



# UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

## **PRESIDENT STOICHEFF SPEECH TO GRADUANDS**

### **USASK CONVOCATION**

**JUNE 3, 2019 PM**

Eminent Chancellor, graduands and families, honoured guests: I thank the many people who are here today to be part of this moment in the University of Saskatchewan's history. In particular, I want to acknowledge today's Elder, the Buffalo Boys drum group, [the MLA representative]. I also acknowledge the many faculty on the stage who are the core of the university — they have been leaders and mentors for so many of you who will graduate today.

We're here to celebrate a milestone in the lives of the graduands who will soon cross this stage.

We're also here because this university has brought us together. A university is a wonderful thing crucial to the ongoing conversation we call democracy. We're so fortunate to be in Canada and to have the freedoms we have. Given the world we're in now, where it is difficult to separate out what's true and what's not, where our future depends on knowledge and the correct use of it, where research holds the key to our greatest challenges, where free speech and informed speech are critical to our humanity --universities are needed more than they have ever been. The University of Saskatchewan is needed more than it has ever been. Educators such as yourselves are needed more than they have ever been. Strengthened with a University of Saskatchewan degree that you worked hard to achieve, what all of you crossing this stage today go on to do in your lives will matter immensely to our collective future.

And many others helped you get to this point. So take the time to thank your spouses and partners, parents and grandparents, friends, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, communities, elementary school teachers, high school teachers, the professors you appreciated or your classmates who helped you out —because you don't achieve something this big without a lot of help along the way.

Many graduands across the country are sitting in seats like you are, in auditoriums like this one right now, getting their university degrees. But I want to tell you that there is something special about a UofS degree, and it's because at this university we govern ourselves not only on the basis of what we want to be, but what the world needs us to be.

The world needs committed educators more than it has ever has before. Over one thousand

people apply now for 350 available seats in the College of Education — so there is a huge desire on the parts of many to do what you will now go on to do. Education is the key to everything important in our lives, and you will go on to provide it — it's a calling, not just a profession, and we thank you for pursuing it. I also thank Dean Michelle Prytula for her leadership, and congratulate her on her recent YWCA Women of Distinction Award.

The world needs thoughtful, educated, and humane leaders; and some of the country's most formative holders of high office got their degrees here. Among them are PM John Diefenbaker, who graduated with his UofS Law degree exactly one-hundred years ago, eventually became prime minister, and after that our Chancellor; Governor General Ray Hnatyshyn; premiers such as Scott Moe and our Chancellor Roy Romanow. Nine Canadian premiers have now been students at the UofS. Many Lieutenant Governors of Saskatchewan including Tom Molloy (a former UofS chancellor), and of other provinces as well. Many Canadian ambassadors to countries around the world. Dozens of high-ranking public servants in Ottawa such as Gordon Thiessen, former Governor of the Bank of Canada. Indigenous leaders such as Fortner Canadian Ambassador and senior adviser to the TRC Deborah Chatsis.

The world needs groundbreaking researchers who change how we understand the world we live in; and people who went on to receive Nobel prizes were here. One was Chemistry graduate student Henry Taube, who received it in 1983. Another Nobel laureate from the U of S was Gerhard Herzberg, who was offered a position in Physics in 1935 by our first president Walter Murray to escape Nazi Germany, when no other university on this continent had the vision or the humanity to offer him one. Herzberg won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1971.

The world needs cures for cancer; and we are the home of the Cobalt 60 radiation therapy that revolutionized cancer treatment in 1951 and saved the lives of millions of cancer patients around the world. The small Acme Machine and Electric Company on Idylwyld Drive built the casing — U of S medical researchers built the concept. Many thousands of patients were treated here over the next twenty years until it was replaced with newer technology in 1971. Sylvia Fedoruk, who later became Saskatchewan's Lieutenant Governor and after that our Chancellor, was a graduate student member of the project's team. Significant cancer research continues at the UofS, building on that world-famous history.

The world needs great writers; and writers such as College of Education graduate Sharon Butala (who wrote *Perfection of the Morning*), and three-time Governor-General's Award winner Guy Vanderhaeghe, were here.

The world needs open-minded, well-educated, courageous and compassionate members of the justice sector; and we have graduated many. Supreme Court Justice Emmett Hall was a student here — a Law school classmate of John Diefenbaker's. Justice Hall's report for the 1964 "Royal Commission on National Health Care Services" recommended Canada adopt Saskatchewan's public health insurance model. In it he wrote that "the only thing more expensive than good health care is no health care." Emmett Hall later became Chancellor of the U of S. Roy Romanow, another law school alumnus and now our Chancellor, authored in 2002 the only

other Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada. These aren't only examples of justice in action, they're examples of social justice in action. (And please join me in thanking Roy Romanow for serving as our Chancellor for these last three years — this is his last series of convocation ceremonies in his role, and we have been so proud to have him as our Chancellor.)

The world needs great athletes and coaches; and Olympian Sandra Schmirler, track athlete Diane Jones-Konihowski, NHL coaches Mike Babcock and Dave King were at the U of S. In fact, three of the NHL's current head coaches were student athletes here with Huskies Hockey. That history of excellence is why we were able to fund and build Merlis Belsher Place.

The world needs peace, sometimes hardfought, and just over 100 years after the end of the First World War, I am also reminded of the 345 U of S students, faculty and staff who enlisted in it. Sixty-nine sacrificed themselves in the line of duty. They are commemorated on the university's Memorial Gates on College Drive. More than 100 more were wounded and 35 were awarded medals of valour. The university gave so many brave soldiers to the cause that the College of Engineering closed its doors for the 1916-1917 academic year when all its faculty, staff and students enlisted. More UofS soldiers were killed in the war than graduated from here in 1918.

These are examples of what I mean when I say that we're the university the world needs. Now in our second century, enjoying a time of peace here secured by those who went before us, and by the accomplishments of our alumni and faculty, we are seen as a research leader in the country, with Canada's only synchrotron —where we've pioneered how to produce medical isotopes without using a nuclear reactor. There is a huge demand for these isotopes due to the closure of Chalk River just over a year ago. And our cyclotron is now providing medical isotopes to RUH — a fitting homage to that Cobalt 60 work done here over half a century ago.

The world needs to provide food to its rapidly growing population. In order to meet the world's food needs, agricultural productivity needs to almost double. Our Global Institute for Food Security is helping do just that, enabled by great work done at the UofS over decades, including by our Crop Development Centre that helped reduce the amount of farmland under summer fallow from almost 50% in 1970 to less than 1% today. The economic impact for the province in this UofS area alone is in the neighborhood of 40B. We now add to that economic impact in many ways.

The world needs to understand the reasons for droughts and floods to safeguard our communities against tragedies such as the many just this year in Canada. Our Global Institute for Water Security, the largest university-led research centre in the world, ranked number one in Canada, is doing just that.

These institutes of water security and food security are also examples of how we bring together different parts of the university to work on global problems. With 17 colleges, including Education, we have more than any Canadian university of our size. This is a crucial feature of who we are — because although we do not know what the solutions are to the major

challenges facing us today, we do know this — that none of them will be solved by a single discipline or a single person, but by many people from many disciplines such as Education working together. We are poised to help do that, with faculty like the ones on the stage before you who are at the cutting edge of research, scholarly and artistic work.

All these things matter. They demonstrate why we're one of the top 15 research-intensive universities in the country and why the UofS leads all Canada's 96 universities when it comes to the per capita economic impact on the surrounding region. They demonstrate how we help make our province, Canada and the world a better place. Saskatoon too. Great cities need, and deserve, great universities. A strong relationship between the two is crucial, and we're fortunate to have one with the City of Saskatoon -- a formal partnership that is the first of its kind in Canada between a major university and the city it's in.

I say this to emphasize that the UofS degree you've worked hard to receive today has tremendous value. Many employers tell me that when they see an application from a UofS grad it gets special attention — because the quality of the university is so high, and because of its graduates' work ethic that's part of our prairie roots. And also because you haven't just learned one particular area of study — you've learned how to transfer what you've learned in one discipline to what is needed in another. You've learned about excellence, and excellence is a transferable skill.

Why does that matter? Because we will all need to be able to solve problems we can't even imagine today. Saskatchewan's future will depend on it. The world's will. It will depend upon educators like you, on the impact you will have on the students of today. Forty-four per cent of the available jobs in this province require the skills and knowledge that a university education provides — but only 25 per cent of Saskatchewan's workforce has a university education. This underscores the critical importance of investing in higher education, and the fact that we are a crucial part of the province's future success. The UofS is a leader in helping Saskatchewan stay ahead of the innovation curve. Without our kind of research and teaching, -- and without you becoming great teachers and second language instructors -- there is no innovation, and without innovation there is a diminished future.

So now more than ever before, we all need people with Education degrees and English as a Second Language certificates like yours, from a university like yours, to help build a more sustainable world; a more equitable world; a world with the courage to embrace diversity. I am proud that we now have students from over 100 countries attending the UofS, and many of those countries are represented by graduands here today.

The world also needs us to be a country that responds to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission — because as its chair Senator Murray Sinclair stated at the UofS, education is the key to reconciliation. I am grateful that the UofS is seen in this country as a participant, not a bystander, in building reconciliation — and the College of Education has played a large role in this. We now have more Indigenous students at our university than ever before in our history.

We are at a time when the country faces the greatest cultural challenge and opportunity of its history. Being the university the world needs today means committing to reconciliation. Not to supplant traditional western understanding, but to enrich it, acknowledge thousands of years of deep learning that occurred here long prior to it, and give all students a more informed and ultimately more compassionate understanding of the world. Achieving this will take a strategic mixture of patience and impatience, and will take time. But as our first president Walter Murray wrote to a friend in 1908 when travelling here to begin his work as our first president, "we are building for centuries."

So, go out from here to contribute — to your community, this province, this country, to an education system that really needs you. Be a person the world needs in your own right. Your university is a radical experiment in human culture — a place where we learn to be humble servants of a democratic society and respectful critics of it. Where we can be "building for centuries", for seven generations. For the Roy Romanows, John Diefenbakers, Gerhard Herzbergs, Sharon Butalas, Emmett Halls, Sylvia Fedoruks (and HD recipients) of the world, it was about something else. None of them, while at university, knew exactly where they were headed — but they knew to listen for a passion to follow, and that became an endless journey. For you, it will be something else. It doesn't matter exactly what it is — but be passionate, and compassionate, about it -- and use it for good. Congratulations to all the graduands who are about to cross the stage today, and make the world a better place for all of us.