

University of Toronto

Convocation of the Faculty of Law and Munk School of Global  
Affairs

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Remarks by Paul A Volcker

Chancellor Wilson, Faculty, Guests - most of all Graduates  
in Law and Global Affairs.

For all of you, this is a glorious occasion - a celebration  
of academic accomplishment. It is something more - a  
springboard to productive professional lives.

For me, it is also glorious, honored by a great Canadian  
university with international reach. I cannot suggest that, at  
my age, the image of a springboard is apt. Rather, I have an  
invitation to look back, to stay on firm ground, with a  
presumption that experience provides wisdom.

Over a span of 75 years or so, from childhood vacations  
through years of official relationships and intellectual debate,  
I can reasonably claim acquaintance with Canada. One thing I  
know is that our countries are quite different in size, in  
geopolitical aspirations and in some cultural instincts.

I also know that the idea instilled in my youth of a unique and constructive American role in the world under laid all my education and years in public service.

Now, I regret to say, internal divisiveness, angry ideological differences, huge and growing disparities in wealth, more visibly eroding infrastructure is undercutting our presumption of a society to be emulated - what has been termed our "soft power". For all our vaunted capacity for innovation, the outlook for strong economic growth and financial order has come into question. We spend enormous amounts on the military and on intelligence, but it's really hard to know how to bring those resources constructively to bear.

I confess, I look toward Canada with a certain envy these days. Take my own specialty. As you know I have had for decades a certain responsibility for, and a continuing interest in, American financial performance and regulatory policies. Unfortunately, the truth is that our vaunted system let us down badly, to the point a few years ago of requiring massive public support to fend off deep-seated recession.

From my observation, the Canadian financial world seems to have weathered the international financial crisis with relative equanimity. That hasn't gone unnoticed - the very idea of a Canadian central banker being invited to take over the Bank of

England, the storied mother of all central banks, is eloquent evidence of recognition and respect.

A good Canadian friend of mine (I still have some despite hearing complaints up here about the so-called Volcker rule) makes a point of extolling what he sees as the essential point of Canadian history and its governance; he calls it a capacity for "mutual accommodation".

Those are not exactly thrilling words, stirring the blood, inspiring fervent patriotic hymns or hailing military victories. You haven't fought a war of independence or a civil war. When tensions arose - your leaders didn't need to claim manifest destiny or foster delusions that the American way of life was somehow, pre-eminent. The vast expanse of Canada has been challenge enough.

The point is that what has happened here is truly remarkable and has lessons for others. The Canadian nation, built out of different national instincts and cultural traditions, whether indigenous or from abroad, has in the end held together. The narrow band of population stretched over 3,000 miles of difficult landscape no longer seems so subject to centrifugal force. Remarkably, a large influx of immigrants have not only been absorbed, but seem to have added life and vitality. My own observation is that this city of Toronto has

itself become a true international city, in more than size, with all the cultural variety, energy and outlook that implies.

Now listen. I didn't come here simply to praise you. I'm not about to give up my American citizenship. I don't doubt the inherent vigor and potential of either the American economy or our constitutional system. I don't see any alternative capacity to provide a needed element of constructive leadership in a troubled world. But I am also very aware the world of 2015 is not the world in which I grew up, a world in which the capacity of the great democracies to work together with American leadership in a common cause seemed to be well understood.

Today, we need some of the Canadian genius of mutual accommodation, of a shared order. The ability of North America - Mexico included - to work together in the common interest has been well demonstrated.

Can we not, for instance, extend that degree of harmony and stretch it across the Pacific? Can we reason together deal with the common concerns about climate change? And at the same time, can we work together to make sure that a radicalized Middle East does not become a destructive force economically or politically?

I stand here before a large Faculty of Law. These days, eight centuries after the signing of the Magna Carta, we are

reminded that it is dedication to the rule of Law that provides the basis for strong and open democratic societies.

And the Law School is joined here by the much newer Munk School of Global Affairs. Its presence in a simple recognition of the fact that these days lasting success must be global success.

Welcome to the challenge - we need your energy, your professional commitment, and that good sense of "mutual accommodation.

I add only one bit of special pleading. Some of you graduating here today, I feel certain, are from the United States.

Come home!

We need your perspective, we need your commitment, we need some of that sense of accommodation that has marked Canadian life.