

## **“We The People...”**

### **Keynote Speech**

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by D. Craig Horn

When I was in high school I tried to play sports. I said, “Tried” because I really wasn't very good. In both football and basketball, I rode the bench most of the time and only got into the game when we were either ahead or behind by 30 or 40 points. But, I always wanted to play when the game was actually on the line. I wanted to play when it really mattered.

Well, it matters today! It is “Game On” for us all.

We are rich with challenges these days. What an opportunity to shine, what a time to lead and what a time to make a difference!

Look For Trouble!

Be thankful for the challenges before YOU. If it were not for things that go wrong, the difficult people with whom YOU must deal and the problems and unpleasantness of each day, someone else would handle them and YOU would be nothing more than a spectator in the game of life.

It takes intelligence, resourcefulness, patience, tact and courage to meet the troubles of each day and each job. If each of us would start to LOOK FOR MORE TROUBLE, and learn to handle tough challenges cheerfully and with good judgment, as opportunities rather than irritations, we would find ourselves getting ahead at a surprising rate.

It is a fact that there are plenty of big jobs waiting for men and women who aren't afraid of the trouble connected with them.

I moved to North Carolina only about 5 ½ years ago. I am originally from a small town in the Midwest and actually lived for a few years on an island in the Mississippi river between Iowa and Illinois. For much of my young life I lived in homes with no running water, no toilets and no telephone. When we got our first phone it had no dial and there were at least three other families on the same line.

I graduated from high school in 1962 and, without money and family, I joined the United States Air Force and became a Russian linguist in intelligence work. I came back from my second tour overseas and moved into a low-income housing project on the edge of Washington, DC, sold soap door-to-door and one night, whilst knocking on doors, I was offered a job with Oscar Mayer & Co. I am probably the only guy that you will ever meet that has actually driven the Wienermobile!

This turn of events allowed me to get out of the projects and into my first home, a small townhouse, and to provide for my young family. One evening after work, I read a notice in the local paper that the town council was going to discuss “Low Income Housing” for the city. Well, fresh out of a “low income housing project,” I understood its pitfalls and humiliation, so I decided to attend the meeting. During the discussion by the council, and being the bashful guy that I am, I was moved to speak to the issue for it was obvious to me that these people actually had no idea about “Low Income Housing” and I told them so. I was quickly admonished by the President of the Town Council to “Sit Down and Shut Up.”

Two years later, I was elected to that same Council. I served three terms and was twice elected Mayor Pro Tem.

I tell you this story as an illustration on how one can get into the game. It is often said that politics is a "game." Well, life is a game and politics is certainly a big piece of life. The Theme of the program today "Today's Classroom...Tomorrow's Citizen," helped to point out the challenges and importance of participating in the civic process. Not too long from now, each of you will begin the long trip from high school-er to breadwinner. Most, maybe all of you will go on to college and most of those will graduate. Civic life is part of Life itself. And we look to you to play a part in that part of life.

For me to explain the importance of Civic Participation to this group would be telling Lady GaGa the importance of make-up. You got it already. The issue, however, becomes what can you do, how can you do it and where to begin.

I am often asked about college "majors." How many of you have already decided what your major will be when you to college? How many have decided which college you will attend? How many of you are willing to put up your hard-earned money that you will actually attend the college of your choice or complete the major of your choosing?

Experience has taught me that almost no one ends up doing what they started out to do. So, my first piece of advice is: "Learn Everything You Can About Everything You Can." Some of you already think that you know everything about everything, but, believe me, you are not even close.

I want to share with you a little of the experience of running for office. Running for public office is a little bit like sipping water from a fire hydrant. Picture it... you look at it, you understand its purpose and you think that you have figured out how to do it. So, you cautiously approach, you slowly turn on the pressure, you lean in and then... WHOOOOOSH! You are soaking wet, drenched from head to foot, gasping for air, trying to figure out how to shut the darn thing down; and, in the end, you may never have gotten the sip that you originally wanted. But, too late, you are sopped and water is everywhere!

As I said earlier, I only moved here a little over 5 years ago. I moved here to become a full-time grandpa. With seven grandchildren, that is a full time job! But it was just not enough for me. Apparently, I don't have either the good sense or self-discipline to "sit down and shut up!"

I started attending the meetings of the city town council and eventually would begin to voice my opinion on some of the issues that arose. Word got around the neighborhood and soon I was being asked by my neighbors about what was going on. I also began to attend meetings of a local political organization and worked on a campaign for office. These actions resulted in opening up a whole new world of friends, acquaintances and activities. Word got around and I received a call to ask me to serve on a local board, the Union County Fire Commission. More new people, more new issues and more new opportunities to sip from that hydrant.

In January of this year, I received a phone call suggesting that I run for the North Carolina House of Representatives. The sitting member had announced his retirement and the caller felt that I displayed the personality and ability to represent this area well in Raleigh.

Now, I don't know if they were just trying to get me out of town or if there were no other good

alternatives available, but I did NOT jump at the chance. I had no illusions that this was going to be easy, quick or painless. I estimated the cost of such an endeavor, determined how much money I might be able to raise versus how much I thought it would cost to mount a reasonable campaign. And I had a serious talk with myself and with my family.

First, with myself. Did I REALLY understand both the pros and cons of running for the NC House in time commitment and did I understand just how hard it would be? How would this impact my lifestyle and my family's lifestyle? And, if I should actually win, was I willing to spend three or four nights a week in Raleigh - three hours each way was much too far to drive every day?

Obviously, as I stand here today, the Representative Elect from the 68<sup>th</sup> Legislative District to the North Carolina General Assembly, I answered those questions in such a manner as to achieve this result. Let me briefly explain the importance of electing good representatives at every level of government. First, they are the trustees of the public money - your money. They are obligated to put that money to good use and to be very careful that it is spent for worthwhile projects that benefit the community they serve and that it is spent responsibly, not wasted. Secondly, your elected officials decide where schools are built, where roads will go and how your property, both personal and public, is used. Elected officials touch your life every day in every way. Keep them on a short leash and don't let them go unsupervised. And when you become one of those "Elected Officials," don't forget who you serve. Be open, accessible, responsible and responsive. It is Public Service, it is a high calling and it is darned important - at every level.

As some of you may know, I did have opposition in the Primary but none in the General held just a couple of short weeks ago. I worked hard during the Primary. I knocked on nearly 1,500 doors, attended every meeting of every organization that I could find. Along with friends and supporters, I erected nearly 1,000 signs across the district, designed and printed handout brochures, palm cards, bumper stickers and campaign buttons. I spoke to anyone and everyone that would just look in my direction. I worked hard to do my homework, become familiar with the current issues and hone a personal message that would resonate with the voter.

Elections are, by in large, a numbers game. Look at it like advertising people do: Time & Frequency. Over how long a period do you want people to see you name or your face and how frequently can you get your name or face in front of them during that period of time?

Much of this stuff costs money, so you have to either raise the money from friends and supporters or dig deep into your own pockets. It is my opinion that if you cannot raise the money from supporters to fund your campaign, you may not have sufficient support to even be running in the first place. They say that money is the Mother's Milk of Politics, but they are wrong! It is the lifeblood! The fact is that you must do all those things I listed (signs, mailings, speeches, photos, donations, etc, etc) and they all cost lots of money. Without the ability and opportunity to get your message out, you have no message. The answer to better government is for more people to support better candidates with their dollars as well as their vote.

Remember, you can't play the game if you are not on the field. You have worked hard to prepare yourself and your team for today. Preparation alone, however, is not enough. It takes determination and perseverance. And it takes ability. The ability to speak clearly and confidently and convincingly is the most important attribute that you can learn, regardless of what career you choose. A good idea, not properly communicated, is no idea at all. There are principles and pointers that you can learn that

will enhance your ability to speak publicly. No matter what career you pursue, the ability to clearly and concisely convey your message will serve you well.

I started by saying that these are great days, full of opportunity to shine, to stand above and to lead. Let me conclude by quoting from a letter written from a mother to a young son that would one day be President of the United States.

The letter was written during a time of tumult and the future was uncertain. A good idea was not turning out so well. In spite of the best intentions for hope and change, no one knew how all this was going to end. He was afraid. She wrote:

“These are the times in which a genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life or the repose of a pacific station that great character is formed. The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties. Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised and animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities which would otherwise lay dormant wake into life and form the character of the hero and the statesman.”

This letter was written over 225 years ago by Abigail Adams to her son John Quincy Adams on the eve of his departure for France. He was to accompany his father John Adams, who was himself to be President of the United States. It was November of 1779 and the American Revolution was already in its 4<sup>th</sup> year. Things were not going well and it would yet be two long hard years before Cornwallis would surrender and end the conflict that established the United States of America.

So, game on. You are coming onto the field. Arm yourself, be of good cheer, and make us proud to be Americans.