

ROTARY SPEECH 6/3/02

Thank you very much.

I thank you very much for the honor of inviting me to be with you today. I certainly know that you do a great deal of good work here and around the world. Your organization certainly defines the word "community."

Your international efforts to eradicate polio and to create an international community of young scholars are the building blocks of peace and happiness in the world --let us pray indeed that we have such a world in these dangerous times.

After I finished my 3,200 mile walk across the United States to speak out for the campaign finance reform movement, I was often asked to share how I prepared for this walk, and to share what I learned from all those miles and all those many, many towns and people. I did learn something, and I will share it with you now.

What I learned --and I hope you will not take this too personally, is that it is never too late to get in shape.

It is never too late to dust off the dreams you may have for yourself and for your community and your country --and do something about them.

It is never too late to have another great adventure,

make a few thousand new friends, and, well, if you like --it worked for me-- to march on the Capitol and get arrested.

Not all of my new friends cared to get arrested --many marched to the Capitol and then treated themselves to gin and tonics and pedicures. This is a wonderful country and there is something for everyone.

My advice these days to the people I meet is that they should not think their age has anything to do with what they decide to yet do with the dreams that define their best and highest instincts. Follow your heart and, you know, it's true: the force will be with you. You will be given the energy you need, if the project is worthy.

Now that I am back home --though I do still like to travel around and make trouble-- I am looking at the more local aspects of political reform.

I have tried to lead a responsible life, as a parent and a wife and a citizen. I think I know what that means in terms of not doing harm to those around us, and providing service to those who need it from us.

I am wondering what it means for a community to be responsible. Surely we responsible people ought to live in responsible communities, too.

Let's imagine that a big city out there somewhere has an opportunity to use solar or other renewable energy for its houses and offices and transit system, and that,

by so doing, the community will stop spewing toxins from its smokestacks, which pollute the communities down wind. Or take it a step further, and realize that the city has been spewing out carbon dioxide which has been contributing to the warming of the planet. What is a responsible community to do? Take the new path if it is economically possible to do so, or stay with the old way, which not only pollutes, but drives our nation's foreign policy toward the acquisition of oil at the expense of our higher ideals. What is a responsible community to do? When you ask the question, the answer seems obvious. So maybe we had better ask the question, especially in the larger cities where there is no opportunity for the surrounding natural countryside to digest the toxins.

And what is a responsible community to do in other areas. What should a responsible community do to assure that its citizens grow up with enough civic education to be proper guardians and participants of a free society? What should a responsible community do to provide a healthy and expanding middle class, which has always been the strong footing of our republic?

In many ways, your organization answers these questions with its good works. I think your example needs to be expanded, and I believe that we need to look at political reform at a very fundamental, cultural level. We have given our children over to the values of television, and we have given our main streets and our family businesses over to a neo-colonialism that saves us a few dollars, but at a monstrous expense to our

culture and its future.

I hope we can start a discussion in this community and in many American communities about our basic civic values and our notion of responsibility. The fundamental bedrock of responsibility, of course, is the power to act. No person can be responsible without the power to do things according to his or her will. In the same way, communities cannot act responsibly unless they have the political power to act upon their values. Getting special interest influence out of our politics is therefore an important precondition to becoming a responsible community. I have been working in that particular area, and the work, being done by many thousands of dedicated people, is far from completed. But it is time for all of us, I think, to look past that --to assume that we are a free people, free to elect people who will feel free to serve the interests of the people who elected them and from whom they came. Let us assume that we will perfect these reforms, and let us look ahead to the question: once we again have representation at every level of government, what are we to do with it? From city hall to Congress, how are we to fashion our local and national communities in ways that reflect the fact that these are communities of responsible people?

I certainly don't have the answers. All I can do, really, is help ask the question. We do have a responsibility, after all, to those who sacrificed everything to give us a free society. Some of us care for the rights of individual action. Some of us care more for the

improvements that are possible through common action. The balance and stress between these ideas of individualism and group action energize our political parties and the arguments within each of our minds. We try to maturely sort out a reasonable middle course that respects the group and embraces diversity, while at the same time it celebrates individual achievement and success and opportunity. This is no easy balancing act. Knowing how to preserve and nurture both of these sides --our right and left sides, most certainly-- requires responsible maturity.

Who of us --who of you --can set aside your own political views and look to the needs of a free society and all its people with all of their views? Who among us is responsible enough to be able to serve the interests of far right and far left and all the shoppers in the middle? Well, it is a big question of cultural leadership, and some of you must rise to it.

I know I have come to the right place to talk about the responsible community, because, as I said, you define that term with your good works. I honor and respect you for that. I hope you will take your instincts of service and help fill the big gaps in cultural leadership that now characterize much of our country.

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You are, none of you, too old to be bold. Be leaders. Be heroes. Accept the legitimacy of your values --your own Four Way Test-- and press them into action in the wider community.

You make us far more of a responsible community than we would be without you. Now, how do we press the battle forward?

Thank you very much.

(Rotary Four Way Test: Is it the TRUTH? Is it FAIR to all concerned? Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS? Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?)