Speech - May 11, 2002

Text of Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks at Texas Tech Commencement

(Note: Gov. Perry frequently deviates from prepared text.)

Thank you Dr. Schmidly. Chairman Brown, members of the Board, Chancellor Smith, distinguished faculty, honored guests, fellow Texans: it is an honor to be with you on this very special day.

The administration has shown no small amount of courage inviting this Aggie to a Texas Tech commencement ceremony. A lot has been said, and much has been made, of that afternoon at Jones Stadium last Fall. Let me share one thought:

Sometime truth is stranger than fiction. Case in point...we now know the easiest way for two Aggies to get confused at a post-game brawl is when they're both wearing maroon. Next time, you may have to split up the visitor's section.

I have gone to a number of games at Jones Stadium, including once as an Aggie yell leader. And almost every time Texas Tech cleans our clocks. We'd rather play next time without the goalposts!

Today is a big day. Moms and dads...grandparents, brothers and sisters...other relatives shocked this day has arrived...I have one piece of advice: make sure that piece of paper is signed!

To our guests of honor...the Texas Tech Class of 2002...I offer my heartfelt congratulations. After four, five...in some cases 7 years of work...you have finally made it.

Sadly, that wonderful college experience is about to end. No more nights in the Depot District...no more trips to "the strip" for "nature studies"...no more days hanging out at the dorm or your apartment, enjoying the smell of the stockyards with a strong easterly wind...yep, there's only one thing left to do...IT'S TIME TO GET A JOB!

By definition this is a commencement address...so by definition I am supposed to dispense some advice.

So here it goes, starting with the most important:

LISTEN TO YOUR ELDERS!

Use dental floss.

Corn is a starch, not a vegetable...and Bar-b-que and Shiner are not substitutes for green beans and broccoli. Eat healthy.

Don't throw out your CD's when something better comes along...things have a way of coming full circle...That's why I still hold on to those 8-tracks.

Don't obsess over your hair...one day it will either all be gone, or gray...or if you're like me, Molly Ivins will make fun of it.

And avoid over-confidence. I happen to know there has to be a procrastinator or two in
this audience today. You know who you are...the one who didn't crack a book until the night before the exam, and then demanded your classmate's notes as you downed five cups of coffee and exercised the newest theories on speed-reading.

You're the same guy or gal who hasn't gotten around to looking for a job...and your folks aren't happy.

But you are also eternally optimistic because you live by the procrastinator's motto: everything always has a way of working itself out.

And soon you will be in that interview, and it will be going so well that you will start to get that feeling once again that you are about to slide by.

There's just one last question...one of those stumpers..."what is your greatest weakness?" Never mind the fact that is the dumbest interview question ever invented...you have to take it seriously.

That's when you have to avoid that destructive urge: the downfall known as over-confidence.

It goes something like this: sitting in your seat, you repeat the question aloud, "what is my greatest weakness?"...you smile that cocky smile, you look the interviewer in the eye, and you say, "that would be kryptonite."

I recommend something more like this: "hey, I'm a graduate of Texas Tech...Coach Knight doesn't tolerate weakness."

Today, a new journey begins. The day I received my diploma, though it was 30 years ago, still remains vivid in my mind. It signified much in my family. I was a part of the first generation in my family to go to college.

My older sister, Milla, was the very first to get a college degree in the Perry family...a degree that bore the seal of Texas Tech University. Today she is a Distinguished Alumnus in the College of Human Sciences. My wife, Anita, also attended Texas Tech. And today our niece is a current student here. All rumors aside, be assured that Texas Tech is a very special place in the Perry family.

I am forever grateful for the opportunity I had to go to college...and for a system of higher education that opened its doors to the sons and daughters of farmers, shop-keepers and mechanics.

That college degree has afforded me a lifetime of opportunity...as a pilot in the U.S. Air Force, as a state representative, your agriculture commissioner, lieutenant governor, and now your governor.

I believe there is nothing more important that we do as a people than make a college education available to every qualified, willing citizen.

From the colonias along the border, to the farms and fields of West Texas, to the suburbs of Dallas: there are no second rate dreams, no second class citizens.

We must say to every young Texan, "we don't want your dreams and ambitions to be limited just because your finances are limited." That's why we have invested in critical programs, like the $300 million TEXAS Grant Program. And that's why I have proposed a new initiative to ensure our colleges and universities attract more First Generation students. No young Texan should think college is not for them simply because mom and
dad didn't go, or couldn't go.

You may not realize it right now...you may not even want to think about it...but 20 or 30 years down the road, you will see how blessed you have been to attend a great institution such as Texas Tech University. You will see the difference it will make in your quality of life, and in providing you greater opportunity and freedom.

Now that journey toward opportunity begins as the world awaits the imprint you will make, and I have some thoughts I want to share with you about what the future may hold.

There will be some who will write you off because you are young. You will be labeled generation X, or Y, or whatever the latest pop psychology term is. You may not conform to their way of doing things, and because of that, they will be blinded to the dreams that serve as your driving ambition.

Don't be frustrated by naysayers. There is nothing more refreshing than youthful idealism. As the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "do not be ashamed of your youth."

Alexander the Great was 16 when he began his conquest of the world...Joan of Arc was 19 when she was martyred for her courage...and William "Buck" Travis was a mere 26 when he commanded that band of Texas soldiers who died defending the Alamo.

I believe there is no greater time for you to harvest the seeds of abundant ambition and youthful idealism. The world awaits your contribution, and you have been trained on this campus to make a difference for your fellow man. So keep your dreams in front of you, and keep your eyes fixed on your life's goals.

Maintain perspective, and remember what is important.

It's a funny thing how we change over time. For the first ten years of our lives, we seek the approval of our parents, following them wherever we go. Soon thereafter, we seek the approval of everyone but our parents...pursuing our own independence and the acceptance of friends.

We often then seek the approval of one special person, looking to find someone with whom we will spend the rest of our lives. And along the way, we often seek public esteem through a successful job, a nice house or a fancy car.

None of these things are wrong in themselves...but there is something greater at work in our lives.

The biggest house on the block...a sports car...a large bank account...they are poor substitutes for love, decency and fulfillment.

Material prosperity is fine...but prosperity in the absence of virtue is emptiness.

America is the most blessed nation on the face of the earth...not because we have accumulated much, but because we have given so much.

Generation upon generation have made the ultimate sacrifice, enshrining foreign soil with the final offering of their blood because of their steadfast belief in freedom...because they understood there are some things worth sacrificing for...and because of their love for you and me.

Many of them were not rich in material, but they were wealthy in spirit. And they have
left a lasting imprint on the free air that we breathe.

The blessings of freedom and a college education will never be experienced by a great many people on this earth. You are among the very fortunate.

But blessings are not intended for safe keeping...they are meant to be shared with others.

If you are ever so blessed to have children, or already do, bear something in mind:

A six-figure executive who provides a comfortable living for their family, but never talks to their children, is not as well off as a blue collar worker who lives month-to-month, but spends time with their children on a daily basis...talking to the...guiding them...and giving them the love they yearn for.

There is virtue and fulfillment that can be found in loving a child or a parent, or providing a hand to a neighbor in need, that can never be replaced by the accumulation of things.

We cannot underestimate the importance of raising our children not only to be successful, but to also be good and decent people.

Your legacy as you pass from this life will not be defined by the wealth you cannot take with you, but by the impact you have on those you leave behind.

A related piece of advice is this...while one person can make a profound difference, keep in mind that the world is a pretty big place, and that there are forces at work outside of your control.

The words of the Serenity Prayer help us to realize the proper balance:

"GOD, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Perhaps it's easier said than done...each one of us will live the rest of our lives seeking greater wisdom. We are all mortal. True and complete wisdom comes from above.

Sometimes, only in the darkest moments do we think about turning to God. But God doesn't just deliver in times of peril. While human beings may let us down from time to time, God is always faithful, and His love unconditional.

Lastly, ponder the words of the great Texan Sam Houston, who said, "do right, and risk consequences."

You can never trade your integrity for something better. Sometimes the knowledge of a good act is reserved only for the doer of the deed and God in Heaven. So be it.

The test of character is not whether you do right in the eyes of others, but if you do right when no one will ever know.

Do not be afraid to own up to your mistakes. My wife says what a dreadful world this would be if I were right all the time.

It is better to admit human error...because to do so is to admit being human. The measure of a person is not whether you have been knocked down...because we all have. It is whether you get up every time.

As our former President, Teddy Roosevelt, once said, "it is not the critic who counts, not
the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

"The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause;

"who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

Thank you for allowing me to share in this day...YOUR DAY. Good luck as you go forward. Make us all proud. And keep those guns up!