

April 2007

Commencement Address

DICK CHENEY

Well, thank you very much, President Hinckley, university trustees, President Samuelson, Congressman Cannon, BYU faculty and staff, distinguished guests, family and friends, members of the class of 2007.

Thank you for the warm welcome to Provo, Utah—home to one of the finest universities in the United States of America. I've enjoyed my time here today. I was pleased to meet with the First Presidency. And it's always an honor to be in the company of this university's chairman, a distinguished American and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Gordon B. Hinckley.

I count it a privilege to be a part of this ceremony. I'm grateful for the honor that I've just received—and humbled, as well. My wife, Lynne, reminded me that I'm not the first in the family to have ties to Brigham Young University or to this state. Lynne's father grew up right here in Provo, and two of her great-grandparents graduated from Brigham Young Academy, which grew into this fine university.

Further back, only a year after Brigham Young arrived in this valley, Lynne's great-great-grandmother was baptized into the Mormon faith. She arrived here in a train of 50 wagons of Welsh immigrants and set to work with all the others who crossed the

Mormon Trail to make the desert bloom. My wife has done a lot of research, and she's very proud of her Utah heritage. And, as of today, she has a higher opinion of me, too—now that I have an honorary degree from Brigham Young University.

But this day belongs to the fine young men and women who've actually earned their degrees. And I'm delighted to share the occasion with you, and I bring congratulations and good wishes from the president of the United States, George W. Bush.

I've had the experience of seeing my own children collect college and graduate diplomas and begin a new journey. It's an experience like no other. And so, as a tribute, I think we should have a round of applause for all the moms and dads here today as well.

Graduation always produces a mix of emotions. There's a sense of pride at having set a high goal and reaching it. There's also a little bit of sadness at leaving a place you love and feeling as though a curtain is falling on a very special time in your life. But there is also

Dick Cheney was vice president of the United States of America when this commencement address was delivered at BYU on 26 April 2007.

a great spirit to BYU, and this university will always be part of you. We had a glimpse of the character of BYU again last Friday, when this campus held a candlelight vigil to remember the victims of the tragedy at Virginia Tech. More than a place of learning, BYU is a community of faith and kindness and compassion.

As you leave your alma mater, you'll carry many fond memories of your years on this campus. You'll recall the long hours of hard work in the library and the lab, the sound of the national anthem in the morning and evening, and the teachers and the friends who have enriched your life.

You'll remember those places you call the H-fack, the Swickitt, the Wilk, and the Marb. I'm told you probably won't miss your visits to the Testing Center or your dealings with the Traffic Office. But you'll remember that every year you've been at BYU the school has been ranked number one in the category of Stone Cold Sober. And you'll remember, of course, the Cougar basketball team beating Utah your senior year and the day in the football stadium when you saw Jonny Harline's answered prayer.

Above all, you'll carry the distinction of earning a degree from BYU—a place with impressive alumni throughout this nation and far beyond. The values of this school have been a guide to generations. BYU alumni are men and women at home in the world—working and achieving and reflecting great credit on this university and on the LDS Church.

I also want to note that BYU has a lengthy tradition of military honor and service. And this week members of the ROTC in the class of 2007 receive their military commissions, and I want to thank all of them, on behalf of all of us, for the commitment they've made. They join the ranks of a great force for justice, freedom, and security—and we're proud of their brave service to the United States of America.

In addition to those of you receiving your bachelor's degrees this afternoon, I'm told

we have many men and women who have earned graduate degrees, including a number who've earned their PhDs. Their presence here reminds me that I was once in a PhD program myself and met all the requirements—except for the dissertation. I'll get started as soon as I come up with a topic.

After putting in these years of hard effort as students at BYU, something tells me you're probably not up for another lecture before you leave, so I'm going to keep this short. I know that it's the custom for graduation speakers to draw from their experiences to share some of the lessons they've learned along the way. So as you begin this new chapter in life, let me offer a few thoughts of my own. There is one very practical lesson that comes immediately to mind. It goes back to the year 2000, when then Governor Bush called to ask if I would help him find a running mate for vice president. The lesson I want to share with you is this: If you ever get asked to head up an important search committee, say yes.

That decision seven years ago set me on a path I was not expecting to take. I believed that my time in public office had passed. And my career in politics itself was an unplanned enterprise. On the day of my own graduation from the University of Wyoming, I had no ambitions of holding higher office. If you'd asked me at the time what I planned on doing, I could have described in some detail what the next 10 years would be like. First would be graduate school, then wrapping up that PhD, and, down the road, with luck, a faculty position at a university. It all worked out very differently. Within a few years Lynne and I were living in Washington, D.C., and beginning a journey in government and public life that neither of us had ever imagined.

Many of you will leave BYU today with definite plans of your own. And setting a plan for your life can be a good thing. It keeps you focused on the future and gives you a standard for measuring your progress. Yet I would guess

that 10 years from now many of you will find yourselves following a very different course—all because of an opportunity that came out of the blue.

Be on the watch for those certain moments and certain people that come along and point you in a new direction. I think, for example, of the first time I met my friend Don Rumsfeld. It was back in the 1960s, when he was a congressman and I was interviewing for a fellowship on Capitol Hill. Congressman Rumsfeld agreed to talk to me, but things didn't go all that smoothly. In fact, he pretty much threw me out of his office. Don's impression of me was that I was kind of a detached, theoretical, impractical academic type. And I thought he was a brash young politician with a cocky attitude. And we were both right.

We didn't click that day, but later on it was Don Rumsfeld who noticed my work and offered me a position in the executive branch. Later on, when Gerald Ford became president and made Rumsfeld his chief of staff, it was once again Don who gave me a position of great responsibility in the White House. Standing here today, I can promise that there will be people like this in your own life who keep an eye on you and reward your efforts and help bring out your strengths. Sometimes others know better than we do just what our talents are and how we can make good use of them. For all the plans we make in life, sometimes life has other plans for us.

Those of us who've been around a while can also recall a few times when life took an unexpected turn, and not always in a positive direction. As I mentioned a moment ago, I received my undergraduate degree from the University of Wyoming. My college experience, though, began at a place called Yale—but I didn't finish there. Instead, I dropped out after a few semesters. Well, actually, "dropped out" isn't quite accurate. "Was asked to leave" would be more like it. Twice. The second time around they said, "Don't come back."

You, too, may face some disappointing turns of your own—times when you fall short, knowing you could have done better. And when that happens, don't give up or let your doubts get the best of you. I have met some very successful people in my day, men and women of talent and character who have risen to the very top of their fields. And it's the rare one who hasn't had a taste of failure or a false start along the way. Setbacks in life can stop you dead in your tracks or they can inspire you forward. Either way, you'll look back on them as turning points. They are crucial days in your life when you see the starkest kind of choice and know that it belongs to you alone.

One of the things I love most about our country is that we have such opportunities. America is still the country of a second chance. Most of us end up needing one. And when we've gone on to accomplish something, we can be that much more grateful.

And gratitude, in general, is a good habit to get into. It is usually a correct appraisal of our situation. Most of us are able to succeed and to rise in the world because someone helped out along the way—whether it was a memorable teacher or a boss who handed us a great opportunity or the person who took a chance and gave us the first big break in our career. A grateful heart is an honest understanding of all that we have been given and all that is expected in return.

There is always the temptation to forget this, to carry ourselves with an air of entitlement as if good things come to us by right. They rarely do. And life has a way of working out better when we don't take things for granted, when we have a long memory for what others have given us, when we look for the blessings, great and small, that come with every day we're alive on this earth.

For all of you, this day in the Marriott Center will forever stand out as a marker of gifts well used and hard work rewarded. It has been my privilege to share it with you

and your families. I congratulate you. I hope your future is filled with the kind of happiness you feel today. And, again, I thank the

university for this honorary degree. I leave here as a proud member of the Brigham Young University Class of 2007.