

**Remarks by the Director of National Intelligence
Mr. Mike McConnell**

The George Washington University – Columbian College of Arts and Sciences Graduation

**The Charles E. Smith Center
Washington, DC**

May 17, 2008

GW PRESIDENT STEVEN KNAPP: Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon and welcome. It's a tremendous pleasure to greet all of you on this milestone day for the graduates, their families and friends, and the faculty and administration of the university. Even though I've not had a chance to meet all the graduates personally, I can say that they have made themselves known to me during this past year, mostly in very positive ways. (Laughter). Their enthusiasm, their energy, and their zest for living have animated the campus and have made GW a place of active intellectual, political and social engagement. And as a result, I do feel I know these graduates very well, and I greet you this day with a sense of shared pride and accomplishment.

It's now my great pleasure to confer the honorary degree on John Michael McConnell.

(Applause).

PROFESSOR JILL KASLE: President Knapp, it is my very great honor to present the Director of National Intelligence, John Michael McConnell, for the degree of Doctor of Public Service.

(Applause).

PRESIDENT KNAPP: John Michael McConnell, as the foremost member of the intelligence community today, you preside over a network of agencies that seeks to protect this country from terrorists while simultaneously respecting a citizen's right to privacy. You have brought intelligence, acumen and common sense to this difficult and complicated task at an especially critical time in our nation's history.

You were born in Greenville, South Carolina and earned your undergraduate degree from Furman University. You later went on to earn a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the George Washington University.

(Applause).

You joined the Navy in 1967 and spent a year on a patrol boat in Vietnam. You began your intelligence career in the Office of Naval Intelligence. You worked as the intelligence officer for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense during Operation Desert Storm. From 1992 to 1996 you served as Director of the National Security Agency.

You retired from the Navy in 1996 and spent the next decade focusing on national security issues as a Senior Vice President at the renowned consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton.

On February 13, 2007 you became Director of National Intelligence, only the second person to serve in this challenging new role. Here, as throughout your career, you have continued to serve with integrity, wisdom and complete dedication to the security of the American people.

For all these achievements in a long and distinguished career, the George Washington University is proud to confer upon you the degree of Doctor of Public Service with all the rights, duties, privileges and opportunities pertaining thereto.

(Applause).

DIRECTOR MIKE McCONNELL: President Knapp, distinguished faculty, staff, parents, family, and most importantly Class of 2008 of which I am now a member.

(Applause).

I'm indeed humbled and most appreciative for this Doctorate of Public Service.

Professor Jill Kasle, the person to my left who introduced me, I just wanted to note that 20 years ago I was one of her students. (Laughter). You have my deepest sympathies. (Laughter).

Professor Kasle was without a doubt one of the absolutely best professors I ever had. The part I didn't understand is how could she be a full professor at George Washington at only age 13. (Laughter).

I've been an intelligence officer, either directly as active duty or serving for over 40 years. Except for a few days testifying on the Hill, I wouldn't trade a single day of it. (Laughter). It's been a wonderful life of public service. Exciting, challenging, interesting, fascinating, and I would argue, necessary.

Early on we learn a very valuable lesson in the intelligence community. There are only four outcomes to any crisis. If you have a crisis, four outcomes. You have a policy success, a diplomatic success, an operational success, or an intelligence failure. (Laughter).

A lot of criticism of my community. We missed Pearl Harbor, if you think way back in historical terms. We missed the collapse of the Soviet Union. We missed 9/11, the attack on the World Trade Centers. What I thought I'd do this afternoon is provide a little bit of context of that background and why, in my view, this community is so necessary in defense of the country.

An intelligence officer learns a very valuable lesson early in his career. An easy way to sum that up is bottom line, up front. We serve very busy people, a lot of competition for their time, so our challenge is what's the point, and present it in a form that they can accept the information in the frame of reference that's most meaningful to them.

So my two bottom lines this afternoon are sincerest congratulations to you all, the graduates, for your achievements and for what you're about to enter in this next phase of your life. You have chosen a wonderful university. You're fortunate enough to live in a wonderful country and I wish you the very best as you go forward.

The second bottom line is to increase your awareness of my community a little bit more, and hopefully maybe spark an interest in serving the profession that I serve.

What I thought I would do is tell you a little bit about me, a little bit about your parents, and a little bit about you.

I found this fascinating, I ran across it the other day. Let me talk about the silent generation. This goes back a long time. I won't tell you exactly how old I am, but I grew up in the aftermath of the Great Depression. I believe in an honest and hard day's work. I'm structured and disciplined. I'm self-sacrificing. And I have great respect for authority. That describes my generation.

How about your parents? (One person clapping). There's another one from that generation right over here. Thank you. (Laughter).

Your parents. The baby boomers. Characteristics. The most populous generation in U.S. history. Focused on personal achievement. They are ego centric. (Laughter). They have less respect for authority. They started something called workaholic. They are very optimistic, however, they have ruled the workplace and they are very resistant to change.

Now you. Your characteristics. The best educated, most technically literate of any generation of Americans. You know no limits. You feel like you're entitled to everything. (Laughter). (Applause). You are highly creative and technologically advanced. You believe anything and everything is possible. You crave teamwork, you crave fun, and you demand social relationships with everyone to include your boss. (Laughter).

Now advice to me from someone who prepared this information is, if we are going to be relevant, my community is going to be relevant to you, we have to create a team-oriented environment where you are challenged to multi-task. We challenge you by giving you tasks where you will have to use your incredible creativity and your intellectual curiosity. You don't take yourself too seriously, you don't want your bosses to take themselves too seriously. And that's my challenge.

Now the last time that I was introduced as a spy there was a journalist in the audience. The next morning I was anxious to read the news and he said, "No James Bond stuff here." (Laughter). "Looks more like a country banker with a bad comb-over." (Laughter). (Applause).

So as you can see, I'm starting my part not to take myself too seriously, but I want to have a serious note. We have an intelligence community and our dilemma is we live in a free and open society and we have a necessity for secrecy. It's not just spies and counter-spies. We study world issues, trends, economics, demographics. I thought I'd give you a couple of examples.

We're now projecting the four largest economies in 20-25 years. Now the summary line is, it's the Century of Asia. The number one economy in the world will be China. We're debating over who's number two. Is it the United States or is it India? Number four will be Japan, of course.

Now if you think about four of the largest economies in the world either being in Asia or having a footprint in Asia, our West Coast, it makes you think about how the next century might unfold.

Let me introduce demographics. Demographically China, Japan, Europe – I didn't mention Europe earlier, but I would add it, Russia – didn't mention Russia earlier, but I would add it, the demographic trends are all negative. Think of it as a cliff that falls off the edge.

The other two that I did mention, the United States and India – demographics are positive. India for its growth rate, its birth rate; and the United States for immigration. For those two reasons India and the United States in addition to being democratic societies that tend to solve problems, it's a much brighter future.

This would give you thought about what career you might choose over the next 50 years, because your work span will be in excess of 50 years.

Intelligence in many communities is used to spy on its own citizens. We are the luckiest people in the world. We live in America. We have this incredible thing called a Constitution. We have checks and balances. It created three co-equal branches of government to ensure that we sustain those checks and balances. It creates tension. You can never define it exactly right at a point in history to say what the answer is, so it created tension in our government so we can work through problems to get to the right solution.

Because of our commitment to democracy we are the beacon of hope, we have respect for law and we follow the rules. If we abuse that balance, our system will correct it. There were abuses in the '70s. My community was asked to spy on Americans. That resulted in very strenuous hearings that created new rules and laws about how we govern the community. There are congressional oversight committees that are very intrusively watching what I do and what my community does, and that's the right thing.

I thought I'd give you just a little snapshot of day in the life. Because I have the privilege of serving in the position that I serve in, I get to arise each morning at 4:00 a.m.. Now I notice several familiar faces out here, and I'm assuming when I was coming down to the White House early in the morning what I was seeing were students that were either staying up late studying – (Laughter) – or you were preparing for an early class. (Laughter). Parents, I want to assure you that that's what they were doing. (Laughter).

I thought I'd use a couple of quick stories just to illustrate this issue of secrecy and the need to protect the country in an open society. I want to use a historical example.

I mentioned that we failed in Pearl Harbor. Shortly after Pearl Harbor the Japanese fleet was underway. They were going to strike a target. Admiral Nimitz who was commander in the

Pacific knew they were underway; he knew the target was somewhere between Singapore and San Francisco – a pretty broad area to cover. We had combined our resources and developed the capability to break Japanese codes, so by guessing at logical targets we caused one of those targets, Midway, to speak about itself in the clear. “There’s no fresh water in Midway.” We had Midway broadcast in the clear, “We’re suffering a water shortage, we need a tanker.”

The Japanese fleet, which is not answering back to the shore; the shore is speaking to the fleet while it’s underway, that’s to reduce their vulnerability, reported to the fleet that, “The target is suffering a water shortage.” So instantly Admiral Nimitz knew the answer and he put what was remaining of the U.S. fleet at Midway. The battle was won and the battle for the Pacific was never reversed throughout the rest of World War II. (Applause).

Meantime, on the other side of the world between the United States and Great Britain, we were breaking the German High Command, the Nazi code. We were reading their mail, their messages, their plans, before the field commanders. We knew at Normandy, for example, that they had believed our deception effort and we were likely to prevail.

Now Churchill faced a dilemma at one time. He knew the Germans were going to attack a town in England and the dilemma was, do I warn the town? Because by providing warning, the Germans would know, they could change their codes, and we’d lose our capability. He did not provide the warning.

Did the American public have a right to know that we were reading Japanese code and German code in World War II? That’s the dilemma that we face – freedom in this society versus what we’re doing against those who wish us harm.

I mentioned failure at 9/11. Part of our culture is described as “need to know”. I have information, I own the information, I determine if you have a need to know it. What that builds in is a lack of sharing information. So we have new legislation, we have a new structure, and we’re attempting to aggressively attack that cultural understanding. We’re moving from a “need to know” culture to a “responsibility to provide” culture. The analysts should understand I have information, I have to find the user and I have to deliver the information.

Let me make it relevant today. Al Qaeda, who wishes this nation great harm, is enjoying a de facto safe haven in a region of Pakistan about the size of New Jersey. They are recruiting people from around the world, to include Europe, to train them to then come back into Europe, the United Kingdom or the United States with a goal of achieving mass casualties greater than 9/11. Last year we observed a cell, we knew who they were, we watched them. Their intent was to have mass casualties in Germany against a U.S. military facility and against a German government facility. We tracked them, we coordinated with the Germans, we arrested them, and they’re in jail today.

They had in their possession 1500 liters of hydrogen peroxide. (Applause). They were going to use the hydrogen peroxide to make explosives, commercially available material, to kill lots of people. We were successful in stopping them.

Now we are balancing constantly sources and methods and secrecy in our effort to help and protect the United States. We always are worrying about making sure that we're doing our mission against foreigners, those who wish us harm, as opposed to anything to do with U.S. citizens. The congressional oversight that I mentioned is strong, it's intrusive, and sometimes we disagree, but when we're out of balance it's decided by the American people.

The greatness of this country is we resolve our disputes at a ballot box, not with a gun.

I have a large community. This community is over 100,000 people, and it's measured in billions of dollars – in excess of \$40 billion on an annual basis. It's an exciting mission. It's around the world, from code-breaking to spy satellites to human agents recruiting other human beings. We have worked to achieve deep penetration of those who wish us harm. I would argue, it's very effective.

We have new leadership. It's informed. Our focus is to protect this country. We need your help to do that.

Let me close by just reminding you that the first spymaster in the nation is the person that this university is named after. It's been around for a long, long time. We have to balance it the right way.

Let me go way back in history to a person named Sun Tzu, Chinese. His view, and he wrote about this extensively. His view, "It's better to win or to prevail without having the battle." What he believed would allow you to do that, to win without the battle, was good intelligence.

So I would congratulate you, hope I sparked an interest, and welcome you to joining our ranks as you go forward in the next phase of your life. Thank you very much.

(Applause).