

Honorary Degree Dinner

Welcome

Let me begin by welcoming our
...honorary degree recipients
...and our other distinguished guests
to our Spring Commencement weekend.

The First Week in May

The first week in May is always a very special time of the year
The glaciers have receded
...the grass is green
...the flowers and flowering trees are in bloom
And our students are packing and leaving town
following their exams...leaving behind parking spaces
Of course, we only get a day or two of respite, since
parents and families soon begin to arrive for
the Commencement festivities.

There are so many things going on this week...

...Tuesday we began the week with an extraordinary
concert

the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra with James Levine
and our own Jessye Norman..

...then on Wednesday, we began the four nights of
the May Festival, with Kurt Masur leading
the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra

(I might note that the entire Gewandhaus Orchestra
be in attendance at Commencement, in case we
have any trouble with the Michigan Symphony Band...)

Throughout today and tomorrow we have a 17 ring circus

...with individual commencement events for each of our

schools and colleges
...and countless receptions and open-houses and dinners
for the graduates and their families
And, of course, the highlight will be the Commencement
Exercises
tomorrow in Michigan Stadium.

Introduction of Guests

...Honorary Degree Recipients
...Regents
...Presidents

The May Surprise

Let me comment a moment on the unusual nature of
tomorrow's event.

As some of you may be aware, last year we finally abandoned
having a University-wide Commencement in favor of
having each of our schools and colleges host separate...
and more meaningful...exercises for their graduates.

However, it has long been a practice for the University to
have a standing invitation in front of each sitting
president...

but since this is such a boisterous place, we haven't had
these invitations accepted since the Great Society address
by Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

Hence, although there was an invitation at the White House
...both for the President and the First Lady
...we went ahead with Commencement planning as usual.

However, as the President's popularity surged with the
strong leadership as commander-in-chief during the
Gulf War, I began to have this premonition that, if ever

the President were to wish to give
the Michigan Commencement,
this would be the year.

In fact, it was the weekend following the Ground War...when
Anne

and I were down in Palm Beach (at a dinner, I might add,
with
Al Taubman, Max Fisher, and others),
that it occurred to me that perhaps
some advance contingency planning might be
useful.

Hence, as soon as we arrived back in Ann Arbor on the
Monday following that weekend, I gave Jack Weidenbach
our Athletic Director, a call, to ask him about progress on
Michigan Stadium.

As you may recall, we were in the midst of a massive
renovation

project, lowering the floor of the stadium for better
visibility,
and converting it back to natural turf...
"prescription athletic turf" ...

I asked Jack..."What if?"

...and he said he would check it out.

I breathed a sigh of relief when he called back saying
that they thought they could manage since the turf itself
was not scheduled for installation until May 1...and they
could

delay that a week and floor the stadium with composite
boards

to support the weight of the graduates.

Well, one of the problems about having these premonitions is that they frequently come true...and sure enough, three days later...the day after the President's address to the special Joint Session of Congress...I received a call from the White House indicating that the President had accepted our invitation.

Now it was time for real panic...

But, taking a page from Operation Desert Storm, we appointed V.P Farris Womack as ... our General Norman Schwarzkopf ...and Walt Harrison as our Colin Powell...and off we went!

Presentation to Bill Maloney

Such events are very people-intensive
Key in this are the Commencement marshalls...
I would like to take this opportunity to make a presentation to an individual who has been our Chief Marshall for the past several years, Bill Maloney
Although Bill is now at the University of Maryland he has returned to help us in this event.

Honorary Degrees

Let me now turn to the introduction of our Honorary Degree recipients
Honorary degrees play a very important role both in a University
Commencement...as well as in the life of our institution.
They provide us with a means to recognize extraordinary accomplishment.
But, even more important, they serve as a great teaching tool

...a case study, in the business school sense
...or a paradigm, if you prefer scientific language
That we can place before our students as both
a model and a challenge.
It is almost as if by awarding honorary degrees,
we say to our graduates
“See...this is how it is done...
This is what you are supposed to do with your new
degree!”

The process of selecting honorary degree recipients is very
much a University-wide process, drawing first
from nominations throughout the university
and finally culminating in the evaluation
of a committee of faculty, students, and
distinguished alumni of the University.

The recommendations of the Honorary Degree Committee
must then be approved by the Board of Regents.

I would like to ask the chair of that committee, John D'Arms,
Dean of the Rackham School of Graduate Studies,
to join with me in the introduction of this
spring's honorary degree recipients.

Reading of Citations

Final Comments

Tomorrow should be quite an event...
We are expecting a crowd of roughly 70,000
...including 8,500 graduates
Of course, the timing will be very precise...
...and the parking will be very difficult
We have tried to prepare for everything

...even rain

(...used a hose today during rehearsal

..."If you want to fight in the North Atlantic

...you gotta train in the North Atlantic..." Bo

I would like to ask all Honorary Degree Recipients
and guests to pick up your information packets
(which contain tickets, maps, and such) from the
staff before leaving.

We look forward to seeing you all tomorrow

...and to a spectacular event.