in your lifetime, and yet at the same time, you will earn more money than they did. Because they were materialistic, you will

have more leisure time, and you will probably visit far distant places. And, you will have more time to follow your own life's ambition.

Yet, I am sure that your parents and friends, who are here tonight, will tell you as I do that all of the challenges have not been met; that all of the battles have not been fought, nor all of the victories won. The life that you make, the challenges that you will face when you leave this school are perhaps greater than those faced by any group of graduating seniors.

You know, try as your parents and friends did, they could not solve all of the problems that confronted their generation. You and I know that every generation of human beings attempts to find the solutions to the problems that confront it. Some of the solutions that they seek and find are successful, and some are not. But, one thing we know, and that is, that each generation passes on to the next not only its successes and failures, but also many new problems and new concerns. For every day a new sun comes over the horizon. Today is never quite the same as yesterday, and as I am sure you will find in your life ahead, that yesterday's ideas alone will not be sufficient, and neither will the knowledge gained from past years experience be sufficient to meet the challenges of your day.

As past generations have found the cures for many diseases that have plagued mankind, others have been discovered to take their place. We will hope and pray that your generation will conquer the dread disease of cancer that takes the lives of so many of our loved ones. Somewhere among you and your fellow graduates around the country today, someone will find the cure for the dread disease of cystic fibrosis that is fatal to practically every child that suffers from it. Surely, someone among you will find a cure for muscular dystrophy. Surely, you will be able to take the great progress and the great strides in the treatment of those who are mentally ill and develop and expand them and find new cures to the point that those who are suffering from mental illness in our society will have a new hope for a better life. Maybe you will find ways to treat these people more humanely.

Maybe your generation will be able to find the doctors that are so badly needed, not only for those who are confined to our mental institutions, but for all of our people. Though we are one of the most powerful nations on the face of the earth, I think it is unfortunate that we rank 21st among the nations of the world in male life expectancy and 18th in infant mortality.

So, you can see that there are many challenges and many problems that confront you and your generation. As we in our generation have developed this State and this nation industrially and provided new jobs, new opportunities, for the people of our State and nation, we also have developed new problems. The problems of air pollution, water pollution, destruction of our lakes and our rivers and our oceans - it will be your job to find new ways to prevent such pollution. Surely, here in North Carolina while we want to develop industrially and economically, we hope we will never develop the industrial slums and wastelands that exist in the Northeastern part of the United States, and in the southern part of California. Just two weeks ago, while visiting in Los Angeles, I read a statement by the Medical Society advising the people in Southern California suffering from any type of respiratory ailment to move out of the area because of air pollution. I hope that this will not happen to this part of our nation. With your help and the help of other people like you across our State, we will be able to hand down to generations to come, the natural wealth and beauty of our State, which has been ours to enjoy.

As you seek to find solutions to the problems and concerns that confront you, may I suggest that you strive

continually to improve the educational opportunities for all the boys and girls of our nation. We know how great the opportunities are for the educated in comparison to those who are not educated. Many children, all across our State, who have not yet been reached by our conventional educational system, wait for your generation to unlock the world of learning for them - provide for them the same opportunities or greater opportunities than your parents and friends have provided for you.

Another concern that I think your generation will be involved with is improving the quality of American government. Some way must be found to make our government more responsive to the needs and wishes of the people if we are to continue in our society as a free and democratic nation. I hope that you and members of your generation will fight for the right of government for the little man as well as for the big. I hope you will fight for the weak as well as the strong, and for the helpless as well as for those who are able to help themselves.

And, finally, may I suggest to you that as you endeavor to meet the problems and concerns of your generation that you show understanding and compassion for your fellowman. One of my favorite passages from all of the scriptures comes

from the third chapter of the 1st book of James. If you will read that chapter you will find that Solomon, after succeeding his father David as King of all of Israel, one night the Lord appeared to him in a dream and asked Solomon what he desired most of the Lord, and Solomon asked that the Lord give him a wise and understanding heart, so that he could judge his people with wisdom and compassion. He did not ask for wealth or power, but only for understanding and compassion.

I would say to you that I cannot tell you how to achieve great power; I cannot tell you how to achieve great riches; but I can tell you how to live a meaningful life - follow the advice of Solomon. In going about your duties and as you face the problems of your generation, try to do so with compassion for your fellowman. We must in this country learn some way to live together in harmony and fulfillment. We must learn in this country and throughout the world to eliminate personal violence as a way of life to the end that we may all enjoy the gifts that God gave us!
