

**COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
Fall Class of 2000
University of Guam
December 17, 2000**

by

**Hon. Benjamin J.F. Cruz
Chief Justice
Supreme Court of Guam**

Governor Gutierrez, Lt Governor Bordallo, Speaker Unpingco and Senators of the Guam Legislature, Brothers and Sisters from the Judiciary, Congressman Underwood, Chairman Shimizu and Members of the Board of Regents, Distinguished Guests .

. . . Families and Friends of the men and women we are here to honor . . . The Fall 2000 Graduates of this esteemed institution of higher learning the University of Guam.

I know that the Graduates and their families have endured many years of sacrifice and study to get to this commencement.

Let me be the first to extend to the Graduates my sincere congratulations and best wishes for a successful and prosperous future.

All of you, as a group, each of you as individuals, have earned the right to **stand proudly** and **walk confidently** onto this stage to receive your degrees.

The family members who sacrificed to support you financially and morally also should be proud of your accomplishments. I hope that you graduates remain forever grateful to them.

Please allow me to thank the Graduating class and the organizers of this ceremony for the honor of being invited to deliver this Commencement Address.

The first time I delivered a Commencement Address to a Graduating Class of this University was about ten (10) years ago. In that Address, I exhorted and encouraged the graduates to become interested and informed about indigenous rights and the right of self determination of the Chamorro people. At that time, very few of our island leaders could spell indigenous and were unaware of the right of self determination reposed in the Chamorro people.

A decade later everyone was talking about indigenous rights and we almost had the opportunity to exercise that right of self determination during last month's election. Maybe in the not too distant future or at least during my lifetime we will be able to exercise that right.

As I contemplated on a theme for this commencement Address many ideas ran through my mind.

I could give the standard speechThis is the first day of the rest of your life.

Or I could give a cute tongue in cheek speech much like the one on the internet that is attributed to Kurt Vonnegut where he says " Don't feel guilty if you don't know what to do with the rest of your life. The most interesting people I know didn't know at 22 what they wanted to do with their lives. Some of the most interesting 40-year olds I know still don't."

But those of you who know me, know that my first choice would be to choose the most controversial topic, maybe even espouse civil disobedience but at any rate in the tradition of the hit movie Dead Poet's Society I would seize the day.

After my speech, your degrees will be conferred upon you. Some of you will be receiving Masters Degrees, some of you Bachelor of Arts . . . B.A's, some will be receiving B.S. degrees, a Bachelor of Science not the pejorative connotation of B.S.

In the Traditional sense these degrees document your successful completion of a requisite course of study. These degrees will be your key to open doors and afford many opportunities for your future and your families. The only limitation will be the intensity of your drive and determination to succeed.

I would like you to view this commencement and the conferring of your degrees as the vesting of your stock option for your investment in time and study at this institution.

This stock option, however, is in the form of preferred non-voting stock. The common voting stock is held by the taxpayers of Guam who have given their proxy to appoint and confirm the Board of Directors or Regents to the Governor and the Legislature. This Board of Regents select the administrators, faculty and employees of the University pursuant to the policies and regulations approved by the board.

Your stock option-your degrees are in danger of being devalued faster than some of the technology stocks that were the shining stars of the NASDAQ last year but today are just spent shooting stars.

You Graduates join a group of thousands of men and women who also graduated from this institution, and like you hold preferred stock. These men and women are Presidents and Governors of neighboring islands, Presidents and CEO's of some of Guam's leading businesses, doctors, lawyers, policy makers in the Guam Legislature and other Micronesian Legislatures, Advisors to policy makers throughout the region and most importantly voters.

I say **most importantly voters** because as the events of the last five weeks have permanently etched into our minds . . . **every vote counts**, and the most powerful office in the world-the Presidency of the United States was lost by fewer votes than there are graduates here today or if you take the original certified results, less than the total number of Alumni of this University.

To paraphrase a famous revolutionary thinker of the last century "Graduates of UOG Unite!!!

The Alumni Association can and should be the most powerful force around this university. **You** have a vested interest in the continued accreditation and success of this university.

I would venture to bet that fewer than a handful of us sitting upon this dias have degrees from UOG and probably less than 5% of the entire management team and faculty hold degrees from UOG.

I am not suggesting that just because we don't have UOG degrees we don't have an interest in the University. I am confident that most have a sincere concern for the university as administrators, academicians, parents and residents who truly believe in the value of this university to Guam and the Western Pacific.

I hope that there aren't many, if any, whose interest are purely selfish for employment or retirement.

What I am suggesting is that if **you** do not **unite** and **demand** that the administrators, the faculty and the government set aside selfish self interest or political posturing, **UOG will lose its accreditation** and your degrees will be devalued.

Demand that the university not be influenced by powers outside of the institution.

Demand that the regents select the most capable person to lead the university then trust that person to run the university without interference and micro-managing.

Demand that the administrators provide the leadership to inspire competence and integrity among all University employees by themselves being competent and having integrity.

Demand that the faculty introspect to ensure that the programs and degrees available at the university are for the good of the whole and not just to ensure job security.

Remember that as UOG goes, . . . so goes the significance, . . . integrity and value of the degrees you receive this afternoon.

To many, these statements may seem dramatic or overly pessimistic, . . . but I make them with all sincerity.

Wherever your lives take you, be it immediately into the workforce, or higher academic pursuits, your UOG degrees will be the platform on which you must stand. The success, stability and independence of UOG will be the yardstick by which those degrees will be measured.

I make these statements not to dampen the pride and joy you and your families feel this afternoon. I pray that you and your families will feel that pride and happiness, . . . not only this afternoon, . . . but for the rest of your lives.

However, I do make these statements, **as a prayer** that each of you will continually endeavor to help this institution become **even stronger** than it is today. As the strength and stature of UOG grows, so will the strength and stature of your stock options.

As students, many of you have voiced your opinions openly, like a chad punched clear through. Some of you have been meek hanging chads, many have been dimpled chads and too many of you have not even spoken at all, on the need to protect and insure the independence of this institution. **I pray** that your voices are not silenced today as your graduate . . . and that they **become even stronger** and more far reaching as alumni. **I pray** that through the years the value and strength of the stock certificates you receive this afternoon continue to grow so that one day, . . . when you come back to this institution to watch your children, . . . and your children's children, . . . receive their degrees, . . . that the value, strength and power of their certificates will be even greater as a result of your continuing concern and concerted effort.

To paraphrase President Clinton's closing comments to a crowd of Catholics and Protestants in Belfast, Northern Ireland the other night

In the end, what really matters is not what people outside say and do and what really matters is not even the encouragement and exhortations I give to you or the people of Guam. "What really matters **is what YOU do** and **whether YOU decide** to give your children not **your own yesterdays**, but their own tomorrows."

Congratulations again for having earned the stock option you will soon be awarded. But you must endeavor to grow that investment for future generations.

Para todos hamyo yan y familian miyu, gi esti na tiempon minagof, si Yu'os enfan binendisi, Si yu'os enfan guinaiya, Felis Navidad, yan y mas prosperu na Añu Nuevo.

Para esti na honra yan y atencion miyu un dangkulu na Si Yu'os Ma'ase.