

THE VICE PRESIDENT
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CONTACT: Peter Teeley/
Shirley Green
202/456-6772

EXCERPTS OF REMARKS OF VICE PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH
AT UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA'S COMMENCEMENT CEREMONIES
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
MAY 24, 1981

10:00 a.m. E. D. T.

This is a marvelous day in your lives, one that you've been looking forward to for at least four years.

I say "at least" because in the case of our son Marvin, he got so carried away with academic pursuits here at Charlottesville that he somehow managed to compress four years of schooling into five -- though, looking around this beautiful campus, I can well understand why.

I agree with Marvin: There has to be something special about a university where a star athlete can't be lured away, not even with a \$6 million offer. There's something special about that student, too.

You graduating seniors are to be envied for having spent your college years at U.VA. in these exciting times. But let me add that I feel a little sorry for you, too. After all, you're not going to be here next spring, when your Cavaliers make it to the Final Four in the NCAA basketball tournament.

Nevertheless, wherever you happen to be, I know that you'll be rooting all through life for U.VA. -- in sports, in academia, in molding character, because once you become part of a great tradition, it stays with you throughout your life.

And what a remarkable tradition you have here at the University of Virginia! Not a static tradition, looking only to the past, but one which grows each year, building on the legacy of its founder, Thomas Jefferson.

As evidence of that growth, your university's Miller Center for Public Affairs is making an important contribution in its ongoing studies involving the institution of the Presidency. Although it's only five years old, I can tell you that the Miller Center has already gained the respect of decision-makers in Washington and promises to have a profound impact on the future conduct of public affairs in our Nation's Capital.

Vice President Bush

No better home could have been chosen for a Center of this kind than here at the University of Virginia, renowned from its earliest days as an educational fountainhead for independent thought and inquiry. And for something else as well, a quality indispensable to the conduct of human affairs in a free society -- respect for the opinions of others.

In recent months, I've been speaking to audiences around the country about the meaning of the mandate given President Reagan last November, and the new beginning now being made in Washington.

The thrust of these speeches has been the need for fresh, innovative approaches to the problems now facing our country.

Today, addressing this graduating class at a university founded by an American who rejected dogma as much as he loved free inquiry, I want to talk about another aspect of our new leadership in Washington.

It isn't a program.

It isn't a substantive policy.

Instead, it's a quality exemplified by President Reagan in the way he conducts his office and treats those who number themselves among his opposition.

Jefferson referred to that quality when, in his First Inaugural Address, he asked his countrymen to "restore to social intercourse the harmony and affection without which liberty and even life itself are dreary things."

I speak of the quality of basic civility in our dealings with each other in public affairs -- the willingness and discipline to exchange ideas and opinions without indulging in name-calling or questioning the motives of our opponents.

The editor of one of this country's leading papers paid our Administration a high compliment the other day -- after hearing some of our top White House spokesmen present their case in answering tough questions he said, "President Reagan's White House team is a civilized bunch". Obvious, maybe, but all too often in recent years, I regret to say, that basic civility has been missing from public debate of the issues facing our country.

We saw the acrimony of the late 60's spill over into the 70's.

Vice President Bush

We saw a new and almost mean adversarial, confrontational, relationship spring up between

- the White House and the press
- between the Executive branch and the Legislative branches
- between too many different segments and parts of one society.

It's true that matters have improved along this line since the acrimonious years of the late 1960's and 1970's. Yet those years of bitter division have in many ways left trails some still seek to pursue.

The result is that political debate on issues important to our country's future has frequently become a matter of fixing labels and accusations on the opposition, not a contest of ideas freely and fairly argued.

Jefferson, as I say, rejected dogma. He didn't abide the notion that any single faction, party or philosophy has a monopoly on truth and right.

Applying that Jeffersonian principle to the issues of today, we discover that basic civility tends to disappear whenever dogma enters public debate.

Let me cite two examples on the contemporary scene:

The first example involves the current debate on human rights in foreign countries. Over the past half-decade, few American foreign policy issues have been treated to as much rhetorical heat without commensurate light as has the human rights issue.

Historically, the American people have always felt a deep humanitarian concern over the fate of others suffering oppression at the hands of authoritarian rulers. Our country, after all, was founded and is largely populated by people escaping from societies that denied human rights to their citizens.

Indeed, tomorrow, Memorial Day, we commemorate the sacrifice made by those Americans who have demonstrated our concern for human rights by fighting and dying not only for the rights of their own countrymen, but of freedom-loving men and women everywhere.

Let there be no mistake about this fundamental truth. Whatever our faults and mistakes over two centuries -- and whatever administration or party happens to be in power at a given time -- America is second to no other nation in history when it comes to caring and doing something about human rights -- make it simply -- about Freedom.

Our Administration is pledged to human rights. Our policy will be less selective. We will not slap around our friends and overlook the violations of others.

We will work to effect changes to help improve human rights but often we will work quietly. We will not be selective in our indignation.

Some feel we must shout from the roof tops and beat our breasts and humiliate countries in order to effect change. We don't agree.

But the debate is not enhanced by name calling or moralizing or questioning our motives.

Let's keep the debate civil as we exert our influence in the area of human rights by quiet diplomacy and persuasion.

Results are what count, not rhetorical confrontation.

My second example of how basic civility tends to disappear when dogma enters public debate relates to another concept the President's critics claim a monopoly over, that of human compassion.

This past week we witnessed a debate over the question of how the Social Security system can be saved. Everyone involved in that debate, regardless of party, agrees that if the Social Security system continues along its present path, it will self-destruct in a matter of years. Something has to be done -- and the real issue is what action should be taken if our government is to keep its word to Social Security beneficiaries in future years.

Everyone in public life understands the critical nature of the present crisis in our Social Security system -- a crisis whose origins lie in the distant past, long before the Reagan administration took office.

That being the case, how can we explain the recent outburst in Washington -- an outburst characterized by name-calling and personal attacks on the President -- when the issue of how to save Social Security came up for debate? The charge was made that President Reagan lacked compassion in dealing with the problems facing our country's Social Security recipients.

Again, that charge is baseless. We have a President who cares deeply about the needy and disadvantaged in our society. In dealing with our present Social Security system, he is in fact faced with a crisis largely brought on by the actions over the years of many of the very critics now attacking him.

Is the question of how we can best salvage Social Security debatable? Certainly. And to his credit, the President has from the first indicated an open mind on this issue. That's to his credit, and more. For at no time in any debate on any issue since he took office has President Reagan stated his side of the case in a manner that personally attacked or demeaned his opposition.

Vice President Bush

It simply isn't his nature. It isn't his style. That nature and style was reflected in his Inaugural Address when he said: "How can we love our country, and not love our countrymen?"

Ad Lib - green ribbon - In that case I note these green ribbons

In seeking a new era of conciliation and a reasoned approach to issues, President Reagan is following the example set by our nation's third President, the founder of this great university, in trying to "restore to social intercourse the harmony and affection without which liberty and even life are dreary things."

That is the essence of the University of Virginia tradition. It is what we mean when we speak of America as a compassionate society, a society made up of individuals as concerned about the rights of others as they are about their own rights. That is your legacy -- and God willing, it will be the legacy of your children when the day of their commencement arrives in the decades to come.

Thank you and good luck.

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