

SENATOR ROBERT MORGAN

1979 COMMENCEMENT

LITTLEFIELD JR. -SR. HIGH SCHOOL

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I am glad to be able to speak here tonight,
a night that marks the conclusion of one phase of
your life.

You are at a threshold in your lives. Some
of you will be getting jobs, and others will be going
to college; but, one way or another within five years,
most of you will have become completely independent
adults. To put it another way, you are going to be

paying for these schools, not attending them.

You are going to become responsible for your own lives. The decisions you make will not be second-guessed every day, and your parents are not going to be able to undo any decision you might make.

I am stressing this change because I would like to make a few remarks tonight on how some of this responsibility should be used. And I would like for you to always remember that the strength of this country has always been based on the qualities and actions of individual Americans.

The United States has been a wonderfully resilient nation. In recent years we have been through a war, a major economic depression, and a Constitutional crisis in which a series of Presidents misused the police powers of government that were entrusted to them by the people. It is a tribute to the people that we have weathered these difficulties as successfully as we have, for these were crises that I believe would have driven most other nations into dictatorship and repression.

I believe that one of the major reasons for the strength and resiliency of our nation has to do

with the way we have kept power out of Washington and with the people. Our country was born because of repressive behavior by a central government, and this bred a distrust of centralized power that is still with us today.

But, it is not enough to dislike Washington, or H.E.W., or the Congress. To prevent power from accumulating in Washington requires a citizenry that is both informed and active in public and community affairs.

In this country, the twentieth century has been marked by the slow but steady transferring of

power from state and local governments to the national government, from individuals to organized and centralized interest groups. This transfer of power is not something that has just been brought about by liberals, who generally get the blame. Big business and other nationally organized conservatives have promoted a centralization of power because it allows them to better focus their limited political resources.

But, as we allow power to be centralized, it is the people who lose. It is the taxpayers, which you will be, the productive people of society who just want to be left alone to raise their families, do their

, and run their community as they see fit.

If this trend is going to be successfully
lenged, it will only be with the help of all of

And what is most needed is the adoption of a
ain attitude, one that holds that we, as individuals,
th source of government and the source of change.

t I am asking is that you think of government in
way the revolutionaries who found this country
sioned a self-governing people. Do not act as if
center of government is in Washington and that
onsibility emanates from there; rather, act as if

the center of governmental responsibility lies with you yourself.

Our form of government is unique because of the way in which responsibility has been divided up between the people, state and local governments, and the national government. In theory, the only responsibilities that are delegated to Washington are those which cannot be better accomplished in forums closer to the people.

We have not been maintaining this division as well as we should have. Too often, we have been asking the Congress and the Washington bureaucracies

to do things that we should have been taking care of ourselves; things that they cannot do as well as we could on our own initiative.

One of my colleagues in the Senate, Senator Moynihan of New York, made a very interesting statement a little over a month ago during the debate on the Department of Education bill. He said, and I quote: "There is a logic of politics in the American federal system. It dictates that groups which do not prevail on the level at which an issue first appears raise the level in the federal system to the next step and then the next, hoping always to find a majority in

the nation where it cannot be found in the region, the state, or in the community."

Senator Moynihan's observation is all to accurate, though I wish it were not. For what is implicit in that pattern of behavior is an attitude that having a diversity of outcomes, that allowing each person or community, insofar as possible, to make their own decisions, is not the best way of doing things.

Some of you graduating today will want to work for the federal government. That's fine. We need good people in Washington, and I encourage you. But I am convinced nothing could do more for our nation

than for the greatest number of young people to return to their community, or settle in a new one, and take personal responsibility for it.

Keep the important activities of government as close to you as possible, so you can have the greatest effect. Work to do things at the community level, and avoid any unnecessary delegation of power to Raleigh, and more important, to Washington. Especially avoid the temptation to take decisions that should be made at the local level to higher and more distant levels of government simply because you are unhappy with the decision made within your community.

Instead, work within your community to reach your goals, and in the end, we will all be better for it.

We have come a long way as a nation, just as you have come far to be graduating today. Ask yourself: Did we get this far because of what Washington did or because of what local people did? The high school you are graduating from exists because the people of your communities took it upon themselves to develop the local school system and to run it. This high school does not exist because of anything Washington did. It exists because local people decided to build schools so that their young people could study

and prosper. In case after case, the institutions America has thrived upon have been created, not because of any sweeping national policy forged in Washington, but because somebody in his own hometown decided he was responsible for its well-being.

It is in the years after school that most people realize -- or fail to realize -- that they are now responsible for the institutions they inherit. Let me extend the example of the schools to illustrate what I mean. For nearly as long as you can recall, your life has been directed and controlled by the schools.

Now, that relationship will be reversed. You will begin to vote, to pay taxes, to send children to school. And it will be up to you to shape and influence the life of the schools. You will have to exercise your responsibilities to participate in government. You may be a voter, only. You may join the P.T.A. Or, you may run for the board of education. But you are and must be a source of any improvement or neglect in your schools.

If you remember our own history, you will realize what a triumph of effort our schools really are. Our present educational system has not existed

forever. It did not come into being spontaneously.

People built it, and not too long ago. I can tell you

that my own parents had very little chance to get an

education. My mother could neither read nor write.

Her generation, your grandparents' generation, could

not take schooling for granted. But as a community,

they needed it, they valued it, and they got busy and

provided their children with what they lacked. We

are not far, in time, from the one-room schoolhouse

in the pines. We are not far from the day in which

the majority of North Carolinians were illiterate. The

school system you just came through is a modern

invention, created largely by local initiative, with state aid and standards.

When you enter your own communities, you will have the opportunity to build upon this kind of inheritance. People create institutions and pass them on. The next generation has stewardship for them, and will leave them better or worse. That responsibility is ours for our lifetimes, and this fact is the rock on which our nation stands.

I challenge you to answer the needs of your day in the forum closest to you. I feel we are trying

to attack problems at the federal level, problems which are best dealt with closer to home. We are a nation which has never given up trying for perfection. This is one of the keys to our survival. But at the same time, we tend to be impatient, and to try to get a "quick fix" through Washington.

I don't mean to suggest that we need no government in Washington, or that anything done at that level of government is necessarily evil. It is just that many of the things we are now looking to Washington to do, do not belong there. They belong to us, either at the local or state level, where they

can be done more carefully, at less cost, and -- most importantly -- with the least loss of the power we are supposed to keep with ourselves.

We say, in our Constitution, that we the people are the government, we are the authority, and we hold the ultimate responsibility for success or failure.

The working out of our problems, the direction of our national life, the very spirit we have as a people, all rise up from the people. Never, in the history of the world, have these matters been imposed from the top down, with any success. That is the realization people had 200 years ago, and I ask you

to remember it now.

I ask you to return to your communities, or to make your homes in new places, with the complete understanding that the responsibility for your community rests with you. Every man and woman has a silent call to service, and on his answering it we all depend. Soon, the care of all our institutions will be delivered into your hands. I urge you to govern well, to serve willingly. Join the voluntary service clubs in your town, find the area on which you want to go to work, and put your shoulder to the wheel. America is no more than individuals who contribute, communities

that work, institutions that live and change as need
be. To the degree that this is not so, America is the
less. To the degree that you make it so, America is
the greater.