



**The Gap High School Speech Night
J A Robertson Assembly Hall
Wednesday 2 November 2005, 7.30pm**

I am very pleased to be here this evening, to honour so many fine Queenslanders, young and older.

And it is a special privilege to command a platform to address the students. That is a privilege not to be squandered.

I wonder how many people present this evening who are over, say, 20 years of age, would remember even one word the guest speaker offered at any speech night they attended in their student days. I don't need to wonder. I won't presume to think you will remember tomorrow, students, much of what I will say this evening. But if I can capture your interest for a moment or two, I'll be grateful, and satisfied.

And can I assure you, at once, that I won't be resembling some eminent guest speakers I do remember from my speech night experiences as a student: not for any aspect of what they said, but for the amount of time they took to say it. We Judges tend to be economical in expression. I promise not to speak for more than 60 minutes...and I will stop when I see you taking out your i-pods.

This evening we celebrate real achievement: achievement on many fronts.

First, the achievement of each and every student. You will I hope have striven at all levels to attain your personal best. If for some unfortunate reason you haven't, don't despair. Especially when we see what others can achieve, though we falter, we are inspired onwards.

That leads me to acknowledge the achievement of your teachers. They have been instrumental in your achievement. Your teachers are persons of enormous motivation. I do not say that just because both my parents were school teachers. I say it because I believe it. Sometimes, perhaps generally, teachers are undervalued. That is regrettable. They are committed professionals who deserve respect and admiration. Teachers mould and nurture students, and students really are the vibrant building blocks of society. Oh that the valuable role of teachers were more universally acknowledged.



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Then there is the achievement of the school itself. The collegial pride evident here this evening is palpable. It is right to note your achievement as individuals, but also important is your contribution to a corporate success which invigorates both you and the broader community, and especially tonight, a success which enthuses the citizens of The Gap, who proudly and rightly celebrate their own vibrant high school.

And finally, a feature which is tremendously important, the contribution of parents.

The role of parents in 21st century society is much more daunting than it was in, say, the climate of the mid 1990's when our youngest child reached the age of 18. These days we confront what is in many respects a quite extraordinary society: a community, for example, where amphetamines and other unlawful drugs are, by some, presented as recreationally acceptable though demonstrably and unutterably destructive; a society where human rights are diminished by the constraints of terrorism; a situation where even our safety on roads and footpaths is imperilled by the rage of fellow citizens for whom any notion of patience and tolerance seems alien. There is no doubt that many of those who appear before the criminal courts have ignored reasonable parental guidance or not been offered it. The bullies of year 10, if not checked now, will quite possibly in future years appear before courts of law facing criminal charges. It is frankly, if not a dangerous, at least an unpredictable society, and the role of parents is paramount as never before. These challenges render the role of parents very difficult: but it must remain pivotal. Parents, you have my sincere encouragement. And lest there be doubt, the optimistic positives of society nevertheless, in my view, still do dramatically overwhelm the negatives.

Now back to the people we primarily honour this evening, those students leaving The Gap, and the students moving towards that point. I have mentioned the grand design: school, teachers, parents, community...and for students from The Gap, no doubt the world: this school equips you for an outstanding contribution.

And that should not be dismissed as merely fancy language! Let there be no doubt about the power of one; both for high individual achievement, and for immense contribution to the beneficial progression of the community. In that regard I mention Toni Hoffman, the Bundaberg Hospital whistle blower, whose courage has produced so much: the power of one relatively humble person which, thanks to her courage, survived in its influence even



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the deposition of a Royal Commissioner and the informed work of his successor. How we can each make a difference: in that particular case to the transformation no doubt of a State's health system, and countless others: to the encouragement of the talented, to the support of those we identify as bullied, to the recovery of those beset by dependencies...and gloriously, overall to the promotion of individual and collegial effectiveness and success.

We may to ourselves seem but humble individual ciphers, but we are all talented in substantial measure, and our potential capacity, in this scheme, this grand scheme, is quite remarkable.

I certainly wish you all well. Unsurprisingly, I especially look forward to welcoming into the legal profession, in due course, those of you who may follow that path.

And overall, I congratulate this excellent school – students, teachers, parents, institution – with warm commendation to all as you move forward, enjoying the marvellous advantages with which this fine school endows you!