Thank you. Thank you very much President Rainsford, Chairman Paul Todd, Judge Pratt, and graduates and relatives and friends. It is a pleasure to be here, a pleasure to have that kind of a generous introduction, I’ve learned in public life you’re never quite sure what kind of an introduction you’re going to receive, I recall some years ago speaking to a convention about one of the books I had written and the President of the group in introducing me became unintentionally accurate and in describing my book said it’s the kind of a book that once you put it down you can’t pick it up. I am pleased to be here in Kalamazoo at your college for several reasons, one is this is the home base of my colleague in the house, Congressman Howard Wolpe who is respected by—he will be pleased to hear about that applause I am sure. He is respected by people on both sides of the aisle, he is a very diligent hard-working member of the house. I feel some ties to this community in this graduating class, one of your local high schools is Lorne Noricks High School, named for a school administrator who grew up in southern Illinois in my district in the little village of Cobden. He has two sisters who still live in my district, and one of the graduates I regret I won’t have a chance because of plane schedules to meet her here today, one of your graduates is Sue Ellen Gordon who is a niece of a long-time friend of mine and the—it was your relatives that started the applause there Sue Ellen, and one of your faculty members Joe Fugate is originally from Southern Illinois. So I have a number of ties here. Last night I was doing some reading and reading the results of a foundation study sponsored by the Exxon Foundation, a number of other foundations about international studies, and in a book called the Handbook of Exemplary International Programs, I first looked for a school in Illinois that might be mentioned, and I regret to say there was none. I then looked to check for the state of Michigan, and lo and behold Michigan has two entries. One is Michigan State University, and the other is Kalamazoo College in Kalamazoo. You’re talking about change here today and before I get to talking more specifically to those of you who are graduating, let me say to all of you that colleges are going to be living in a period of change, first because of some changes in federal assistance, and it would be interesting to me to figure out in this graduating class, you don’t mind raising your hand, those of you who have received some type of either government loan or grant to help you through college. If you don’t mind—well you can see in that demonstration what cutbacks can do to Kalamazoo College and to other colleges. In addition, in the next decade, we will experience a drop of roughly twenty percent in college enrollment in the United States. There will be a great many private colleges who frankly will not survive, and those who will survive I think have among their ingredients these two: Number one they will be providing a quality education, and from what I hear and understand, you are doing precisely that here. And the second thing is to have a substantial endowment. And I was pleased to hear from Paul Todd and your president that you have just completed successfully a drive for enlargement of that endowment, but let me say as a friend of schools like yours, that that endowment can stand some enrichment. And those of you in the audience who have not written out your will or who have—wonder where you can contribute to a needed cause I hope you will sustain this college not just with its ongoing expenses, but with endowment. Now I’d like to talk to those of—the president told me to mention that, I told him I would. Now I’d like to talk to those of you who are graduating meaning no disrespect to the faculty and relatives and friends who are here. And my remarks are addressed to each and every one of you, not simply to that person who may be at the very top of the class. I’m also talking to that person who may be here, I won’t ask you to raise your hand now on this one, but you are—you weren’t sure you were going to be here within the last few weeks. It has been my observation that those who contribute the most to society are not necessarily those who are at the top of the class. I think of someone who started at West Point in the same class with Douglas MacArthur, only they plunked him out after three weeks because he couldn’t get English. His name was Carl Sandberg. I think of someone who
graduated from Columbia Law School with grades so low they didn’t give him a law degree. His name was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. I think of someone who for a period couldn’t get foreign languages, used to hand in blank sheets of paper for his French exams. His name was Winston Churchill. Now before I get in trouble with the faculty here, I approve academic excellence, but each of you in this superior school has the potential to contribute a great deal. And you’re going to experience change and you’re going to have to respond to that change. And some of the change, some of the great changes that will happen will not be headline things. Some point between now and the end of this century somewhere someone will find an inexpensive way to convert saltwater to fresh water. And it may not even—it probably won’t get as much attention as a baseball strike does in the media. But it will be one of the most important things that will happen in your life. But there are three things that affect your struggle in life, that affect our struggle for freedom that are, as I see it, major items to dominate your future. One is simply population growth. It is growing almost beyond belief. If I live a normal lifespan, in my lifetime I will see a tripling of the world’s population, and you will see more than a quadrupling of the world population. I was in a debate a couple of years ago at Purdue University about American agricultural policy with the former secretary of agriculture Earl Butts, an interesting experience in and of itself I might add, but in the middle of his response to a question from the audience he said, “If you take all the people who have been on the face of the earth since the beginning of time, the majority of them are alive today.” That’s where we are in the population picture. It is growing dramatically. Number two, poverty is growing. One fourth of those who die each year today are below the age of five. The majority of the people on the face of the earth this minute are going to die before their actual time either for lack of food or for lack of protein in their food, while ironically some of you in this graduating class will probably die before your natural time because you have too much good food. We are responding less and less as a nation to poverty around the face of the earth, and I think it is not in our own security interests to respond less and less. After World War II under the Marshall Plan we spent about 2.9 percent of our gross national product helping the poor around our borders. We now spend less than one fourth of one percent. The reason is, after World War II your congressmen, your senators could come back home and tell the Schmidts I’m helping your relatives in Germany, tell the Zagganelli’s I’m helping your relatives in Italy and so forth. Now the people who need help live in places like Bangladesh and Botswana. And no one comes to me in southern Illinois or in central Michigan and says what are you doing to help my relatives. The third reality that you’ll face is that we are inching toward self-destruction. You remember reading last fall in Arkansas about the Titan II missile that went up accidentally, air force sergeant believe it or not dropped a wrench it severed a little aluminum tube, it landed in—the missile landed in a wooded area, and the newspaper said it was a nine megaton warhead. What does that mean? Well nine megaton warhead means this: all the bombs dropped during World War II, including Nagasaki and Hiroshima were less than two megatons. Or another way to measure it, if you read in El Salvador about a car blowing up, it is one or two or three pounds of TNT. A megaton is, in TNT equivalent, a railroad freight train loaded with TNT three-hundred miles long. Nine megaton means twenty-seven hundred miles long. Power as we cannot conceive it. And today the United States has about ninety-two hundred nuclear warheads, the Soviet Union has about sixty-five hundred. That’s part of your world. Now, how do you respond to this world. You, number one, give of yourself. Back some years ago when I spoke to smaller groups at commencements when I was first in the state legislature in Illinois, I handed out one year a piece of paper and a pencil to all graduates. And I said would you put down what you’re looking for in life. I was surprised number one, the number of people who responded saying, “I don’t know.” But the one word I heard more often than any other, the one word that came back was the word “happiness”. And happiness is basically a subtraction process and not an
addition process. You can’t add degrees, well all kinds of things to yourself and achieve happiness. You do it by taking from yourself and giving to others. In his letter of invitation to me, your president quoted a senior who I assume is graduating, who told him this about his experience at Kalamazoo, “I could put down anywhere in the world and not only get by, but also make a contribution.” And that’s what I want from you is a contribution. I have a friend who says life is like a bucket of water, you put your hand in and then you pull it out and the bucket of water hasn’t been changed because of your presence. I could not disagree more. What you—each of you can do is just immeasurable if you’re willing to do it. And then secondly I ask you to reach out as you give of yourself. Reach out within your community wherever you live to people of other racial groups, national groups, religions, get to know your community, but reach out also as you have learned to do here at Kalamazoo as few schools have, reach out to the rest of the world. We must have understanding if we’re not to blow up this world. When American University was founded in Washington, DC in 1914 Woodrow Wilson spoke. And among other things he said this, “Nobody is president of any part of the human mind. The mind is free. The only thing that one can do in opening a university is to say we wish to add one more means of emancipating it from fear. From misunderstanding.” And my friends you have to help emancipate us from misunderstanding, from fear. And we all need it. When the hostages were taken in Tehran all of a sudden I started reading about Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims, and I realized I know something about the world of Christianity and Judaism in its various branches but what I know about the Muslim world, about the Buddhist world, about most of the world is much much too little. And that is the situation we are in in the United States. And the world of education has to follow the example of Kalamazoo and wherever you are, where you can have an influence on your grade school, your high school, your college and university. I hope you will help to influence it in the right direction. And let me just use as a gauge what we are doing in the area of foreign language. We are living in the only nation on the face of the earth where you can go through grade school, high school, college, get a ph.D, and never have a year of a foreign language. Kalamazoo is fortunately one of the rare exceptions to that general rule. Fewer than one percent of our elementary school students receive foreign language instruction. In most countries, all elementary school students receive it. I could go on with the statistics, but I will not impose them on you except for one. And that is fewer than one percent of the American college students today are studying the languages spoken by three fourths of the people of the face of the earth. And that has to change. And you, my friends, have to help bring that about. What do we lose when we do not communicate with others in their language, let me just cite three things very briefly, and then I shall conclude. Number one we communicate a cultural arrogance and we lose something. I think of H.L. Menckens old tongue and cheek saw, if English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it’s good enough for me. We need that cultural opening. Number two in the area of trade, our country needs it. I was at a meeting Monday on coal exporting, and the president of one of the large coal companies of this nation said to me what do we tell foreign visitors when they come and talk to us about purchasing coal and he talked about a couple of specifics. And I said your premise is wrong, we don’t wait for them to come to us, we go to them. You go to your customer. You don’t wait for your customer to come to you. In New York City today there are over 10,000 Japanese salesmen, all of whom speak English, and in all of the United States we have fewer than 1,000—and all over Japan we have fewer than 1,000 American salesmen, most of whom do not speak Japanese. Who do you think sells more? Michelin tire manufacturer in France published a French technical journal why a certain process would not work. Unfortunately, no one at Firestone read the French technical journal, and Firestone lost millions. Economically we have to. And finally, from the viewpoint of our own security we have to. And let me—I could cite all kinds of examples and tell you the concerns of many of the leaders of this nation
who worry about security, but let me just give you one example. And that is when we got involved in hostilities in the Vietnam era, there were totally in the United States as far as I can tell, a grand total of two people from the defense department, state department, and all the great universities of this country, American-born specialists who understood the language of that area, who understood the culture of that area. What if we had had ten or twenty or fifty. Maybe we would not have had 56,000 American lives lost, almost three million Asian lives, one-hundred thirty-five billion dollars and scars in our society today. Eighty-five percent of you who are graduating today have studied abroad. You have been given a tool by this university—this college which says to you, look at the rest of the world. Reach out. And I say to you as an official of this government we need you to continue that concern and that interest. Back a few years ago my brother and I late at night were driving along, and I saw headlights out in the field and I slowed down, and I heard a faint but distinct cry help, help. We stopped the car and ran over and found someone very seriously injured. After we got him to a hospital and were told he would probably survive, my brother and I talked about how nearly we had missed his call for help. It is very easy, frankly, to attend Kalamazoo, to live in Kalamazoo, to live in southern Illinois, to ignore the world’s call for help. We do that at our own peril. You’re graduating in a world of change as we have never seen change before. And I want you to take of yourself and give to others. I want you to hear a world that is calling for the kind of leadership you can provide. Thank you.