Pi Alpha Sigma-Political Science Honors Society

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Pi Alpha Sigma - Political Science Honors Fraternity

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you Judge Molloy for that kind introduction. The Molloy family is certainly well represented here tonight and I'm glad to be able to spend the evening with so many good friends. In fact, I have Molly Molloy, Don and Judy's daughter to thank for inviting me to speak to this prestigious group.

CHAUNCEY DEPEW

Before I begin, during Don's opening remarks I was reminded of a similar situation involving a judge and a Senator that didn't go as quite as smoothly.

The Senator was from New York and his name was Chauncey DePew. Senator DePew was hosting a fund raising dinner and the guest speaker was the former President and then sitting Supreme Court Justice Roben Taft.

As you know, Justice Taft was quite well known for his rather substantial bulk. And as luck would have it, during his introduction, Senator DePew pointed at Taft and said about the rotund Justice "He's pregnant with integrity." As you can imagine a giggle went through the crowd and Taft looked displeased.

Undaunted, DePew continued saying "And he's pregnant with courage." Well, that was enough for Taft who pushed himself away from the table and to a standing ovation assumed the podium.

Once the crowd had taken their seats, Taft looked at Chauncey DePew, rubbed his stomach and said "If it is a boy, I shall name him Courage. And if it is a girl, I shall name her integrity. But if it is only gas, as I expect it is, I shall call it Chauncey DePew."

LEADERSHIP, PUBLIC SERVICE AND KNOWLEDGE

Tonight I want to talk to you about leadership.

About making a difference in our lifetime and leaving a meaningful legacy for future generations.

About a quest for knowledge and education. And about public service.

Since the beginning of time, advances in human civilization have come from the extraordinary efforts of ordinary people. From the thinkers of ancient Greece to Bill Gates our history has been carved from a blank tablet the contents of which are limited only by our desire to learn, our will
to lead and our commitment to serve.

Tonight I want to challenge each of us to meet the challenge of our collective future. To create a bond between knowledge and activism that will make an impact on our world.

No one is stopping us.

There are no limits.

And if we think there are limits to that which we can accomplish we need only look back at the beginnings of our country and our state to learn differently.

BUILDING A NEW COUNTRY

Just recently I began a personal project that has reinvigorated my interest in the American Revolution. I decided to read a biography of every President of the United States and to read them in order beginning with Washington. In fact it was 209 years ago last Thursday that George Washington was inaugurated as the first President of the United States.

In America we learn the facts of the American Revolution in elementary school. For me it was at Hawthorne Elementary School in Helena. And for many of us, the stories of Paul Revere's ride, the Boston Tea Party, and the colorful uniforms of the Redcoats represent the bulk of our thinking about the founding of our nation.

While these are important and colorful parts of our history as a nation, our foundation is set in something much deeper.

The foundation of our republic was forged through knowledge, sacrifice and courage.

Real people, in many cases ordinary people, doing what we now see as extraordinary, but what they saw at the time as necessary. Necessary in order to found a nation based on freedom.

Intellectual freedom. Religious freedom. Freedom to maintain a democracy for future generations.

Just listen to the first words in our Declaration of Independence.

WHEN in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation.

This is an extraordinary statement.
With the very first line, our founding fathers demonstrated their knowledge, their leadership and their conviction. "When in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary," they began. They had looked at the history of human events and had judged radical change as necessary.

So necessary, in fact, that it was for these people.....some lawyers, some educators, but many just average working people....that they were compelled to action that could cost them their very lives.

Extraordinary words from ordinary citizens. Words and actions that as Chief Justice Warren Burger wrote “unleashed the energies and talents of people to create a good life.”

And the lasting legacy of this “good life” is exactly what the founders of our nation hoped it would be. It is freedom.

DISCOVERING MONTANA AND THE WEST

The exploration of the American West holds other lessons for us today as we prepare to leave our imprint on the future. While the leaders of the American Revolution had some sense of what lay ahead, Thomas Jefferson and Captains Lewis and Clark really had no idea.

Their journey was based largely on hope. And on curiosity. And on a deep commitment to public service.

Think for a moment about the scope of their journey. Lewis and Clark gave-up years of their lives....years....to serve their country and to expand its borders and enhance our knowledge of the West. Not weeks, not months....years.

Undaunted Courage? Absolutely. Stephen Ambrose did a splendid job of showing us the courage and the conviction of the Corps of Discovery. These days we take our self-bailing rafts and our dry bags for a four day float on the Smith River and believe we are roughing it.

The Corps of Discovery had it a bit rougher. And look at the contributions they made to America, Montana and to the world.

Through their sacrifice...their service...our state gained an identity....a face for all the nation to see. It was the place with the magnificent Great Falls of the Missouri, the daunting Continental Divide and the dozens of new species of plants and animals documented by the Corps.

Was Lewis or was Clark the best scientist or explorer of all-time? With due respect, I don’t believe so.

What I do believe is that their courage...their commitment...their thirst for knowledge drove these ordinary people to extraordinary lengths.

This is what our history is all about. And what our future must be about as well.
CROSSING THE BRIDGE TO THE NEXT CENTURY

We live in an historic time. Our lives will span two centuries and during just the past ten years we've seen dramatic change in our world.

We have witnessed the decline of the Soviet Union and the rise of the global marketplace. The birth of the Internet and the coming of age of a wide range of information technology that changes the way we live.

In many ways it is a world Washington and Jefferson.....Lewis and Clark would not recognize.

And yet in other ways, more important ways, it is the same.

We are still Americans. In our case, as Montanans, part of a community in which we have personal and collective responsibilities. A community of people who share rights and freedoms that bind us together and make the value of our whole greater than the sum of our parts.

A community of people anxious to learn and willing to lead. A community willing to do what is necessary to advance the cause of a free people.

I believe also that many of those who have played such an important role in the development of our nation would be genuinely surprised by their status in history. To them, their actions were born of necessity not heroism...of a desire to do what is right, not a desire to become famous.

Ask Cal Ripken how he has been able to play in 2,500 consecutive games and he says "One game at a time."

Ask Bill Cosby how he has maintained a marriage in Hollywood through good times and bad for some 37 years and he says "I just keep going home."

You see, to leaders it's that simple. You try, or you do nothing. Period.

And when you decide to try, you do your best. You work hard. You learn all you can. And you take responsibility for your actions. It's that simple.

I make this point at some length because these attributes are exactly what has made America the greatest country on earth and will be the ones that will be put to the test as we prepare to meet the challenges of a new century.

THE CHALLENGES

Let me spend a few minutes on what I perceive as some of the most significant challenges we face as a state and as a nation.

School boards across Montana right now are voting to close schools, increase class size and eliminate programs like music, physical education and art. And as a story in last weekend’s
Missoulian noted, Montana college students are going deeper in debt than ever before in order to pay for college.

We must find a way to turn that around. Tomorrow's leaders are being trained today and we...you and I...are the stewards of their learning. We can not let them down.

The tension between environmental protection and resource development will continue to be a point of division in politics. We need to re-align the parameters of this debate. The environment and the economy are not at war. Our challenge will be to find sustainable solutions that both enhance our economic prospects and protect our natural heritage. To do so will take good science, and thorough research and common-sense.

The aging of America will provide us with important decisions about our financial future. Private pensions, social security and Medicare are a few of the issues which will merit serious and thoughtful discussion.

At the same time, workplace issues will continue to be significant. A recent Business Week study shows that the average boss in America makes 326 times what the average worker earns. This kind of disparity leads to the counter productive rhetoric of class warfare. What we need is some serious work focused on making the American dream an attainable goal for all families in our country.

And we must re-gain some control over a campaign system that has spun badly out of control. The average Senator must raise $2,000 a day, 365 days a year for each of his or her 6 years in office in order to have enough money under today's rules. I can assure you that is not what Madison had in mind when he encouraged factionalism in Federalist 10.

And we've got to continue our work on health care. We provide prisoners with better health care than we provide some American families and children. Families who work hard, pay their bills but just can't afford the $500 a month it costs for an average health insurance policy. That's just not right.

CONCLUSION

We will meet these challenges. I know we will.

It will take knowledge. It will take leadership. And it will take commitment.

We will accomplish these things the same way history is made.....step-by-step.

Through our extraordinary commitment to making the world a better place, we ordinary people can make history. And that is our challenge.

One of the ways I'm trying to move this debate forward is by spending a lot of time in schools. Talking to kids. Stirring the pot. Getting them to think. And listening.
When I speak to schools I make three points:

Number 1. To thine own heart be true. There is only one of you in the entire world. No one is like you. No one. That makes your ability to contribute completely unique and only you know what makes your blood stir...what challenges bring out the best in you.

Number 2. There are no closed doors. Nothing is impossible. We are all going to fail. But when we do, we just get back up and try again.

Number 3. Pursue public service. In my view, public service is the most noble human endeavor. Service to family. Service to church. Service to community. And service is a two way street. When you give you get back...in spades.

I like to think that Washington and Jefferson, Lewis and Clark would have liked these three points. And further that they would urge us to realize our potential as real contributors to our community. To make learning, leadership and public service an integral part of our daily lives.

In a speech he was to give in Dallas, Texas on the afternoon of November 22, 1963, John F. Kennedy wrote: “Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”

He was right. We must thirst for knowledge in order to be able to impart wisdom. We must listen before we speak. And we must learn in order to truly lead.

So as we go from here toward a new millennium, let us remember....each one of us....that the future is in our hands....and ours alone. As Americans we have accepted the mantle of freedom and democracy and the challenge is before us.

At the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin was asked “What have you wrought?”

He answered “....a Republic, if you can keep it.”

And keep it we will.

Thank you very much.