

Good afternoon. Let me first begin by saying congratulations on taking the first step to make a difference in the lives of those around you, in your communities, in your state, in your nation and indeed around the world. Decisions are made by those that show up and you have done just that.

Public service, that is service to others - placing their needs above our own, is the greatest and most noble profession available to us. Whether you are a teacher, an elected official, a law enforcement officer, a firefighter or a local volunteer; selfless sacrifice in the service to others is an incredibly rewarding experience. It is up to each of us, you and me, to work hard each day - to hold nothing back as we work to find a better way.

I believe that each person in this room has the opportunity to make a difference, to choose that path that will allow you to positively impact the lives of those around you. I had such a choice as a young man. There were two individuals that greatly influenced my life and without their wisdom, their help, their tough love and their guidance I am not sure I would be where I am today. I would like to take a moment and recognize my father and my high school principal. They made the trip today to be here with us and I appreciate the lessons they taught me as a young person more and more each day. It was because of their efforts that I stayed focused as a young man on what I needed to do to be successful in life...to truly contribute to the world around me. For that, I am eternally grateful. I recommend to each of you sitting here today that you find a mentor, find someone that you can talk with and work with them to ensure that you reach your full potential. We all have it within us to make that lasting difference. And trust me my friends - we need you. We need your fresh ideas, we need your energy and we need your help to make our state the best it can be for all people.

There are four principles of public service I want to talk with you about today...action, integrity, perseverance and sacrifice. Each of these is important to successful, effective and honorable public service. As we move forward this afternoon it is imperative to remember that we must all live our lives deliberately and passionately for others. For I believe that it is our moral obligation to be that voice for those who do not have a voice, to fight for the weak and to always do what is right. As a member of the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners and now as a member of the North Carolina House of Representatives it has always been my goal to not simply be a vote...but to be the people's voice.

Albert Einstein said that "only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile." One of the most important aspects to public service is sacrifice. We must be willing to sacrifice all that we are in the service to others. According to the latest census estimates there are over 400,000 children living in poverty throughout North Carolina. Wouldn't you agree that they need our help and our best efforts? At the end of February of this year, 535,986 people throughout our great state were unemployed with no jobs

in sight. Wouldn't you agree that they need our help and our best efforts? It is important to support our educational system, strengthen our justice and public safety systems, protect the most vulnerable of our population, children and older adults, and work to make progress on issues such as mental health, healthcare and the environment. History teaches us and our future demands that we must work together; placing the needs of others above our own needs, and working to find a better way in North Carolina. The people of North Carolina truly deserve better.

The second public service principle I want to talk with you about today is integrity. Without integrity we will never be able to be the leaders that our state needs and demands. We each have the opportunity, each day, to be those leaders. You can be that leader in your community, in your school, in your church and in your circle of friends. I cannot emphasize enough that we need you. And we need you to step up and be those leaders now. As I said earlier you have already taken those steps...which are evident by your attendance here today. Our state motto is *Esse Quam Videri*, which means to be rather than to seem. In other words, in all that you do be sincere and lead with integrity. Unfortunately, North Carolina has seen its fair share of corruption in government. A former Speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives and a few other former members of the North Carolina General Assembly are currently in prison. It seems that daily we hear of new investigations into elected officials about potentially corruptive behavior. The people of North Carolina deserve our best efforts and we must find a better way.

One of the most important public service principles is perseverance. I was taught the importance of this at a very young age; however, I have recently learned more than ever the importance of perseverance as a member of the North Carolina General Assembly. The legislative process is often daunting and frustrating. Taking an idea from creation to a drafted bill to a law is equally frustrating and rewarding.

It is important that if you believe in an idea that you hold onto to that belief and work towards the goal - no matter what obstacles are presented. Our history teaches us that we used to be a nation of dreamers, of thinkers and of doers. If you hear nothing else that I say today please hear this...we must once again become a nation of dreamers, a nation of thinkers and a nation of doers. Our nation was founded by individuals who risked it all, truly risked their lives, to ensure the birth of a new nation - a nation where the voices of the people mattered most. Without the perseverance of our founding fathers and those that came after them I am not sure where we would be today. Your generation, the next generation of leaders, must be willing to think and create new ideas to address our problems and persevere and to care about the people.

I stand before you today my friends and I am telling you that the system is broken. Government at too many levels does not focus on the people, does not listen to the people and does not place their needs as the first priority. Too many elected officials are worried about the politics of governing and the politics of re-election and not on what is best for the people. One thing that I have learned during my time in the North Carolina General Assembly is that there is a tremendous and deep disconnect between what takes place in the legislative building and what is happening on the main streets of North Carolina. It is imperative that we give a better effort and listen more to the people of our great state. All of us, and yes I am including you, must be involved. There is too much at stake for any of us to sit on the sidelines. It is up to us, those that are committed to a brighter and stronger future to find that better way. We must persevere each day to ensure that North Carolina is once again the land where the weak grow strong and the strong grow great.

That leads me to the final and most important principle of public service - action. Without action there is nothing. As I said earlier, decisions are made by those that show up and if you are not actively engaged in the debate you cannot make that lasting difference. Late on the night of April 18, 1775 Paul Revere made his historic ride announcing the arrival of British troops and later on April 19 the first shots of the American Revolution were fired. Less than one month later the Second Continental Congress met to begin discussions about independence and what actions needed to be taken to reach that goal. They understood that action was necessary and that in order to achieve those things which were great they must do those things which were hard. This fact remains true today. Action is required and we must be willing do those things which are hard so that we can achieve for all people those things which are great. It is 2010 and the shots have been fired, the signals have been sent and the bells are ringing. The question is will you answer the call?

Anne Frank wrote, "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." She was right. Each of us can jump in and get involved and work to raise the level of public debate about the issues we face on a daily basis. In fact it is imperative that we do just that - raise the level of public debate in our local communities, throughout our state and around our nation. If we do not accept this challenge, if we do not stand in the gap...who will? We need more people committed to governing; we need more people focused on others and less people worried about the politics of governing. As long as there is breath left in me I will fight for a more inclusive governing process. I will fight for a process that truly defines priorities, establishes needs based on those priorities and listens to the people. I am determined to ensure that no matter how loud the noise is within the walls of state government, it never drowns out of the voice of the people. I ask you this afternoon to join me in this effort.

As I stand in your presence today I am encouraged. You are sacrificing your time to come and learn how you can be involved. I humbly ask you this afternoon to continue your involvement, learn the issues and never let anyone tell you that you are too young to make a difference.

In 1966, amidst great strife and suffering around the United States and around the world, Robert F. Kennedy stood at a podium in Cape Town, South Africa and said the following. "Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, these ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance." That same principle holds true today and as I look around this room I am humbled to be in the presence of the next generation of leaders. I challenge you today to leave this place with a new focus, to leave this place with a new determination to always put the people first and work tirelessly each day to find that better way. For when we give up on that goal, when we give up on finding that better way, we are lost as a people. God bless you and your efforts, God bless North Carolina and may God continue to bless the United States of America.