

Thank you—I am truly honored to be invited here today. When Emil called me and asked me to do this, I was surprised---perhaps slightly shocked. I don't feel old enough to have wisdom or witty enough to be highly entertaining. As I thought about what I could say to you today I tried to remember what it felt like to be where you are---at the beginning. Sometimes people say, "If I only knew then what I know now..." You know, as I look back I can't honestly say that. I am not sure I realized it 25 years ago when I graduated from DCRP, but I knew the important "stuff" then and I think you do, too. Today I want us to be connected this morning. I want you to try to project yourself 25 years forward in your life, and I will once again walk in your shoes. I will talk about what you already know but not realized consciously, and why it is so important for your future.

First, you know the value of education. I don't know what motivated each of you individually to come to DCRP, but you don't spend the time and the money for a degree unless you believe that it will have value. For me, that value was simply the intrinsic worth of education—period. In my family education is a rock solid core value. My father believed in education and this commitment was as strong for his three daughters as it was for his one son-and this wasn't necessarily the norm for families in the 50's and 60's when each of us reached college age. Today among his four children, our four spouses and the five grandchildren who have hit college age there are 19 awarded college degrees and four more in progress---and there are still five more grandchildren under the age of 18. So when I entered graduate school in 1975 I was going, in part, because education is a pure good.

Now I am sure that many commencement speakers talk about the value of education---its foundation of a free society or the economic power of increased skills entering the workforce. But today I want our connection to be more personal and more directly related to the education I got at DCRP so that you can see what your commitment to this education will mean to you 25 years from now.

Twenty-five years ago when I graduated from DCRP I expected to be a transportation planner. I thought I had found a “career.” When I received my degree I thought the “value” was the doors that would be opened, the jobs I would qualify for. Of the dozen or so jobs I have held over the last 25 years, my first and the one I have today are the only two that have carried the title “planner.” What I knew when I left DCRP, but didn’t recognize 25 years ago, is the value of our DCRP education is in the perspective it gives us to look at and solve the complex, messy problems of our communities and our society. So many disciplines look at life through a single lens. Planners are lucky because we learn that the issues and problems we face are multi-dimensional, connected and complex. That complexity doesn’t frighten us. Unlike many other disciplines we are taught to recognize and deal with the full scope of complexity. Our education—the planning process---teaches us how to break the complexity down, analyze it and deal with it systematically. And we learn to do this using both technical data driven skills and consensus building people skills. So while I haven’t been a “transportation planner” over the last 25 years, I have used all my planning skills in every job I have had. In fact, I attribute the majority of my career success to the ability deal with complex issues from both a technical and a people perspective. There is no other professional training that

provides such wide array of skills for dealing with the problems that we face in the nation today.

But let me add one word of caution—as a planner you are at high risk of being dismissed as irrelevant----of getting in the way of doing the “real work.” I left “planning” as a career because it didn’t take me long to realize that planning is great, but it doesn’t mean beans if what is planned doesn’t get implemented. You have to figure out how to play the implementation “game.” There are a lot of ways to do it---develop strong partnerships with the implementers of the world, find institutional ways to tie planning and implementation together—through procedure, policy, law—or, do what I did, become a “closet planner” working on the implementation side of the process. If you don’t want to be irrelevant, it is your responsibility to figure out how to make it work. Don’t expect it to “just happen.”

This leads me to the second important “thing” you know that will shape what you do over the next 25 years. You know today that you have it within your power to effect positive change—and, for the most part, you aren’t looking to make small changes, but rather large scale changes that can affect the quality of life for lots of people. Whether your chosen specialty was community development or land use or economic development or the environment, throughout the basic philosophy and core values that you studied at DCRP was how to plan for positive change and how to create the structure and build the consensus to make that change happen.

This was a natural for me. I was a product of the idealistic and turbulent '60's when I started planning school. I knew then, and still believe today, that our communities and can and should be better places for people to live. There should be good jobs and lots of opportunity. Development should be sustainable—with clean water and clean air. Transportation and housing should provide choices and fit seamlessly into the look and values of the community. Bottomline, I saw planning as the way that I could help create a higher quality of life.

This is also the reason that I have chosen, as many of you will, to work in government. There are many opportunities for planners in both the public and private sectors. I personally believe that for those of us who want the best chance of improving the quality of life, the public sector is the place to be.

It is not easy to spend your career as a public servant. Last week I overheard a member of my Board tell a citizen that the thing that surprised her the most about working with DOT was the quality of the people who work there. Over my 25-year career I have heard this comment many times, in many forms. To some people public servants are the “folks who can't make it in the real world.” To some we are faceless bureaucrats who wouldn't know a creative thought or idea if it rose up and bit us.

Believe me I know how difficult it can be to work in government. The laws and rules that we work under frequently seem senseless and are often frustrating. The machinations of such close interaction with the political process can be downright disturbing. And

responding to a Governor, a Board and 170 legislators—many of whom believe that you work directly and immediately for them--can be an exercise in skating on thin ice with while pushing a wheelbarrow full of bricks. But under our democratic system, it is government that has the primary responsibility to create and maintain a high quality of life. While many outside government can influence policy making, it is elected officials that make the laws. And when the debate is over it is public servants who determine how that policy will be implemented and maintained. It is in this public arena where planners have the most opportunity to influence or create the changes that we care about. So twenty-five years ago when I left DCRP, I knew I wanted to use my DCRP education someplace where I could help make the world a better place—I didn't realize then that the biggest bang for the buck opportunities to do that would keep me in the public sector for my career.

This leads me to my final point of what you know today that will be important to you over the next 25 years---your personal values. Sitting here today, you know your values. Your families, your religion, your education, your friends, our society has helped form them, but over the next 25 years you will find them challenged in ways you never expected. You are about to enter the messy real world where lots of people play “the game.” Over the last 25 years I've certainly been asked to recommend actions that the process didn't support. I've been lobbied and offered “perks” to try to influence my decisions. I've been told that it I shouldn't be seen with a good friend because she had become an organizational “untouchable.” I've watched incompetent people move up and superstars held back because of their skin, their gender or who they associated with.

These are the reality checks that are part of our less than perfect world. No matter where you work for you will face ethical issues as difficult or disturbing as these.

More difficult is when it is the organization itself that asks you to compromise your values so that the stakes of taking a stand can have huge personal consequences. I've had that happen to me twice in my career. In every case, small and large, my personal values were the guideposts for my actions. Without them I am not sure how I could have handled the difficult choices I needed to make. Before you go out into that "messy world" make sure you really know what your bottom line core values are—they are going to come in handy.

The endings of speeches are always the hardest for me to come up with. Do I just summarize? That's not very inspiring. Do I just thank you? That's certainly not very memorable. But then, today's events are not the primary memories you will have 25 years from now. When you look back twenty-five years from now, this day will just be the start of a long chain of opportunities, decisions, events and people that will have made it possible for you to help make the world a better place—your education, your commitment and your values are the stepping stones to make that happen. Thank you again for letting me be a part of this wonderful day.