

Transcript of Keynote Address by State of Oregon District Attorney John Haroldson

**Keynote Address by State of Oregon District Attorney John Haroldson
2017 Commencement of Central Washington University
Saturday, June 10, 2017
Tomlinson Stadium, Central Washington University**

Thank you President Gaudino.

Bienvenidos damas y caballeros (Welcome ladies and gentlemen).

Welcome Wildcats. Welcome friends and families. Welcome faculty. Welcome all of those who have made this grand day possible...and it is a grand day.

It is a day where we have the opportunity to pause and reflect on a momentous achievement that is combined with sharing that achievement with friends, family, and humanity. So, let your voice be heard. Let your voice be heard to let the world know that you are ready.

I want to share with you some truths that I have learned, since my days at Central Washington University. Some truths I have learned from working in the justice system. And that is that justice doesn't only apply to the justice system. Just as I studied justice in philosophy and read lengthy books, trying to define what justice is, what I have come to understand is that justice exists when two key components are present: one is community and the other is love. Without one of those components, there is no justice.

But, when we speak of community, we really speak of all people. We hear the phrase "justice for all" and, sometimes, we don't allow ourselves to give pause to what that means. Because justice exists in all of our ambitions. It exists in all of our careers. It exists in every human endeavor. These are elements that were recognized before this country was formed—taking us back to the Declaration of Independence.

Recognize the language and recognize that human beings are born with inalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Life...to be. Liberty...to be free. And the pursuit of happiness...the right to have hope, the right to have dreams, the right to opportunities. So that when you dedicate yourself to an education, to a quality education, and you graduate from Central Washington University, you have an abundance of opportunities because you will be ready.

Along with justice comes sacrifice. And we can imagine many who have sacrificed in order for us to be able to realize our opportunities.

In this spirit, I want to share a story with you that is very close to my heart—about sacrifice. My Aunt Licha, she loved me dearly. She was one of the youngest daughters of 13 children, living in the inner city of Monterrey Nuevo León. For her father died when she was young and tradition

was that one of the youngest daughters would not marry but would dedicate her life to care for the aging parent. And that's what she chose to do.

She lived a very meager existence, and yet she expressed so much love, that she was the first person in my life that I called "Mama," and my mother wasn't happy about that. But despite her meager resources she made me feel like she could get anything for me. And my brothers would tell me how spoiled I was. But this unconditional love and support, she gave and offered as a sacrifice to everyone.

I recall later on, as we were returning to the United States, coming across the border—even though she had documentation, she was not allowed to pass. She was holding me in her arms and had me pulled away from her and she sobbed. Eventually we were able to get things cleared up and she was able to witness my graduation. She was able to witness my first murder trial. And, when I graduated, she gave me a gift of a gold ring that I wear on my hand. And I knew that this was a huge sacrifice because of her limited resources, but it was something that she wanted to do. For her, I was a manifestation of her dreams...that which made her sacrifices mean something. And for her to be able to watch me in trial, to be able to watch me be able to graduate, to watch these key moments was a celebration much like those of who are celebrating with you today.

A year ago, my Aunt Alicia [Licha] passed away. And my brothers and I returned to Mexico to tend to the funeral and to her belongings. When I was alone, picking up her things from the bedroom, I came across her jewelry box. And in the jewelry box there were plastic rings, cheap metal jewelry, nothing of value. She gave it all. And every day I'm reminded of that sacrifice and what that sacrifice means with respect to justice for all. For that becomes our responsibility, what we are going to pay forward.

So, the question ultimately for you is: Are you ready?

This is such an important question because I can tell you from this side, more than three decades away from my graduation at Central Washington University, that the overwhelming majority of opportunities that you will find will be unplanned and unexpected.

So many of us learn that if we make a plan, make a goal, and work towards it we are going to get there. And that's a good formula. But life teaches us that being ready is a critical component. Because the overwhelming majority of opportunities were ones we had not even thought of on graduation day.

I'm here to tell you that you will see amazing opportunities, the majority of which you have not even thought of. Let me share.

When I attended Central Washington University I lived in Kamola Hall. They called it Kamola Granola. I don't know if that was a compliment, but it's such a historic building that I loved it. But, when I was attending Kamola Hall, it never occurred to me that one day I'd be attending law school.

When I was at Bouillon Hall, where I took the LSAT (law school aptitude test), it never occurred to me that, one day, I would become a criminal prosecutor. In fact, no one in my family had ever been an attorney. I had never met an attorney, and our best idea of what that meant was what we saw on TV telenovelas [serials].

When I was studying in the Language and Literature building, I never dreamed that one day I would be serving as adjunct faculty at various institutions.

When I studied at Brooks Library, I had no idea that one day I would be a chief deputy district attorney, the right-hand person to the elected, who's responsible for trying some of the most challenging cases and having a strong voice with regards to policy.

When I was a member of the Residence Hall Council and a MEChistA [member of the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán student organization], I never imagined that, one day, I would become the first Latino district attorney elected in the history of the state of Oregon.

When I sat, in then President Garrity's office asking for his support to get into law school, I never imagined that there would be a day when I would be facing an ocean of cameras, microphones, and media asking me questions about high-profile cases. Being on television—having to ensure that every single word that I expressed was intentional—a communicator.

When I lived in Stephens-Whitney, I never imagined that I would be serving as an international faculty. I never imagined that one day I would be in Tabasco, México. I never imagined getting off of the plane and, going through the airport, that there would be three armored vehicles waiting for us. And that we would be flanked by armored pick-up trucks with soldiers holding automatic weapons as we were taken to our hotel. And then I would be presenting lectures to 6,000 lawyers, professors, law students, prosecutors, and defense attorneys in my heritage language.

When I lived in North Hall, I never imaged that one day the work ethic that I learned from my parents would lead me to a place where the Oregon State Bar would present me with their most prestigious professionalism award.

I don't share these experiences to talk about myself, but to give you examples of the reality of the unplanned opportunities that will come if you are ready.

My education at Central Washington University was not just about a career. It was about a holistic evolution of myself. And that holistic evolution of myself led me to grow into a person who could offer substance, character, integrity to the most important relationship of my life and that is Maria Teresa—my life partner, my wife. That decision, like all of the other decisions and opportunities that came about, all came through my journey through Central Washington University. Being ready when the opportunities came. Being able to make the decisions that would serve me with the opportunity to make the greatest difference with justice and to make a choice that would bring the greatest joy of my life.

More than three decades ago, I sat in Nicholson Pavilion with my graduating class. And at that time, I had no idea that I would be back to offer a keynote for the Class of 2017, but here we are.

No matter what field you work in our capacity to communicate will define our success. Our capacity to communicate will define our success in every language that we speak. Our voice must be heard more than ever, and for that we must be ready.

Your education represents not just a degree but learning how to think about how you think—becoming a critical thinker not a segmented thinker. Becoming a continuum thinker not a segmented thinker. So, when we hear things that are not true, that we have a heightened capacity to analyze things and get to the truth.

The key to making a difference is integrity and love, intelligence, and education—a strong sense of history where you came from, and purposeful direction—where you are going.

Some advice...build a board of directors for your life. Surround yourself with people who won't tell you what you want to hear but what you need to hear. Build a board of directors for your life because there's nothing that is more important when it comes to the difference we are counting on you making. Because the differences I have made in my life should pale in comparison to the potential that waits for you. You represent our future. You represent the changes. We hand you the baton so that you can make the difference.

In conclusion, I offer my sincere congratulations on your commencement as it represents a manifestation of generations. Celebrate these collective achievements with those who have sacrificed in order to make those opportunities possible. Celebrate with those who have sacrificed and for those who will benefit from your achievement. Let the celebration be an announcement to the world that you, a Central Washington University Wildcat, are ready. That your voice will be heard and that justice has come to call.

So, students, I'm going to ask you to stand. We have arrived and we are going to announce to the world that we are ready. And we're going to do that in whatever authentic expression and voice is your voice. I'm going to start us off with my expression which will be a grito [Mexican interjection, expression of joy or excitement] and after I do my grito that's your cue to come back and let the community, let Ellensburg, let the world know that you're coming and that you're ready.

[Lets out a loud battle cry.]