

## ***"Authentic Work"***

***Kenneth S. Apfel  
Commissioner of Social Security***

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Thank you, Deirdra, for your very kind introduction. It's certainly an honor to be introduced by the salutatorian of the graduating class. I also want to acknowledge those on the stage with me who are here to witness and celebrate this significant occasion -- particularly Chairman of the Board Father John Franck, Bishop Daniel Reilly, President Tom Plough, and your fellow Board members and distinguished faculty. And I want to join with each and every one of the family members and friends who are here today in wishing heartfelt congratulations to all the members of the graduating Class of 2000. A lot of hard work by students -- and a lot of sacrifice by your families -- is paying off today, and the nation will be the better for it.

And to the parents out there -- I bet you're glad today finally arrived. Well, our family is about to start the process you are completing, and I hope that four years from today my wife and I will be sitting on the football field at Boston College watching our first born graduate from college. Wish us luck!

It's really wonderful to visit the college again and think about how far Assumption has come from its beginning almost a century ago, when it started out with just four students. I bet back then none of the students had trouble getting their course selections!

However, we know that times have not always been rosy. As many in the audience may recall, around a half century ago was a terrible time for Assumption -- a tornado hit the original Greendale campus, causing severe damage and claiming the life of an Assumptionist and two religious sisters.

Well, the same tornado that badly tore apart the campus also badly tore apart our home on Uncatena Avenue here in Worcester, and to this day I have vivid memories of rushing to the basement that very sad and very scary day. But we rebuilt our lives here and Assumption rebuilt the school here on Salisbury Street. Part of the rebuilding effort over the years was to start admitting women, who now make up the vast majority of graduates. Your sitting here is evidence that the school has not only survived but also flourished

It's amazing to look out at this sea of caps and gowns and realize that in this group of

graduates, we have seated before us the future teachers, doctors, business men and women and public servants -- those who will change our world. Deirdra, your salutatorian, hopes to make her mark in the international business arena, and you just have to listen to her speak to know she will make her mark. One of the lessons I learned is that the world is bettered by collective action, but it always comes down to the efforts of individuals taking individual responsibility. Seize the day. "*Carpe diem*." Let this graduation be a stepping stone into the world so that you can make a difference in the world.

It has been said that graduation marks one of the five great milestones in one's life -- the others being birth, death, marriage and the day you finally pay off your student loans! Seriously, today is certainly a time to recall the lessons learned in the past and to celebrate being here together in the present. But as the word "commencement" indicates, it is most importantly a time to begin the future. What does this future hold? Well, as we all know, that answer will unfold one step at a time for each and every one of us. But remember that much of what you learned right here at Assumption will act as a roadmap to guide those steps. As you pack up your dorm rooms, you might forget to pack something, but it's actually impossible to leave that roadmap behind. Those lessons learned in these buildings, walking this campus, speaking to friends and teachers will always be part of you wherever you decide to venture.

Now everyone knows that all commencement speakers have to provide some advice to the graduates and I'm not going to pass up that opportunity. But I'm also reminded of an answer a student gave to an essay question on the life of Socrates. The student wrote, "Socrates was a famous teacher who went about trying to give people advice . . . They poisoned him."

Well, casting aside those concerns, my advice to each and every one of you is to go forth from this graduation, from this "commencement" and don't let up until you find meaningful work, something you love, and something that allows you to contribute to yourselves, your families and your communities. Find something important and gratifying and essential to your soul. Something some refer to as "authentic" work.

As Pope John Paul II wrote regarding the dignity and the value of work, "Man combines his deepest human identity with membership of a nation and intends his work also to increase the common good developed together with his compatriots . . . in this way, work serves to add to the heritage of the whole human family, of all the people living in the world."

In the same spirit, I like to think of work as the expression of a higher calling in the world manifested through us. Work puts us in touch with others, not only within the parameters of personal interaction, but by serving others. As the great Senator Hubert Humphrey said when he gave a commencement address right here at Assumption College nearly a quarter of a century ago, "...there is nothing better that you can do than help save a life or shape a life." Work gives all of us an opportunity to do this.

And today, with your roadmap in your pocket and your life's work ahead, you are leaving

Assumption.

As you do leave Assumption and head out, whether it be belted into your new Chevy Blazer or zipping out on your ten speed bike or riding in an old beat up Volkswagen Bug as I did 30 years ago, as you move into the greater world beyond college, you could find no better time than now to listen to your inner voice on how to make your special contribution. There are role models you can look to -- many sitting under this tent today on Rocheleau Field -- many who sacrificed so much so you could be here today.

And there are many others. I'd like to mention three right here from Worcester, Massachusetts, who have touched my life.

The first was a woman who grew up in Worcester and graduated from Classical High School long before women even attended Assumption. She lived at a time when women were best seen and not heard, relegated to secondary roles in the workplace -- if they were there at all -- and certainly not allowed to be the movers and the shakers in the world.

When she enrolled at college, she had no clear direction as to who she was and where she was going. But while at school, "Perk" as she was known, visited factories and was touched by people struggling to succeed and people struggling to survive. She developed a life-long concern for the plight of working people, and her experiences while at school became the place where the seeds of her future were planted. And each and every one of us sitting here -- graduates, teachers, family and friends alike -- are the beneficiaries of her discovering her authentic work.

So from our city emerged this young woman whose name was Frances Perkins. Instead of simply sailing through life, she let the struggles of ordinary Americans and the poverty of older Americans touch her. And it was not long before her direction in life became clear.

Described by historian, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. as "Brisk and articulate . . . proud of her New England background . . . and intent on beating sense into the heads of those foolish people who resisted progress," she worked tirelessly to reward work. Based on her dedication to helping working people, in 1933, President Roosevelt appointed Frances Perkins as his Secretary of Labor -- making her the very first woman to hold a cabinet position in the United States -- and she held that post for 12 years, a record even to this very day.

She said about her chosen life work, "I came to Washington to work for God, FDR, and the millions of forgotten, plain common workingmen." She had a passion to help people succeed and thrive and grow through their work. And she did this by helping to write New Deal legislation including the Fair Labor Standards Act, which put a floor under wages and a ceiling over hours. But she's best known for being the number one "mover and shaker" in the creation of our Social Security system, of which I am now Commissioner. Her life has touched all of us.

I'd like to briefly mention a second person who is actually sitting here on this stage, Timothy Barnicle. He started at Assumption way back in 1962. He tells me that Assumption was still all male then -- except for the nuns in the cafeterias! He remembers the first women coming on campus as nursing students from St. Vincents. His work from the very beginning was to help young men and women find their place in the labor market.

He helped Senator Hubert Humphrey expand opportunities for young people, and went on to spend the past three decades strengthening federal jobs and training programs, some of them actually started by Frances Perkins so many years ago. And he still had time to help me learn the ropes in my very first job in government. Tim continues to this day to make real contributions to young people, such as being a Board Member here at Assumption.

A third role model was someone who touched me right here a very long time ago. A year or so after my college graduation, I came to Assumption to take my very first graduate course. I wanted to take teacher education courses, but every one of the classes was fully enrolled -- an experience some of the graduates may relate to. Instead, I took a graduate counselor education course with a Professor Edward Landy, a kind and a decent man who obviously had found his authentic work. Professor Landy taught us about the value of the helping professions. He encouraged us all to make a contribution. He urged us to find work that really made a difference in people's lives. I must say, I never returned to take those teaching courses -- at least not yet -- but after two graduate degrees and a lifetime in social policy, I won't forget Professor Landy and my short but significant experience here at Assumption College. Both are part of my roadmap to this very day, and will be forever.

President Harry Truman once said, "We can never tell what is in store for us." When I look at my own life, there were experiences I had that directed my path. And so many of them were tied to my experiences in school. But I never imagined -- as I dreamed my dreams and created my roadmap -- that these would lead me to be the custodian of what I believe to be the single most important domestic legacy of the Twentieth Century -- the Social Security system -- which helps almost 45 million Americans live a better and a more secure life. But they did. My experiences in school helped me find my authentic work. And my advice to you today is while no one knows the exact destination of where you are headed, aim high and you and the whole human family will be the better for it.

I look out today at the Class of 2000 -- you who are known as "the Echo Boomers" and "the Millennium Generation."

Your generation is the largest since mine, "the Baby Boomers." Right now you number 60 million strong. You are more racially diverse, and much better than prior generations at dealing with this diversity. Your generation's presence on both college campuses and in the workplace is increasingly female, and, frankly, your generation is also much better than prior generations at dealing with this diversity. You were weaned on the Internet and very rapid change and according to a recent survey of college freshman, by the time you reached 18, most of you had five-year plans. You are already looking at how you'll be balancing your work and your family commitments in this time of change.

And over the course of your lives, you'll have to change careers -- not jobs, but careers -- several times. You are facing much less security than the Baby Boomers but also much more flexibility. You may be working in a job tomorrow that doesn't even exist today -- or in a job today that won't exist tomorrow. In other words, this world of change is one of the big challenges of your lifetime. How you face that challenge will affect the world around us.

The Pope urged us all to use our work to add to the heritage of the human family. While not an easy challenge in these times of change, I think it's part of your individual responsibility to do so. But it's also part of our collective responsibility as a nation to help reward you for your work. Indeed, Francis Perkins' Social Security program was based in part on rewarding those who work with a measure of economic security in old age. And -- by the way, if you have any doubts about the future, let me tell you that Social Security will be part of your future. There will be changes, but Social Security will be there when you need it -- just as it has for many generations -- tying us all together.

If you look at just the past few years, a multitude of other efforts have been undertaken to reward work. Both welfare reform and expansions in health care and tax laws are aimed at helping the poor move from a welfare check to a paycheck. The Workforce Investment Act, Hope Scholarships and expanded Pell Grants and loans are all aimed at helping people go to college and increase their skills to make greater contributions. The President's AmeriCorps program has provided options to more than 100,000 young people, so they could receive college scholarships or pay off college loans in return for service to the community.

And just this year, I stood by as President Clinton signed two landmark pieces of Social Security legislation to expand work opportunities for the disabled and for older Americans.

Why are all these government programs important? Well, there are many reasons. A big one for me is that work matters to each of us -- to the poor, the disabled, the elderly, and to you. And work matters to all of us collectively -- to strengthen our economy and to add to the heritage of the human family.

The Assumptionists teach that we need to give "a doctrinal, ecumenical and social dimension" to whatever we do and wherever we go. That's a lesson for all of us, whatever our religious beliefs. I bet they would also add, "remember that your roadmap is always with you."

When I look out at the faces of the graduates of the Class of 2000, I know the members of this class have very good roadmaps. You are ready for the next step. And our world will be the better for your actions.

So I stand here with you today in my hometown, honored to be part of this collective event in each of your individual lives. Remember the value of work -- to yourself and others. And when you step off of Rocheleau Field into the waiting arms of life, do so knowing that men and women -- even if they don't know the future -- do shape their destinies. In my experience, those who strive to find their "authentic" work are the ones

who also shape our collective destiny.

I'd like to leave you with the words of another New Englander, Henry David Thoreau. This great thinker said, "In the long run, men hit only what they aim at. Therefore, they had better aim at something high." Well, to the men and the women of the Class of 2000, for your sake and the sake of your families and the whole human family, go for it. Find your authentic work. And aim high.

Congratulations to each and every one of you.