

DEDICATION ADDRESS

for

Harl Commons

October 1, 2013

Thank you for those kind words by way of introduction. There is something very humbling about this occasion. One thinks back to all of the “greats” who built this university and its reputation over the 155 years since this institution was founded. But before we get too immersed in nostalgia, I want to look ahead rather than back.

First, though, I want to thank those who were instrumental in transforming what would surely have been rated as the least appealing entrance to a major university structure on this campus (and possibly in the entire galaxy of land grant institutions) into a grand entrance to one of the most historic buildings on the Iowa State University campus. When I arrived here in late September of 1951, 62 years ago, and made my way up those infamous east steps into Curtiss Hall I was impressed by how grim it looked. Unfortunately, it had not improved much over the years except the steps were a bit more worn from several thousand feet trudging up and down the steps.

Turning to the key individuals who made this project a reality, those who devoted so much energy, skill and a great deal of sweat include – Kerry Dixon-Fox, project manager for Facilities, Planning and Management at Iowa State University [and I just must pause here for a round of what I trust will be thunderous applause for what Kerry and

her crew pulled off]. Also, Kevin Griffith, site superintendent for Woodruff Construction; Luke Wall, project manager for Woodruff Construction; and Rob Ebel, construction manager for Facilities Planning and Management at Iowa State University. One has to be proud that our institution and a very capable general contractor could pull off this feat which was an engineering marvel and artistically worthy of some high honor. And if there isn't an appropriate medal, we should create one. I also want to recognize Dean Wendy Wintersteen for her staunch support for the project and Dr. David Acker, associate dean, who visualized the project and provided strong leadership throughout.

Next, I want to thank the Iowa State University Foundation, and its then President, Dan Saftig, for selling Darlene and me on the project and our past president, Dr. Gregory Geoffroy, for emphasizing its importance to the university. We extend our gratitude to Dr. Steven Leath and the current leadership, under Roger J. Neuhaus at the foundation, for keeping the project alive and well funded.

Next, I want to recognize my good friend, Leonard Dolezal, for whom the auditorium is today dedicated to Leonard and his dear wife, Evelyn. Also, my good friend, Ernie Buresh who is here today with Leonard.

I also want to stress that our part in the project has been a family undertaking with Darlene, who is here today, involved at every step along the way. I also want to recognize other family members -- Rod Harl and his wife, Amy, who are here with their daughter, Gemma; and Brent Harl (who could not be here but is planning to come in a couple of weeks with our four grandsons). We are also pleased to have our

nephew, David Harl, my sister Marjorie Sutter, my sister Merna Marie Donald and her husband, Neil, from Traer, Iowa. Our hard-working tenant on our farms, Matt DeVore and Chantell, could not be here today – combining corn always takes priority over just about everything else that comes along. Finally, I would recognize Bruce Rastetter, President of the State Board of Regents.

I commenced the task of developing my remarks in a lull in my schedule in late February on a snowy day that offered few ways to avoid the wintry weather. I was assuming, that wintry day, that I might have an hour, at least 50 minutes, to share my thoughts. About three weeks ago, I got the bad news that it would be limited to 7 to 10 minutes. That, for an academic, even a retired academic, is bad news in spades.

For several years, I have been burdened by one feature of our global policy and that issue is the primary focus of these brief remarks, today. For many years, the terms “exceptionalism” and, more pointedly “American Exceptionalism,” have been tossed about, lauded, derided and criticized, even by some of our then non-friends around the world. I would only say, regarding the long-running debate over the term “exceptionalism,” and whether we are, as a country, exceptional, that to the extent the United States is exceptional it is heavily because of the system of colleges and universities that have grown with the country, built upon a good and universally accessible K through 12 educational system and have produced enormous benefits for the human family. We owe so very, very much to our colleges and universities and I do not see that changing as we peer ahead. Indeed, it is likely to become even more important in future years and for future generations.

In my view, easily the most pressing challenge we face, globally, is to reduce conflict within and among nations, in advancing peace in the world, and in boosting per capital personal incomes, particularly in the low income countries of the world. In my view, those two issues are linked, inextricably – reduction of conflict and raising income levels.

Poverty is at the root of many of our evils – starvation, warfare, disease, reduced life expectancies, all contributing to civil unrest and all inconsistent with the admonitions throughout history that *we should work to ease the burdens of the fellow citizens here and our needy abroad*. A well-fed and prosperous people are far less likely to be mischief makers than those who are perpetually hungry and see little hope for a better life ahead. There is nothing more conducive to unrest and bloodshed than a feeling of desperation in the face of continuing poverty in a world they know to be populated in part by favored peoples, economically.

As I have so often said, the hunger problem is not solved by an adequate food supply, as some have argued. In my view, the three most important factors in eliminating hunger are income, income and income, in that order. Our market economy, now dominating much of the world, responds to increased demands for everything, including food. We could quintuple our food production *and those without the means to buy it would still go hungry*.

With hunger and bleak economic futures staring millions and millions in the face every day around the world, and with that scenario fueling strife and unrest in the world, our task – and it is a huge one – is to somehow set low income countries on a course of economic development that lodges those countries firmly in the development

queue that has worked so well in the developed countries and is now, as we speak, lifting millions out of poverty. The biggest challenge is the African Continent where many of the countries lack the most basic economic development elements – a rational and effective legal system, a functioning market economy and an efficient and effective system of governance.

Education is a key part of that effort, coupled with research on economic development strategies appropriate for each country. Iowa State University should be in the forefront of that effort. ISU has a long and distinguished tradition of involvement around the world, starting with Earl Heady, John Timmons, Stanley Johnson and, modestly, our own work as director of the Center for International Agricultural Finance in the Eastern Bloc countries. But available funding has been diverted heavily to military assistance for our friends and allies rather than economic development assistance for the neediest countries.

I would hope that such a program would capture the attention of and support by a substantial part of our population which just might also succeed in helping us to see just how fortunate we have been and how desperate the situation is for a large swath of the world's populations.

But back to the dedication. As we fast forward a few decades, history will likely judge us by the extent to which our generation used our resources – both physical and intellectual—to leave the globe at the end of our tenure here better than when we assumed the responsibility for policy making.

Darlene and I want to be a part of that process and trust that those in leadership positions will see the urgency of placing a greater

priority on establishing an accelerated program of economic development in the countries most in need of that type of assistance. I am confident that the world will be a better, safer, more secure place if every individual on the planet can look forward to an education limited only by their ability to learn, can easily acquire the food needed for themselves and their families and can see a better life than has been envisioned by many in those countries.

Darlene and I are hopeful that the Harl Commons will be a part of that noble effort, well beyond the time when we will be walking upon this earth. If so, our fondest hopes for the future will have been realized.

Darlene and I join in thanking everyone here for your generous comments and thoughts about the Commons Project.

Neil E. Harl

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