

Harnett Central High School
Angier, North Carolina

Graduation - June 13, 1979

It is an especially high honor for me to have a small part to play in these graduation exercises tonight at Harnett Central High School. And it is also a particularly great pleasure for me to have the opportunity to come home for this special occasion and share it with friends whom I have lived with and known for many years.

As I have talked and visited with many of the members of the graduating class of 1979, not

only tonight but at other events, I have come to know them as an outstanding group of students and young adults.

Not only have they made up a strong class of over two hundred, but they have also shown great individual talents and skills.

As we all know, graduating classes, from year to year, are never the same. I think that we can all be thankful that the attitudes and views of each class do change and that their energies are channeled in different directions.

I have no doubt that this graduating class, of 1979, will make their presence and determination to succeed known through Harnett County and North Carolina.

I have often spoken on the topic of "education and self-government", and the outstanding contributions that good education has made to society and to sound government. These seniors, who will graduate tonight, will make significant contributions to government and to the communities they may move to in the years ahead.

I feel very close to this group of seniors. You might say that I share a bond with them, in their goals and intentions for the future.

They are the second class to graduate from this young and very good high school. They are well equipped with the tools necessary to live a happy and satisfying life. And I have kept up with their activities over the past years.

There is also another important reason why I feel a strong tie with these seniors. And that is

because my oldest daughter, Margaret, is a member of the class. So I know not only the day to day activities of these young people, but I also have the inside story. And from what they have told me, they have all been excellent students and upstanding citizens.

Since Harnett Central is such a young school and one that has not graduated many classes in the past, quite a bit of responsibility falls on the shoulders of the Class of 1979 - especially in guiding the graduating classes which will follow them for

many years. I know that they will meet the test.

And while greater responsibility falls on the shoulders of our graduating sons and daughters, I am not quite sure whether our responsibility as parents is increased or lightened.

But I do know just from looking at all of the smiling, laughing and happy faces today, that it really doesn't matter. Graduation day is the time when we really show how much pride and respect that we have for our children. And I know, that as our responsibility to them does not end today

neither does our unwavering support and concern.

But I do think that we should all pat ourselves
on the back for a job well done.

I know of some other persons here tonight
who are also quite happy and very proud. Their
job has been, perhaps, the most rewarding and, at
times, the most frustrating. Of course, I am speaking
of the school principals, teachers and administrators.
I know that they have done an excellent job, and
they deserve our hardest thanks and congratulations.
They are a major part of the reason we are able to

gather here tonight for this great occasion.

Almost all of our graduating class today, I am sure, has thought about and made plans for what they intend to be doing in the months and years ahead. These plans have probably not been set in concrete. They are probably goals that will be constantly shaped by new experiences. And some of these new plans include responsibilities to family and friends.

The members of this class will no doubt enter many new fields. Some will begin work on

family farms and businesses. Many will go on to study in our state's and nation's colleges and vocational schools. Some will serve in the armed services. Some will marry and begin families. And I am sure that some will do several or perhaps all of these things.

There are a lot of decisions being made at this point and this graduating class of 1979 is beginning to find that with each goal there is a great deal of work, which must be done before the goal is realized.

A distinguished poet once wrote that: "In dreams begins responsibilities." This quotation sums up what you must be thinking about right now.

But the word "responsibility" should never be taken to have a negative meaning. These are very exciting times in your life, and you should by no means allow them to slip away. I can feel this excitement as I stand here tonight.

For this reason, I would like to tell you about some of the things that I hold to be important

about our community here and the opportunities which await you in our nation.

There are only limits to what we can do in the short term. Those limits are beaten down and disappear, when we accept the responsibilities which accompany the dreams we have and begin to push our efforts and energy in the direction of accomplishing the goals we have set.

There are no limits here in Harnett County or North Carolina. These are only challenges.

Challenges are not chance happenings. They are determined after a great deal of study and then they are followed by the amount of effort we are willing to put into them--thought and work that changes ordinary dreams and wishes into realities.

We, here in Harnett County, are very fortunate. We come from a community that was built on hard work and unbending determination--a community which is bound tightly by its strong families, its capable leaders, its faithful churches and its excellent schools, like Harnett Central.

You have a firm and solid base from which to work. Our community here has given all of us that gift, and as you grow older you will see that it is a priceless gift indeed.

Paul Green, a very dear friend of us all, was born here in the Cape Fear Valley near Buies Creek. He is, of course, an excellent playwright and artist and grew up here, when times were rough and uncertain. His travels have taken him throughout the United States and the world. He earned exactly what he yearned for and he has won wide

acclaim for his work.

Yet, he now lives nearby and he has in the past and now continues to draw great inspiration and energy from his home.

Paul said it best when he wrote this paragraph in the introduction of his book of stories Home To My Valley:

"I was born in the Cape Fear River Valley of North Carolina and have spent most of my life there. But over the years it has been necessary

now and then, both for financial and artistic reasons, to dwell for quite some time in other parts of the world--whether studying and working in the theatre of Europe, putting on plays in New York, writing motion pictures in Hollywood, or traveling and lecturing in Asia and elsewhere. And two precious years I spent in my youth struggling and doing some fighting in Flanders to make the world safe for democracy. But wherever I have gone, wherever my footsteps have wandered, I have always returned--home to my Valley."

Coming from a man of Paul Green's stature, his thoughts and accomplishments can not be taken lightly. Life has never been easy in this part of the world, yet each one of us has benefited greatly from being raised here as a member of this remarkable community.

But although we come from a strong base, we who live in Angier and Lillington and Buies Creek, are certainly not alone in this massive and great country. We are very much a part of something greater than just the mere mention of fifty

states. We are part of something that truly lives and feels--a country that has bound thousands of people in a democratic form of government, that was only a dream in the minds of a handful of men two hundred years ago.

If you ever have the opportunity to travel and I hope you will, this feeling will become even stronger.

Tonight, we all left our houses for this splendid ceremony. We got into our cars and drove

to the school--just a simple procedure.

But in many parts of the world, traveling, even talking about what you want, is not that easy. We didn't have to tell a soul where we were going or for what purpose. In some countries, freedom of travel and speech are severely restricted.

You have had a choice in the courses and careers that you wish to pursue. In some nations, children are tested and placed in certain jobs without much of a chance at all--not even the opportunity to try something different. These are very basic

freedoms that we have so often taken for granted,
but which other peoples of the world lack.

These experiences, seeing the denial of
basic liberties, first hand, have stayed in my mind
long after I forgot what buildings and monuments
I also saw. It has made me much more thankful
of the nation we live in and proud of the history
we have written.

The freedoms and opportunities that we have
in America are as much a part of our nation as the

natural resources with which we share our lives.

America is a living nation, one that thrives and grows.

And like our natural resources, the freedoms which we have protected for over two centuries have given this nation the unique ability to change itself for the better and to care for its people.

There is a role that you graduates of the Class of 1979 are beginning to inherit. The role of not only preserving the rights which we now

have, but also of making our society and system of government better when it appears to be failing.

Most of you here tonight are now able to register to vote, to make your views known, and most importantly to keep up with the affairs of our nation. Always try to show your optimism, never get despondent or down about things. Because that is the point, when things begin to take a turn for the worse.

The late Hubert Humphrey, whom I had the pleasure to serve with in the Senate before his

death and who also visited Harnett County several years ago, always preached these basic values of American life. And no matter how bad the situation looked, Hubert was always advocating a solution. He was much like a breath of fresh air.

Hubert Humphrey was born in a small town in South Dakota called Lilly, which then had a population of about 175. His father was a druggist and Hubert himself took the same profession, though he always aspired to be a political science professor and studied in various universities with that goal in mind.

But Hubert was more interested in getting involved with government. As a young man, he became mayor of Minneapolis, he then became a U.S. Senator from Minnesota, Vice President and the Democratic Party's nominee for the Presidency before returning to the Senate.

He was a truly remarkable man and an optimist about this nation and its citizens.

At the end of his auto-biography, which is called The Education of a Public Man, he wrote about

the presidents that he had worked with and had known personally. He discussed both their accomplishments and failures.

But he emphasized that no matter what their failings, their hope and vision was always for a better nation. As the late Senator wrote:

"It is that continuity [the continuity of the American experiment], after two hundred years of our history that fills my life with hope today. I remain an optimist about our country. Our democracy is the most exceptional attempt at popular

governance in the history of the world, and to have a hand in it, even a small voice, is the privilege of being a public man."

I too am an optimist about our country, as Senator Humphrey wrote. But I am even more optimistic about the prospect ^{that} you young men and women will rise ^{the} to challenge of not only bettering your own lives, but also the future of our nation.

Hubert Humphrey rose from very humble beginnings in South Dakota to become one of the most influential persons in America. And it was

not just a thirst for power. It was an undying desire to make this nation a much better place to live for all of us.

This is the reason that occasions like this inspire me. I know that if the desire and energy that you graduates possess is molded in the right direction then we can't help but succeed.

Just look at the growth of our State, not just in size but also in quality, during the last twenty years. North Carolina has always been a leader in

education. But in recent years, the years that your class has been in school, we have made even more progress in educating our youth.

For instance, the ratio of the number of students to the number of teachers has improved quite steadily over the last ten years.

In the 1969-1970 school year, there were 24.5 students, in North Carolina public elementary schools, and 21 students, in high schools, for every teacher. This past school year, the totals

show that there are now 19.8 elementary school students and 16.7 high school students for every teacher. Not only do these numbers show that classes are smaller, but also that more specialized teachers, for the gifted or for slow readers, are being hired.

The number of North Carolina high school students continuing their education after their graduation has also increased over the last twenty years. In 1958, 42.2 of those graduating went on to college, trade school or other specialized training.

This figure rose to 54.2 percent in 1968 and last year, 59.5 percent of our high school graduates continued their education after high school. This has been a dramatic 17 percent increase in twenty years.

Federal, state and local governments have also pledged more funds for education over the last twenty years. In the 1958-1959 school year, \$206.39 was spent on each child in school. Last year, during 1977-1978, \$1,313.09 was spent per pupil. Of course, inflation takes its toll, but the

awareness for better education has been the biggest factor.

These developments have taken place, while your class has been in school in Harnett County and here, at Harnett Central, and moreover, these efforts in education have greatly stimulated North Carolina's productivity and business pictures.

North Carolina is definitely a leader in the South. And we will always lead the South and continue to improve ourselves, but only if the interest in and love of our state traditions are carried on

by your class.

This is not say that the answers come easy. Of course, they don't. The problems we face are technical and complex. But that is not to say that they can't be solved with the brilliance and ingenuity of our people and particularly with the vigor and interest of our youth. The way to help and build on to what we already have is simply to get involved in the community and the nation. Vote during every election, and keep up with what affects us as a community, as a state and as a nation.

As I said before, I am very excited about these commencement activities this evening. You have come from fine homes, been reared in a good community, been educated in excellent schools, and have the very best wishes of the family members, teachers and friends gathered here in your honor tonight.

The future looks quite bright ahead. It can be travelled successfully by using the great energy you possess and the knowledge you have gained here at Harnett Central.

All of you have done very well. And you have crossed one of the early hurdles in your life. You each should be quite proud of yourselves, and I congratulate you. We all have great expectations for each of you.

Thank you.