

Commencement Address
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UMSL College of Business Administration and MPPA

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I'm going to begin by utilizing one of the most useful skills I learned in three years of law school and 41 years of practicing law: the use of the phrase "including but not limited to." I want to acknowledge a lot of people including but not limited to the men and women who are receiving their degrees tonight. First, I want to congratulate you on what you have already accomplished. You would not be here today without many years of sacrifice and hard work. You have every right to be immensely proud of the degrees that you have earned. Second, I want to thank you in advance for what you're going to accomplish in the years ahead. Because of what I know you are going to achieve, I'm confident that the degree I'm receiving today is going to increase in value. As proud as I am of this degree right now, I'm positive that in five or ten years it will be worth even more because of the success of my fellow UMSL alumni. Again, thank you.

Unlike you, I am receiving a degree without ever having passed a single exam, written a single paper or completed a single assignment of any kind...at least not at UMSL. I have, however, received an incredible education from this university...from our university. For over 40 years I have listened regularly to St. Louis Public Radio, which, as all listeners know, is a service of the University of Missouri-St. Louis. I'm pretty sure I've spent more hours listening to KWMU than I have sitting in classrooms in grade school, high school, college and law school combined. Thanks to St. Louis Public Radio, lifelong learning has been a rewarding reality for me.

I also had the benefit of being tutored and mentored by Dr. Arnold Grobman, who served as Chancellor of UMSL from 1975 to 1985. He then moved into the City of St. Louis and was appointed to the board of The St. Louis Public Library, of which I was the President at the time. Dr. Grobman, who was 30 years my senior, was a wise and patient teacher. From his counsel and his example I learned invaluable lessons about governance, leadership and life in general... lessons that have served me well for over three decades.

Finally, I actually did take a course at UMSL in the fall of 1991. It was noncredit course in music appreciation called "Know the Score." Every week the instructor would invite a musician from The St. Louis Symphony to talk about his or her craft. I remember the time a trumpet player spoke to our class. When someone asked him who was the best trumpet player of our time, without hesitation he answered, "He just died." He was referring to Miles Davis, the jazz icon from St. Louis. The symphony musician went on to explain how much he admired Miles Davis's skill at improvisation, a talent he said he personally did not have.

I thought about this comment when we opened The Schlafly Tap Room at the end of that semester in December of 1991; and have thought about it frequently ever since. The life of an entrepreneur is one of improvisation. It's like jazz. It's not carefully orchestrated like a symphony. In fact, I would say that whatever career you might pursue, you're going to need to be able to adapt and improvise. Everything in life demands improvisation. We should be ever mindful that St. Louis is a cradle of jazz. Both as

individuals and as a community we need to be ready to adapt and improvise...like Miles Davis and the other great jazz musicians from St. Louis.

Twenty-seven years ago, when I was enrolled in my noncredit course, the UMSL athletic teams were called The Rivermen. Without revisiting the decision to change the name of the mascot, I'd like to consider for a moment our connections with our rivers. Many of you, I'm sure, are familiar with the sculpture in front of Union Station downtown. The Milles Fountain depicts The Meeting of the Waters, the coming together of the Missouri and the Mississippi Rivers.

The reality of course is far greater than the coming together of just two rivers. The Mississippi River is formed by tributaries in 31 different states, from New York to New Mexico, and from Montana to Georgia. Melted snow from the Rockies and springs in the Alleghenies all join together to form the mighty river that flows past New Orleans into the Gulf of Mexico.

This coming together is a metaphor for what St. Louis could be. All of us have the potential to be tributaries in a dynamic and unified region. Instead, we have chosen a path of fragmentation. It's as if the powerful Mississippi were dispersed into millions of insignificant trickles.

The division is not simply between Missouri and Illinois; between the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County; or among St. Louis, St. Charles, Jefferson and Franklin Counties. St. Louis County alone includes 90 municipalities within its borders, 57 police departments, 43 fire districts and 81 municipal court systems. When confronted with these numbers, some defenders of the status quo inevitably respond, "So what? We've always done it this way. We like it this way. What difference does it make?"

The difference it makes has now been documented in a Regional Spending Comparison Report commissioned by Better Together. The 115 local government agencies in St. Louis and St. Louis County spend over \$2.3 billion annually to provide a variety of services at a per capita cost of over \$1,800. By contrast, in Indianapolis and Louisville, where city and county governments have consolidated, the per capita cost for similar services is six or seven hundred dollars lower. In other words, our region is overspending by approximately \$750 million.... nearly 50% more per capita than what Indianapolis and Louisville are spending for comparable services.

All of you who are about to graduate have spent years honing your skills at critical thinking. Maybe you can answer this simple question to which, I admit, I don't know the answer: Why does St. Louis cling so stubbornly to the plainly inefficient status quo? We know it's costing us a lot of money. I'm sure we could identify lots of crying needs on which to spend the \$750 million we're currently wasting.

It's no surprise that municipalities often have to scramble to find revenue to cover the excessive costs that result from this inefficiency and replication of services. Many of them turn to traffic tickets and fines for other municipal violations as a way of meeting their needs. Again, I would ask you to apply your critical thinking skills to the following questions.

How would you explain to someone who's thinking of moving to St. Louis why so many municipalities have fought so bitterly against limits on how much money they can raise from fines and traffic tickets? Is it really the purpose of law enforcement and building codes to provide revenue to fund basic services?

How would you explain to this same out-of-towner why many of these same municipalities have also fought so strenuously against minimum standards for their police departments? Why would anyone want to move to a community that would file a lawsuit to keep its police department from having to meet minimal standards of training and performance?

My charge to the graduates here tonight is to help find a way to fix this situation. My generation and prior generations have so far failed to come up with a solution. Unfortunately, there's no clear road map on what to do. As I said earlier, we're going to have to be improvisational and creative.

As I look out on the tremendous wealth of talent assembled in this room, I have confidence that if we act collectively; if we come together like the tributaries of the mighty Mississippi, we can help St. Louis change course before it's too late.

In closing, I would note that when Arnold Grobman and I were serving together on the board of The St. Louis Public Library, East and West Germany were separated by a border of electrified fences, barbed wire and minefields...patrolled by guards with machine guns. The conventional wisdom at the time was that there was no way the two Germanies would ever unite. Yet, that's exactly what they did within a few years.

Surely, if East and West Germany can unite as one country, we can find a way for the dozens of governmental units in St. Louis County to cooperate efficiently and productively with each other and with the City of St. Louis. Our survival as a region depends on it.

Thank you.