

**Remarks after Receiving  
An Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree**

**By David Albright**

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President David Hopkins, trustees, faculty, parents and friends, and, especially graduates, I am honored to return to Wright State today.

I would first like to thank Dean Michele Wheatly, President Hopkins, and Don Graber and the other members of the Board of Trustees for this inspiring award. I want to thank the Committee chaired by Jacob Dorn for recommending me this year for this honor. I also thank Susan Smith and Dean Jay Thomas for supporting my nomination.

When I graduated in 1977 from Wright State, I expected a life in physics and mathematics. At Wright State, I had come to love learning to understand how the natural world functions. I spent several years here with a great group of students and professors exploring many intriguing questions.

Within a few years of graduating, however, I felt a different calling. I was increasingly drawn to understanding better the problems threatening the security of our country, which at that time were defined by enormous stockpiles of nuclear weapons.

"Every man" said President Woodrow Wilson, "sent out from a university should be a man of his nation as well as a man of his time." I, like many other men and women in science, felt a call to public service.

I decided to use my math and science training to find ways to reduce the risk of nuclear war. I moved to Washington DC and started to work in non-profit "think tanks" or nongovernmental organizations. Eventually, I would found the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) to more effectively bring science into policy debates in Washington. My training in math and physics at Wright State has always been at the core of my work. That training gave me the tools and the confidence to take on the hard problems we face as a nation. Despite many calamitous events, I remain an optimist. I believe that you, graduates of Wright State, will face a future with many difficult challenges and threats, but you can brighten that future significantly.

It was 1981 when I came to Washington—in the midst of the Cold War. Nuclear war seemed all too possible and, if it happened, our civilization, and probably our world, would be destroyed. It was also a time when more nations were seeking nuclear weapons, further increasing the threat of nuclear war. We saw the beginnings of a new threat, terrorists someday using a nuclear weapon to destroy an American city. Today, we are thankfully not concerned about Russia annihilating us, but we remain very worried about the spread of nuclear weapons to terrorists and additional countries.

My journey from Wright State has taken me in many unexpected directions. I have experienced many difficulties and have had doubts about continuing in this career, particularly early on. For me, continuing on my path has been easier because I chose a career that I believe in passionately. You are now poised to pursue your own careers. I am sure that many of you have gone through or will go through periods of doubt about your choices of career. You should take the time to find a career that you feel passionate about.

One of my unusual but rewarding experiences, was working with nuclear inspectors in Iraq in the 1990s. During the inspections, I witnessed the unraveling and destruction of Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapons program that he had secretly built up in the 1980s. I saw first hand how inspections made it virtually impossible for Saddam Hussein to rebuild his nuclear weapons program. That experience taught me that political will, determined diplomacy, and concerted cooperation by the international community can really work to keep countries and terrorists from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Later, in the run-up to the most recent war in Iraq, I was skeptical of claims that Iraq had rebuilt its former nuclear weapons program. But I do not feel vindicated by events. I remain haunted, because I and my colleagues inside and outside government were unable to convey this skepticism effectively to the public. If the American public had realized earlier that the threat of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was small, maybe the government would have slowed its rush to war. Whatever anyone says now, there were alternatives. We could have found another, less costly and tragic, way to contain or remove Saddam Hussein. This experience reaffirmed that an informed, questioning citizenry is vital to both our democracy and our security.

We now face threats posed by another country, Iran. As tensions mount over Iran's slow, steady nuclear advancements, I believe we should be wary of calls to attack Iran's nuclear facilities. There are always alternatives. We can solve the problems posed by Iran without war or capitulation.

I am reminded of what John F. Kennedy said in 1963 at another graduation ceremony. "We shall do our part to build a world of peace where the weak are safe and the strong are just. We are not helpless before that task or hopeless of its success. Confident and unafraid, we labor on toward a strategy of peace."

Graduates, in whatever career you pursue, may you prosper, may you find a career that you are passionate about. Then, no problem is too big for you to solve. As you go forward, I also urge you to look into your own heart and ask what you can do to make the world more peaceful for everyone.

Thank you all very much.