



NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL-INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Office of Corporate Communications

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**Remarks as Prepared for
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Director, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
for the
National Intelligence University Convocation
August 25, 2014**

Good morning! Dr. Ellison, distinguished visitors, faculty, and students. I am privileged to be among those whose contributions have been recognized by this institution with an honorary degree. I am deeply grateful to receive this honor. Thank you very much.

We are gathered together today to embark on a new academic year. This year begins the sixth decade in the history of the NIU. Congratulations on your 51 years as the defense and intelligence communities' premier educational institution! And congratulations to the more than 235 full-time students in residence and the 500 more part-time students who are beginning this exciting and unique experience!

I want to give a special recognition to the part-time students. They continue to work full time at critical jobs across the world. They are balancing the demands of work and family as they pursue their degrees. I respect their determination and honor their commitment.

In addition, more than 40 intelligence community, military, and Allied organizations are represented in this class. This new year promises to be another significant milestone in your illustrious history as you begin to transition to your new campus in Bethesda. This relocation will allow you to significantly enhance your role as the center of academic life for the entire intelligence community.

As some of you may know, your new campus was home to NGA and its predecessor organizations for 40 years. And what you have done with the place is quite remarkable! My very best wishes for your bright future in your new home!

As your physical surroundings change as you move to your new home, the Community and our nation are also at a transition point—facing the most daunting and diverse set of challenges that we have ever seen. Put bluntly, we live in a world where crisis is the new normal. Violent extremism, regional instability, cyber attacks, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are evolving at a rapid pace.

We are drawing down our military presence in Afghanistan and pivoting our strategic focus to anticipate changing global conditions that threaten U.S. national interests.

Lurking underneath it all are the technological challenges of the future – including:

- The evolution and advancement of technology, tools, and methodologies;
- The growth of “Big Data” and its impact on intelligence collection and analysis;
- And the critical need to hire, train, and retain a workforce with advanced skills and tradecraft that can take advantage of Big Data and the new technologies.

It is the most challenging environment I have seen in my 35 years as an intelligence professional. It is up to all of us here today to adapt to this “new normal” to meet these new challenges by improving our ability to discover, access, and use knowledge to predict and prevent the actions of our adversaries.

And we must do this despite continued budget cuts. I am deeply concerned about the impact that sequestration could have next year on the Fiscal Year – FY – 2016 budget. These reductions will be across the board and will severely harm our ability to carry out fundamental missions. They will cut deeply through our muscle into our bone.

Smaller budgets mean that everyone must work together – across the Community – to protect our nation. This is why we must support the DNI’s highest priority of intelligence integration. Our years of wartime experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, most notably the Usama bin Laden takedown, prove the value of multi-INT integration and constant collaboration.

NIU plays a key role in preparing future leaders to fulfill the promise of integration, face these challenges, and overcome our adversaries. This daunting new world demands a new type of agile, adaptive leader who knows how to go beyond the past of collaboration to embrace integration today and drive the community toward the future of immersive, predictive intelligence.

It is no longer enough to watch our adversaries, estimate their actions, and counter their threats. We must anticipate and predict their activities so national leaders have the decision space and time to make the best decisions.

Speaking with you today about your role in the future of our community is a bittersweet occasion. As you may know, in six weeks, I will retire after a 35-year career in federal service. And this honor you have bestowed on me signifies two key points—An appreciation for a career of service to the nation and a beginning so I can explore new opportunities.

And I want to make the most of my time here with you today by sharing the most meaningful lesson about leadership I have learned and by challenging you to seize this phenomenal opportunity that begins for you today.

The 250 of you who are in residence full time are chosen from the ranks of tens of thousands of other intelligence professionals to enjoy a great luxury. That luxury is to spend an entire year among your peers to focus on thinking and learning. You also have a unique opportunity to deepen your knowledge, understand the value of diverse cultures and points of view, and broaden your perspective. You have a unique opportunity to prepare yourself to serve your Community and your nation better than you could have ever imagined.

You are very fortunate. More than 20 years ago, when I was a GS-15—and even when I was a new Senior executive—few of us had this opportunity. Integrating the IC was barely an idea, joint duty assignments were rare, and the value of integrated operations was little appreciated.

Today, this outstanding academic institution is an excellent place to inspire you to fulfill the potential of intelligence integration, to lead the community for the next generation, and to achieve the next level of personal service and leadership.

NIU has taught and inspired dozens of men and women who have become Directors and Deputies of intelligence agencies. To name just a few of these noted leaders, Vice Admiral Michael McConnell, former Director of National Intelligence, General Michael Hayden, former Director of both the CIA and NSA, Rear Admiral Elizabeth Train, current Director of Naval Intelligence, and Richard Ledgett, current Deputy Director of NSA.

Education here has also helped hundreds of the most promising professionals achieve the ranks of Senior Executive. This has happened because NIU develops strategic thinkers, produces high-quality research on vital topics, and energizes global engagement. And it enables these results by encouraging superb instruction, welcoming a diversity of views, and stressing continuous, lifelong learning.

So you have received a great privilege. And as you know, great privileges bring great expectations. The DNI, your Senior Leaders in your organizations, and I expect you to return and dedicate your experience to drive intelligence integration forward. We expect you to seize this unique opportunity to become strategic leaders in positions of greater responsibility.

What does being a “strategic leader” mean? As you already know from your own years of experience, leaders are not just managers, leaders are not just cheerleaders, and leaders are not just great speechmakers. Think about the leaders who have made a difference to you and to your organizations. What did they do that inspired you, that transformed their organizations?

We could write a long list of traits—such people have a clear and dynamic vision, they have a passion for mission, they care about their people, they set high standards, and many more. I would suggest that everything we could say about leaders comes down to one simple phrase: Have Courage.

Great leaders have the courage not only to proclaim a vision, they pursue it relentlessly. They not only care about their people, they care **for** their people. They not only set high standards, they **live** by them. And that is exactly how you can join the ranks of strategic leaders who will guarantee a bright future for our Community and who will protect this nation from our enemies.

All it takes is courage. So I urge you to:

- Have courage to be passionate about your vision and your mission, to pursue them despite the perils of bureaucracy, complacency, and ambition;
- Have courage to take risks, embrace failure, and view criticism as a gift you can appreciate.
- Have courage to speak truth to power – yes, right now some of you are squirming in your seats a bit. It is **how** you speak truth to power.

I know—sometimes I have had to tell the DNI that I disagree with him. And it is difficult although we have known each other for a long time. It is OK to bring a situation to a leader's attention and offer a suggestion—and back it up with a solid argument. Have courage to leap out of your comfort zone, to seek out stretch assignments across community. Let me tell you a brief story about how this lesson helped me on my path to a successful career.

Twenty years ago, I was a new SES at the Office of Naval Intelligence, and I had had a new job for several months. A new Director – an Admiral – was named and he told me he was going to put his guy – a GS-15 – in my job and I would be his deputy.

Needless to say, I was a bit surprised. I reached out to my mentors at the time, including my parents. I offered the Admiral a compromise—split the job into two functions, and each of us would run one. He turned it down. And just as I had decided to stay and see what would happen, I received a phone call that changed my career forever.

Joan Dempsey, a Senior Executive at the DIA at the time, told me that then DIA Director Clapper had a job for me and I had an interview the next day. The key point is that I did NOT know Joan Dempsey at the time. Although I was taken aback, I went to the interview and got the job. That leap of faith, that bit of courage has made all the difference.

It has led to my service across the Community in seven positions in five agencies. Now, some people may say I cannot keep a job, but I prefer to think about the experience and skills I have learned in every job and the contributions I would never have been able to make otherwise. I had to be “encouraged,” that is, yanked out of my comfort zone. But you can embrace change and have the courage to leap out of your comfort zone.

Last and equally important, have the courage to ask “why not me”? Far too often in my career, I have seen superbly qualified people not even apply for jobs. When I have asked them why they didn’t apply, they have told me they did not believe they were qualified. Or they thought someone else was better qualified than they were. Nonsense!

Not only did they deny themselves a better job, but they also denied their Agency and the nation the benefits of their intelligence, expertise, and skills. I understand that people often feel afraid to change. It is OK to feel fear. It is even better to turn that fear into positive energy and that energy into action.

So when you see or hear about an opportunity you may not think you are qualified to have or you think might be just beyond your reach, have the courage to ask “Why not me?”

The first time I ever asked that question I got my job as Director of NGA. Let me briefly tell you how. I was sitting in then-USDI Clapper’s office and we were discussing who might be best qualified to become the next Director of NGA. At the time, I had been the Deputy Director of the DIA for several years. In fact, my office was upstairs in this building.

As then-Secretary Clapper and I talked about the possible candidates, I suddenly realized that I was as qualified as anyone we were discussing. I looked at him and said, “Sir, why not me?” He did a bit of a double-take and replied, “Yes, you’re right. Why not you?” And since then, I have been privileged to lead NGA through a major transformation that has established geospatial intelligence – GEOINT – as the foundation for intelligence integration. That simple question is why I stand before you today as the deeply grateful recipient of this honor.

In closing, I want to challenge you to have the courage to seize this unique opportunity. It may never come again during your career.

- Prepare yourself to give even greater service to the nation.
- At every opportunity, ask “Why not me?” Seek out the stretch assignment, the promotion you do not think you are quite ready for.
- Be a role model, be the change you want to see. Set the example as a cross-Community leader. Put the good of the nation and the Community before the good of your Agency and yourself.

- Be a servant leader; make it your personal mission to help others succeed. Remember - people first, mission always.

These sound like clichés, but I can assure you that the great leaders I know and respect—leaders like Director Clapper, Joan Dempsey, Mike Rogers or Keith Alexander. They live by these principles every day.

And that is why you are here and that is what we expect of you: To have the courage each day to serve and sacrifice, to protect and defend, and to learn more and do more. Only with such dedication can you lead a Community trusted by the American people, respected by other nations, and feared by our enemies. Thank you.

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