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“Celebrating the Class of 2019: Sharing in Indiana University’s Essential Work”

Winter Commencement

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President, Indiana University

Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall

Saturday, December 21, 2019

10:00 a.m.

1. THE BICENTENNIAL OF INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Governor Holcomb, Trustees, Provost Robel, Senator Coats, Chancellor Subbaswamy, colleagues, and members of the Class of 2019:

In exactly 30 days, we will celebrate the 200th anniversary of IU’s founding on January 20, 1820.

Extensive commemorations and celebrations of this unique milestone in the life of Indiana’s namesake flagship university have been underway for some time.

We have hoisted Bicentennial banners here in Bloomington and on our campuses around the state; awarded Bicentennial Medals to hundreds of dedicated friends and supporters of the university around the world, the first of which was to Governor Holcomb; and we are sending the “Big Red Bus,” IU’s Bicentennial travelling exhibit, to every one of Indiana’s 92 counties. There are many more exciting and memorable events to come in the months ahead.

Today is the Winter Solstice. It has been celebrated in nearly all cultures and civilizations as a day of renewal and ascent. In this, it is symbolic of the beginning of IU’s third century, but also of the commencement of your lives beyond the hallowed walls of Indiana University.

Today, we celebrate the more than 1,900 graduates who have been preparing for years to become the next generation to discover, to understand, and to apply all that they have learned—and who today make IU history as the members of the Bicentennial Winter Class of 2019.

2. A PROFOUND IMPACT IN THE HOOSIER HEARTLAND

Indiana University was founded 200 years ago in the trackless forest wilderness of Southern Indiana. From the original campus with its single classroom building, one faculty member, and a first class of around a dozen students, Indiana University has grown to become one of the world's leading research universities—one that is an engine of prosperity for Indiana and the nation.

Helping to build a prosperous and innovative Indiana, including right here in Southern Indiana, is at the very heart of our mission. Thousands of IU students, including many of you, have been engaged through IU's hugely successful Center for Rural Engagement and through IU Corps, in bringing to bear the formidable resources of this campus to improve the quality of life and address challenges in the areas of health, education, housing, the environment, business and innovation, and the arts in dozens of less-advantaged counties and communities in Indiana. From this, you have learned how the resources of a great research university can play a vital role as partners in improving the quality of life in counties and communities like these with similar challenges across the nation.

Some of you, too, have been part of IU's Grand Challenge projects, in which IU has invested over \$200 million aimed at improving the health and well-being of Hoosiers through programs to curb opioid addiction, to address and provide tools to mitigate the impact of climate change, and to develop precision cures for cancers and neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's.

3. A LEADING INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

But while focused on the state and nation, IU has also grown to become one of the world's leading international universities.

Speaking in 1960, at the height of the Cold War, a time when knowledge and understanding of countries around the world was critical to our national security, then-president Dwight Eisenhower, who had previously served as president of Columbia University, observed that the recent advent of jet travel had, in effect, shrunk our globe. "As this shrinking proceeds," Eisenhower said, "the world must learn better how to live co-operatively together to the mutual benefit of all peoples. Clearly, the rising generation," he continued, "must become more internationally minded and more diplomatically skillful than the one to which I belong."¹

When he spoke those prescient words nearly 70 years ago, Eisenhower could not have imagined how the personal computer, the Internet, cell phones, and social media would revolutionize global interconnectivity and shrink our world even more dramatically. Today, without question, the need for internationally minded and diplomatically skillful citizens is greater than at any time in our history.

On the great seal of Indiana University behind me, appears the university's Latin motto, *lux et veritas*. It has, for 200 years, inspired the unremitting pursuit of "light and truth" at IU. This pursuit has produced new cures and treatments for disease and illness, new vistas of science and scholarship in nearly every discipline, and countless discoveries that have helped all of us to better understand the world and universe in which we live. But this pursuit is not limited to the boundaries of any one state or nation—it is a truly international enterprise. We work with others around the world on some of the defining

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Address at the Opening Session of the White House Conference on Children and Youth, College Park, Maryland, delivered March 27, as reprinted in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1960-61: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, January 1, 1960 to January 20, 1961*, (Government Printing Office, 1999), 314-315.

challenges of our century—conquering disease, responding to the effects of climate change, alleviating poverty, building prosperity, and reducing conflict. Many of you have been partners in this great global enterprise. You leave Indiana University with the knowledge and superlative skills that will enable you to address some of the most pressing problems of the 21st century—and to seek answers to questions that have not yet even begun to be formulated.

Many of you have taken advantage of IU's longstanding and formidable strength in language studies—we annually teach over 70 foreign languages, more than any other university in the nation. The language proficiencies you have gained allow you to hear and understand more, to more deeply appreciate other cultures, and to better develop stronger global friendships and business partnerships.

More than a third of you have traveled the world for your studies—a number that ranks IU in the top ten of over a thousand ranked universities. You have embraced the world in all its diversity, not shunning it or closing it off. Your commitment to understanding and learning about the world in this way has helped make IU one of the nation's most internationally engaged universities.

And the more than 300 international students who graduate today have brought diversity in thought and culture to the Bloomington campus and have provided windows into their own countries and cultures—for which all of us at IU are enormously grateful.

4. THE CLASS OF 2019

Today we have awarded honorary IU doctorates to Senator Dan Coats and to Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy. Both are renowned alumni of Indiana University who are outstanding examples of the 200-year-long commitment by graduates of IU to public service and excellence. This tradition, too, extends around the world, with a long roster

of IU alumni who have served with distinction at the highest levels of government and as leaders in the field of education.

Class of 2019, as graduates of one of America's great international research universities, you are superbly prepared to follow in their footsteps and to confront the challenges of the 21st century. Many of you will, I know, be inspired to follow their outstanding examples—whether you go on to hold public office, help lead a university, or take your place as active and engaged global citizens. The range of your achievements at Indiana University is testimony to the time you have invested so diligently in your education and to all that you have learned.

Many of you have already helped to improve the quality of life for citizens of Indiana, the nation, and the world during your time as students at IU. Members of the Class of 2019 helped raise record amounts in support of the Riley Hospital for Children through their participation in and leadership of the IU Dance Marathon, one of the largest student philanthropic events at any university in this country. This year, the IU Dance Marathon raised a record \$4.25 million for Riley. This is a remarkable achievement that will benefit countless children and families who receive treatment at one of the nation's leading pediatric hospitals.

And, as we are in Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall, it is fitting that we remember the many ways in which IU student athletes have made history over the years, including winning

- 179 Big Ten regular season championships,
- 20 Big Ten Tournament championships,
- 25 team national championships,
- 145 NCAA individual national championships,

and

- 104 Olympic medals.

And among today's graduates are a number of members of the IU football Hoosiers, who helped lead the team to its most successful season in 26 years, brought home the

Old Oaken Bucket, and are about to head to Jacksonville, Florida, to play in the Gator Bowl—and win it!

5. CONCLUSION

Just over a century ago, Indiana University's 10th president, William Lowe Bryan, wrote that the one thing he would have alumni of Indiana University fully understand is the "incalculable value ... to the furthest corner of the state" of the university's first-rate scholars. Moreover, Bryan wrote, he would have IU alumni realize that they themselves "are bound to help make that kind of first-rateness a living fact in (their) own communities. The alumni who do this," Bryan continued, "are not simply (people) who once took a degree. (They are) living members of the university, sharers in its essential work..."²

Members of the Indiana University Bicentennial Winter Class of 2019, you are the next generation to become sharers in the essential work of Indiana University. Your IU education has prepared you to contribute in transformative and innovative ways to the prosperity and progress of this nation and the world. Take what you have learned and make the quality of your alma mater known not only in every corner of the state and nation, but also around the world.

It is to you, and to your fellow graduates around the country, that the world now looks for your commitment as citizens, for your energy and seriousness of purpose as you grapple with the most formidable problems that confront us, for your commitment to human dignity and freedom, and for all that you can do to discover, to innovate, to invent, to build, to heal, and to teach.

Congratulations and best wishes to the Class of 2019!

² William Lowe Bryan, "On the University Ideal," *Indiana Alumni Quarterly*, (Alumni Association of Indiana University, January 1914), 34.