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## 46th Commencement Address

Edith Green

*United States House of Representatives*

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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

June 7, 1964

THE HONORABLE EDITH GREEN

United States House of Representatives

Thank you, Dr. Shain, for that very generous introduction. Mr. Wiles, other members of the Board of Trustees, members of the Faculty, and the parents and friends of this special group that we are honoring today. I really am very pleased to come and if Dr. Shain is correct, greet the constituents in the second Congressional District of Connecticut and urge you to move to the Third Congressional District of Oregon. I really am always pleased to be able to come to a college campus, it seems to be that most of us on the Education Committee deal vicariously with the problems of education through witnesses who appear before our Committee and through bills and through legislation and through reports. And so it is a special privilege to come to a campus and to participate in its activities and to talk with members of the Faculty and to the students with which we have a mutual concern. I am also exceedingly grateful for the very warm hospitality that has been extended to me since I have been here and for the beautiful corsage that was in my room when I arrived. I thank you for that. I don't know whether we will be successful in allowing young girls to be page boys in the Congress or not, but it certainly would have my approval. I wish that it might be the case. There is another reason why I am particularly glad to be at Connecticut College today. I was one of those on the Committee who did not approve of the Loyalty Oath in the National Defense Education Act, and those of us who were in the minority but those of us who disapproved of that Loyalty Oath watched with a great deal of interest those colleges and those universities which also took that position and refused to participate as long as the Loyalty Oath was attached, and I notice that Connecticut joins with some of the great colleges across the country in this particular stand. Dr. Shain has told you that I have served as a member of the President's Commission on the Status of Women, and I also don't think that I may suffragette, but I must say that I

do take special pride in the accomplishments of young women, and I notice this graduating class today, and the membership between the men and the women is about the reverse of the membership in the House of Representatives. I am one of 12 out of 435 there. So with Dr. Shain, I also hope not just one, Dr. Shain, but more than one of the graduates of Connecticut College of 1964, might follow a career in politics, and I use that word in its best sense. Many times we hear a cliché, "Never underestimate the power of a woman." I think of a parody which was written on "New Moon" sometime ago that went like this "Give me five women, five stout-hearted women who will fight for the right they adore, and soon I will give you five thousand more." And so, today, you women who are graduating are entering a world where there are far more opportunities for women than there ever have been in preceding generations. Just a few evenings ago, I was also able to participate in another Commencement program at the largest private university in the Northwest. A university that originally was just for men students but about fifteen or twenty maybe twenty-five years ago, they opened their doors to women students. As I must say, I didn't tell them this, but I must say that it was with some pride that I noticed that among the graduates - those graduating with highest honors - 9 out of 10 were women; the one who received the President's cup for the highest honor, and it was a straight four-point average, was a young lady; those graduating with high honors - magna cum laude - 24 out of 31 were women. I hope you gentlemen will pardon me this reference - and there was almost the same ratio for the cum laude graduates. I am also advised that this year at Connecticut College the maximum number for the first time have been admitted to Phi Beta Kappa, and that out of this graduating class you have three who have won Woodrow Wilson Fellowships. This is really a remarkable record. My very special congratulations then to these graduates, and indeed to all of you who have successfully completed the work at this institution known for its very high academic standards.

Commencement time always is a very festive occasion, and the speaker is permitted an unlimited number of cliches, and looking about at those to receive their diplomas, there is a sense for the future, sense of brightness and unlimited possibilities. As you who are graduating, I am sure, realize that you are among the most fortunate. We think of about 300, over 300 colleges across the country that are not accredited either at the regional or the national basis by any professional group, and this at a time in our national life when we cannot afford to perpetuate mediocrity but rather must have academic excellence for our very survival. And you graduates are also very fortunate for another reason. We in the Congress are very much concerned about the high percentage of high school graduates who do not go on to college. And I am speaking of young people who have IQ's of 120 and above. There are between 150,000 and 200,000 young people who graduated when you did from high school four years ago, and these people did not go on to college, and half that number, approximately 60,000 to 80,000 were properly motivated; they had maintained good academic records throughout their high school careers, but because of financial reasons they could not continue their education. And the fact that they are not graduating from our colleges and universities this June, is a loss to this country at a time when we desperately need highly trained manpower. One college president said that in a country that spent 15 times as much on legalized gambling as it spends on higher education, we can afford to gamble on every young man and every young woman who is qualified and really wants a college education. But now that you people have received, or are about to receive your degree, your diploma, you also have tremendous responsibilities. And whether you marry and have your own home or whether you are going on to graduate education or whether you are entering a profession, you have these special responsibilities. You are entering a world where your

brain power and your skills and your training are greatly needed. And I reject any philosophy which says that women are interested in only certain areas of national life. I always am a bit disturbed when I receive an invitation from any group to talk about how a woman looks at events of the world, or how a Congresswoman looks at legislation. There seems to me that in such an invitation, there is an implication that women somehow look at our great national issues in a different light. I think this is not true. And whenever I receive such an invitation, it seems to me that there is the assumption that somehow a woman is not a creature of logic and that if you give her a certain set of facts and figures that she is never going to arrive at a logical conclusion anyhow, so why bother. And when this assumption is made, I'm reminded of a bit of -well, I hate to call it poetry - but a poem that I learned when I was quite young and it is called "Why Fire Engines are Red" and it goes like this:

Why are fire engines red?  
 Well, papers are read, too  
 And 2 and 2 are 4 as a rule  
 And Queen Mary was a ruler  
 And Queen Mary was a ship  
 And ships sail the sea  
 And there are fish in the sea  
 And ships have fins  
 And the Fins fought the Russians  
 and the Russians are red  
 And fire engines are always rushing  
 So why shouldn't they be red too.

Let me assure you that I hold no grief that this is the way that a woman's mind works, and that I am sure that women are just as much concerned about the critical issues facing this country and this world as are the men.

And so this morning - if I may talk about some of these great issues, only two or three of them. In this past school year, we have seen the assassination of a president; we have seen race riots and bombings and the lunatic friend speaking ever louder, and so many good people remaining silent.

And if I were to preach a sermon, and I hope that is not what I am doing this morning - but if I were to preach a sermon, I think I would choose as my text some of the words from the remarks which were made on August 28 of last year in Washington - perhaps some of you participated in that great march for jobs and freedom. And the speaker on that occasion, or the one that I remember most distinctly was Rabbi Prince, who lived in Berlin during the days of Hitler. And he told this gathering of 200,000 people many things, but among his remarks were these words, "When I was Rabbi of the Jewish community of Berlin, I learned many things. The most important thing I learned under those tragic circumstances is that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most shameful, the most urgent, the most disgraceful, and the most tragic problem is silence. A great people, the German people, which had created a great civilization had become a nation of silent onlookers." America must not remain silent. It must speak up and act, and not for the sake of the Negro, but for the sake of the image, the ideal, and the aspiration of America itself. From the thousands of college graduates of these years must come leaders who will become involved, and not mere spectators, leaders who will speak out with the voice of reason and not be silenced by those who would benefit the most by retaining the status quo.

In the field of Foreign Policy, Senator Fulbright recently admonished us to think some unthinkable thoughts. And he has urged us to abandon the old myths in the face of current realities. And it seems to me that on the domestic scene, we must also abandon some old myths in the face of current realities. We have problems of discrimination, and you people are keenly aware of this, with one of your own numbers actively participating and arrested, and you people, I am told, very spontaneously rose to her defense. The problems

of discrimination, inadequate education at all levels, and poverty loom large before me. And in these three typical areas, we have barely begun to move. If Civil Rights legislation is to be meaningful, inevitably it must be linked with both an improvement in the skills of the Negro and the White, and an economy that will provide jobs for this floodtide of youngsters, the bumper crop of war babies, as the newspapers call them, who are now entering the labor market. And I believe it was James Baldwin who so eloquently said "What will the Civil Rights Legislation mean to the Negro who does not have a dime for a lousy cup of coffee." President Johnson has sent to the Congress a program for war on poverty. And this is very laudable and it is overdue. And we are hoping that from this year's college graduates will come volunteers for the job corp that is set up in this legislation. Also volunteers for the Community Action Program. I am told that from Connecticut College last year, there were six Peace Corps volunteers and that this year there will be ten Peace Corps volunteers. We, on the Education Committee that has been working on this war on poverty, also hope that we will have committed concerned people, not only for the Peace Corps, but committed concerned people to handle the less glamorous tasks on the home front. In a hearing on the War on Poverty legislation, we heard many witnesses, but I thought the most eloquent of all was Mr. Whitney Young, the Executive Secretary of the Urban League. And I would like to read just a few of the statements that he made to this Committee. He said, "We will either provide money for rehabilitation and prevention, or we will automatically spend more money for welfare and crime. Surely an emergency welfare program which now finds three generations of the same family accepting it as a way of life is not the answer." And at another point he said, "Now I think negro citizens in the face of the years have provocation; in the face of historic abuse, they have shown an amazing restraint, and an amazing loyalty.



And I give you only last year as an example. Last year you saw the march on Washington with its quiet dignity and its fervent pleading, and last year you saw Negro parents, Negro citizens, after children were bombed in the Sunday school, remain calm and cool and continue to pray. And last year you saw in Jackson, Mississippi, Negro people in a church after their leader had been slain, and after the widow of their leader addressed the meeting, a woman who had every right to hate, stood up and said to this group "You must not hate, you must love." And we saw thousands of people in that audience that day who had every reason to be angry, stand up and sing spontaneously without anybody announcing it "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty." They have said to America, "I believe in you." and Mr. Whitney concluded by saying, "It seems to me that it is time for America through its elected representatives in Washington to say to the Negro citizens, "We also believe in you."

Now there are none of us who believe that the passage of the Civil Rights legislation is going to solve our problems. It's but a beginning. And it will take a massive program of education and re-education and retraining, and it cannot be done in inferior schools. It means greater public and private investment in teachers and schools and housing, and vocational education, and at all levels. And I am more and more concerned about the role of the small liberal arts colleges, and it's important in the post-war years in these days when the nation's people watch the exciting and the glamorous and the dramatic achievements in outer space, there may be great danger that in our national life and in our educational system that we put overemphasis or too much emphasis on science to the neglect of the humanities. It seems to me that we are so much concerned about outer space that we pay too little attention to inner space and the exploration of the truths of the human heart and its attitudes. And it is less a rocket thrust

into outer space, than a rocket thrust of massive proportions in education that may determine how we are going to major or how we are going to solve the weighty matters that are characterized by social and economic and political upheavals. I have sometimes wondered if historians will write of this age that we can train scientists and technologists to produce the H bomb, poison gas and the means for mass germ warfare and intercontinental missiles, all capable of producing massive death lists, but we cannot produce enough social workers and doctors and nurses and teachers and priests and ministers to help make life on this planet more meaningful. And will historians write of the technological age of America, that we can lift man into outer space, but we can't lift millions of our own out of the slums of poverty and ignorance.

Let me turn to one other matter briefly. This is in the area of Civil Liberties. Members of Congress have a steady stream of ill literature crossing their desks. And a common characteristic of the extremist correspondence, be they men or women of the extreme left or the extreme right, it is a sense of their own absolute infallability that leaves no room for any honest difference of opinion. Another characteristic is the assumption that since a Congressman does not agree with a particular course of action that they advocate, or a particular analysis of the meaning of a particular situation, immediately that official is at best a victim of some diabolical conspiracy or at worst a traitorous accomplice in the subversion of our country. The extremist is also convinced that his views are, indeed, the majority views. And depending upon the views of the particular correspondent, support of the United Nations, or support of the National Council of Churches, or support of Foreign Aid, or support of fluoridation for our water, or indeed in support of the Fifth Amendment itself, is equated with Communism. I'm reminded of a letter which one of my colleagues on the Education and Labor

Committee received two or three years ago when we were working on a School Construction Bill. This member of the Committee was a former member of the Supreme Court of Montana, a lawyer of national reputation. And he received a letter from a medical doctor in his congressional district, and this medical doctor said "Dear Congressman so-and-so: You must not vote for Federal aid for schools because it is clearly a Communistic plot, and it is unconstitutional." And my dear friend, Lee Metcalf of Montana, enjoyed a luxury which few of us allow ourselves, he wrote back and said "Dear Dr. so-and-so: As a lawyer and a former member of the Supreme Court of Montana, I greatly appreciate your legal advice, and now if I may give you some medical advice, go take a couple of aspirin." But this indiscriminate labeling of opponents as traitors and subversives seems to me the most un-American phenomena on the American scene today, and it defies the spirit of the Constitution; it divides us when we desperately need to be united, and it shows an utter contempt for the very concept of democratic self-government. And I am sure that this labeling of people as traitors led one of the newspapers in the New York area to publish what I guess I can also call a poem. It was called "The Song of the Modern Vigilante!" Perhaps some of you have read it, but it goes like this:

I sometimes fancy as I spy  
 that I excel the FBI.  
 Right now I'm making little lists  
 of folks I think are Communists.  
 I have no proof on any one  
 and yet these lists are loads of fun.  
 All friends of foreign aid, I think  
 must be set down as rather pink.  
 A little pinker, not far off  
 I list perforce the college prof.  
 And pinker yet the college crowd  
 that lauds the Bill of Rights out loud.  
 And U.N. supporters as I have said  
 are also ipso facto red.  
 And redder still on my red list  
 are all the integrationists.  
 And just for good measure in my labors  
 I add a few of my good neighbors.  
 And thus I rejoice that loyalty resides in you and me  
 Although before my work is through  
 you may good friend be listed, too.

More than six months ago, President Johnson said this, "In political affairs, and in all affairs, there is a time to be silent, and a time to speak, a time to turn, and a time to stand. And I believe the time has come when the responsible centers of our society must stand, must speak, and must face down the political irresponsibility attacking our system. The riptide of irresponsibility has gained undeserved force and influence because over the post-war years, too few have sought to stem it, or turn it, or sail against it. And as a result, yesterday's idiocies is becoming today's idiom, and unless we act, it will be tomorrow's ideology. We have by silence quietly encouraged these attacks. We can tolerate differences, we can absorb wide swings of the pendulum, but we cannot afford in this country paralysis, and paralysis is what this irresponsibility will bring about if it is not properly checked." Thirty years ago, another president, and I hope I will not be accused, Dr. Shain, as showing my partisan leanings today, but thirty years ago another president said "that to some generations much is given, and of other generations, much is expected." "This generation has a rendezvous with destiny." If I may paraphrase President Roosevelt, "To this generation much is given, and of this generation much is asked." To us is given the challenge of the H bomb, and the challenge of the segregated classroom. And of us is asked the way to the moon, and the way to brotherhood of man. You, as the graduates of the Class of 1964, must share your share, or must share in the responsibility of leading these challenges successfully. And if I may conclude by quoting a philosopher who addressed a college audience in Boston a 100 years ago, and he said this, "Ideals are like stars, you cannot reach out and touch them with your hands, but like the seafaring man on the desert of waters, you will choose them as your guide, and following them, you will reach your destiny."