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Remarks by Representative John E. Fogarty

Commencement Exercises
Mount Pleasant High School, Providence, Rhode Island
June 16, 1961

It is a great honor and privilege to speak at the Commencement exercises at Mount Pleasant; to congratulate the four hundred students who are graduating tonight and to renew my association with their parents and friends. The understanding and support which I have had from this community has meant a great deal to me. The friendships I have found here have given me much inspiration and satisfaction in my work in Washington.

It is part of the ritual of commencement speakers to say something about the significance of the word "Commencement." Usually this takes the form of a pronouncement to the effect that your graduation from high school is just the beginning of your adult life. I would like to go further than that. I would go so far as to say that as you graduate from high school you are only commencing your education. You are just beginning to learn.

And I don't mean just those of you who are certain enough of your aspirations, and fortunate enough, to be going on to college. I mean each and every one of you. I venture to say that no one of you is finishing his education tonight. I know because I haven't finished mine. When I completed my schooling 30 years ago, as some of you know, I became apprenticed as a bricklayer. If anyone ever thought he had completed his schooling, I did. Of course, I viewed my apprenticeship as an important form of learning, but I assumed that that would be the end of it.

Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Many times in the last 30 years I have wished that I had gone on to college. Sometimes, for example, in those debates in the House of Representatives, I have wished that my vocabulary and my ability as an impromptu speaker had been subjected to the constructive discipline of college. But I have less to complain about than many. My career in Congress has been an education in itself.

As chairman of the House appropriations subcommittee responsible for the Departments of Labor and of Health, Education, and Welfare, I am privileged to preside over a fascinating and continuous "seminar" on Our Changing America. This has been an extraordinary education for me, and I would like tonight to pass on to you some of the lessons I've learned from my course, about the educational prospects of yours and future generations.

There is one dominant and recurring theme that runs through the discussions of our subcommittee, as we have the benefit of enlightenment from national leaders in the fields of medicine, labor, education, and social welfare. That is the theme of change. The evidence of our expert witnesses universally attests to change in the direction of greater complexity, greater mobility, greater opportunity, ...and greater uncertainty. Without exception we are warned that the future holds wonderful possibilities, provided we are prepared for them. It is clear that our society must, like a good short-stop, be constantly on its toes ready to move in any direction, ready for anything.

Our "seminar" has heard testimony over and over again that the great prospects for major advancement in our economy and in our society generally are being inhibited and delayed for lack of sufficient trained manpower. Without more scientists, without more medical researchers, without more nurses, without

more teachers, without more social workers, we cannot capitalize on the possibilities of our society. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, reports that the greatest growth in job opportunities for the future lies in those areas that require education beyond the high school level. They report an anticipated decline in the number of job opportunities that can be classified as unskilled.

All this makes it clear that the nation, like the individual citizen within it, has to run forward to keep from falling backward. The tempo and rate of change in our society and in our world makes it perfectly clear: if you are standing pat you are moving backwards.

Now this indisputable fact--a fact that has been impressed upon me in the course I have been taking as your representative in Congress--has implications for all of us.

This fact has great significance for the people of the United States and for those, who like myself, represent them. It also has great significance for you who will have to live in the changed world of tomorrow and upon whom will shortly fall the responsibility for maintaining the nation's pre-eminence in the world.

Let me speak briefly of the burden of responsibility placed upon those of us who are now the responsible generation.

We have a responsibility to make educational opportunities beyond the high school more readily available to more and more of our young people. We need to make sure that the obstacle of financial need is removed from the path of those who aspire to higher education. We should try and place higher education closer to our young people, either through the creation of community colleges or through the establishment of branches of existing colleges.

We need to strengthen the traditional colleges of the nation, both public and private, as they seek to cope with the growing numbers of young people who seek a college education.

We need to broaden curriculums in our post-high school educational enterprise. Especially do we need to make provision for the training of sub-professional technicians; medical aides, engineering aides are examples of many similar categories in acute short supply.

We need to take a new look at our vocational educational programs. We must make sure that this extremely successful Federal program that has been in operation since 1917 is preparing our young people for the occupations of the late Twentieth Century.

We must expand and strengthen our professional schools. We need, for example, to create 20 more medical schools if we are to maintain the physician-population ratio in our country.

We must expand our adult education programs and extension education and other educational opportunities for working people.

We must establish rapidly and effective programs for retraining the unemployed in our economically distressed areas. These are people who have been caught "flat-footed" by technological changes and economic mobility. Only through retraining can we help them to regain their self-respect.

And--perhaps most importantly--we must buttress our basic educational system. We must train more and better teachers. We must pay them better. We must give them adequate facilities in which to work. It is in this basic system that we implant the seed of life-long training.

These are some of the enormous areas of responsibility that confront us today. In each and every one of these areas the President has taken the initiative and recommended bold action to prepare us for future needs.

But what is the significance of all of this for those of you who do not yet vote, who do not yet pay taxes, cannot yet serve in Congress, and who, for a few years at least, are spared the responsibility for the inadequancies of our educational system? What are the educational challenges of the future for you?

I think the challenge that confronts you is every bit as great as the challenge that confronts your elders. Just as change and the need for change (if we are to realize our national potential) require that responsible citizens think straight, so does it require that you think straight. Let me suggest something of what it should mean for you:

(1) Don't let yourself get complacent. Don't settle for the job you have, assuming that it is safe and secure against the tides of change. As I have suggested, there are more than 5 million unemployed persons in the United States, many of them the victims of economic and technological changes that took place about them, rendering their often highly-skilled occupations obsolete.

(2) Learn as much as you can of your job on the job. Take a real interest in it. See it in perspective. On the wall of my office in Washington--I have the following story printed and framed:

Three men were putting up a building on a wide and spacious lot. A stranger passing by stopped a while to watch. The worker nearest him was doggedly placing brick on brick. "Warm day", said the stranger, "What are you doing?" Without glancing up, the man replied, "I'm laying bricks." The stranger strolled on. A little farther he stopped again beside another bricklayer and repeated his question. "Fine day" he said, "What are you doing?" The second man slapped on some mortar, glanced at the stranger, and said, "I'm earning \$20 a day." Around the corner of the building, the stranger found a third bricklayer, who whistled as he worked. Again he asked what the man was doing. With careful precision, the workman finished laying a brick. He straightened, stepped back, and slowly surveyed the unfinished building. With pride in his voice, he replied: "I'm building a cathedral."

Try and see your job in this kind of perspective.

(3) Don't be afraid to change your mind or your decision about a career if you see a better long-range opportunity elsewhere.

(4) Make sure you are in work that challenges you--both in terms of your interests and your abilities. If your job isn't using you fully, either find a better job or make your own into a better job.

(5) Stretch your capacity for work. Think, read, and talk.

(6) Take full advantage of the marvelous panorama of educational opportunities that confronts you. No other nation in the world offers the assortment of adult education courses, extension courses, on-the-job

training, home study, and other convenient forms of educational development that the United States does. To fail to explore these possibilities is to fail to be what you could be.

These are some of the things you must keep in mind if you are going to be ready for what the future has in store.

What you do as individuals--what you do to make sure that you don't fall backwards by standing still--means a lot to our whole society. The bright promise of the American dream can be fulfilled only if you and the generation you represent adopts a venturesome, constructive attitude toward the future. All that your elders do for you, all that we do in Congress, to provide opportunities for growth and preparation will be to no avail, if you don't take advantage of them. Illness is cured only in individuals. So it is with our social ills. The individual is the basic unit of our social and political currency. If you don't as individuals seek to excel, to develop yourselves, to prepare yourselves for the changes of the future, then the Nation cannot excel, cannot develop, cannot be prepared for the future.

It is no exaggeration to say that it might not even survive.