

POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPT. AT QUEENS COLLEGE

HONORS AND AWARDS CEREMONY – COMMENCEMENT 2022

Thursday, May 12, 2022

Thank you, Madam Chair, Patricia Rachal, for this award presentation and your introduction.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am so grateful to be with you today at your Honors and Awards Ceremony, and also, humbled to receive the Distinguished Alumnus award from the Dept. of Political Science.

I say humbled because I graduated 50 years ago in 1972, and have not spent a lot of time at this campus since then. So, just doing some quick math for you... I graduated at age 22, add 50 years, and that makes me 72 years old at this juncture! With this huge age gap between me and all of you graduates, I am also feeling challenged as a baby boomer on what relevant messages I can share with you, as members of generation Z (also referred to as “Zoomers,” 1995-2012). Hey, there is even a pretty big gap between me and your parents too (generation X, 1965-79/80). I probably match up closer with your grandparents! That may be a good thing?

At my age, though, there are some benefits. For one, life insurance sales people don't call me anymore! And, of course, all the senior discounts! Putting all kidding aside, wisdom comes from age. As we get older, we understand how

things hang together, and then you begin to know what you like and what you want to go after, hopefully, with a passion. Being a big Rockin' Roller, I like to quote some of the big rock stars, such as David Bowie who once said: "Aging is becoming the person you always should have been."

For me, that took about 6 years from graduation to figure out what was my passion (from 1972-78). During that time, I held onto to one of Ralph Waldo Emerson's quotes: "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail." Man, did I leave a long winding trail after leaving QC, by spending several months on many Greek Islands with only a backpack, and then moving to the Catskill Mountains all because of my equestrian pursuits, while having a friend in upstate NY offer me a job as a drug and alcohol counselor, and also running one the first drunk driver courses in NY State which I helped design and teach. In 1976 the NY legislature passed a law mandating this innovative course for first time DWI offenders, and that law is still in place! Suddenly I had a solid resume, but more so, I had developed some keen insights on health care issues. My time at this podium is limited, so I can't dwell further on the details of this "trail," but this part of my career path is an example of how pursuing other interests and curiosities can lead to who you really are, and unplanned experiences can lead to new applications. Whether you're involved in community-based action groups, have hobbies, involved with sports activities, keep them as a priority, in addition to your career pursuits. You just don't know where they will lead you, and more importantly, who you will meet. For me, that

was healthcare, more specifically, hospitals which were, and still are, a microcosm of society, with all the politics, economic/financial challenges, humanity, ethics and ongoing conflicts that we see on global, national, regional and local levels. All within the walls of one hospital. Now, with ever growing health systems comprised of multiple hospitals, they have become even more complex. And I came to this conclusion long before the COVID-19 pandemic!

Back in November 2018, as a featured speaker in your dept's Professionals on Campus Series, I dwelled on this point, and also, how political science majors are well suited to contribute in many aspects of healthcare delivery. With your knowledge on how public policy is formulated and the impact of policy on the social and economic status of the populace, your strong writing, research and analytical skills, your understanding of comparative structures of governments across the world are all needed in healthcare when exploring policy initiatives and considering the ramifications of government actions.

As new graduates, I am certain that all of you have discussed with your faculty and peers what career pathways await you. Some of the various job titles that come to mind include: Policy Analyst; Legislative Assistant; Government Liaison; Public Relations Specialist; Social Media Manager; Marketing Researcher; and Political Consultant. I am sure there are many more, but just this short list of job titles reminds me of how my political acumen and advocacy became a major part of my career path as a Healthcare Executive and Consultant. My basic knowledge,

as a political science major was a great asset when it came to strategic planning for the health organizations I led or consulted, or my role as a member of numerous hospital association boards and consulting groups which formulated health related legislative bills, placing stories in the media, organizing press conferences, and analyzing consumers' behavior, to name a few examples. So, keep these points in mind as you move forward with your career selection and related pathways.

Now, I recognize that some of you are already on a prescribed course, such as going to law school, graduate studies, or already landed a job. If not, don't sweat it, as I referenced my "long winding trail" which led me to a real passion. Take the time to figure out what drives your spirit and beliefs. I probably don't have to encourage all of you "Zoomers" too much on this point, as I have read recent articles that so many of you are constantly looking for your next opportunity. These articles have pointed out that "Zoomers" who are trying to establish their careers are currently switching jobs 134% more than in 2019! I have to say that's a good thing, given my personal "trail," but more so, because a new set of expectations are forcing businesses to rethink everything from benefits to remote work policies to retain young talent.

At this point, allow me to quickly recap my career path, in order to highlight disruptive factors.

After graduating with an MBA in Health Administration in 1980, along with two completed administrative residencies, and a pretty decent resume, I landed a front-line management position at the MEETH as the Associate Director reporting to the CEO, followed with a VP position at the NRHMC, and then my first Executive position at BSH. That straight line trajectory continued with my appointment as President/CEO at the Hospital for Joint Diseases Orthopedic Institute, a world famous Specialty Hospital in its time. Suddenly that trajectory ended due to all the M & A activity among many NY hospitals including HJD, as well as hospital closures (this was circa 2005, well into the new millennium). It was a great run, and thanks to some ensuing consulting engagements, I resumed my CEO career with not one, but two, Academic Medical Centers (Temple Univ. Hosp.in Phil., and University Hospital in Newark, NJ). This quick reference to my career path, is by way of informing you that in this age of advancing technology, information overload and global uncertainty, you have to be prepared for disruptive innovations, especially in healthcare, which will probably force you to embark on a new journey of transformation, even though you think you have found your niche. There is a great book recently released by Apolo Ohno, the former Olympic Ice-Skating champion, the book is entitled "Hard Pivot," which covers the career ending injuries he had, and the difficulties of letting go of what was familiar and stable, leaning into a new curve, picking up momentum, and following a new track to success. I wish I had access to his encouraging words when my trajectory collapsed. And, unfortunately, your generation is destined to see more frequent career challenges and changes, much more than mine. So,

sometime down the road, you may need to pick up Mr. Ohno's book for some encouragement.

In closing, I have to say that there have been some very defining moments in my life, some positive, and others, let's just say were hard learning experiences. You have heard the adage about "if it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger." That's definitely part of my story. Certainly, arriving on this campus in the late sixties and graduating in 1972, was a defining experience, especially being a part of the "Woodstock Generation" (and yes, I was at Yasgur's farm in 1969! And that was another defining experience), but here on this campus we confronted so many global and national issues including: Women's Lib; the Civil rights movement; the effects of pollution on the environment; gay liberation; the anti-draft movement; and of course; the anti-Vietnam War movement; and Watergate! Sound familiar? Different titles, but very familiar issues. I guess some issues are destined to be cyclical. Other defining moments for me included: becoming a CEO at age 40; the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, while leading a front-line hospital (this was at HJD, where we actually treated 56 survivors and performed life- saving surgery on 26 patients, reference watching the attack live); then there was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in NYC, in the Spring of 2020, when I served as the official liaison for the GNYHA and Governor Cuomo's office at the Javits Center and the USNS Comfort; and above all else, meeting my wife, Joyce Long. Needless to say, I am enjoying this last reference the most!

I am sure you will have some very defining moments in your own life, and you probably have already experienced one or two. And now, as you begin a new adventure as college graduates, I suggest that you judge your success by the degree you are enjoying peace, health and love. I guess you would expect this message from someone of the Woodstock Generation. But the reality is without any one of these attributes, life seems empty. Winning a sporting event, accumulating material things, coming out ahead on a business deal all make you feel good for a while, but that feeling never lasts. The things that count, that just can't be bought, negotiated or won, are peace, health and love. If you achieve them, you will be truly successful.

So, Congratulations to all of today's awardees, and graduates. Thanks for listening and best of luck to each one of you.

And again, thanks so much for this acknowledgement, it's another defining moment, for sure. Also, it's been said that a person makes two major trips in their life. The first major trip is when you leave home, and the other is when you return home. I hope this doesn't sound too presumptuous, but thanks for bringing me back home to Queens College.

Peace!

