



CITY OF SOUTH BEND

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Office of the Mayor

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IVY TECH COMMUNITY COLLEGE-NORTH CENTRAL COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Before we begin, I want to mention that today we mark the fallen officers of the South Bend Police Department. The annual remembrance ceremony is taking place this evening at the Central Police Station, and because we cannot be in both places at once, I want to ask everyone here to be there in spirit by observing a brief moment of silence.

Thank you. I am honored by the invitation to be here as your commencement speaker, and delighted to be able to participate. It is a pleasure to join Dr. Tom Coley, who has been a dynamic leader for this institution, and I congratulate you, Tom, on being chosen to bear the added responsibility of leading the combined Northwest and North Central regions of Ivy Tech. It is also a special treat to share this occasion with Mike Staszewski, who has served the city energetically and diligently as a Mayor's Office intern, and opened the door for more Ivy Tech students to come participate in my office.

I have held the office of mayor, which if you ask me is the best job in the world, for less than a year and a half. In that short time, we have seen many developments in the life of our city. We have seen an accelerated revitalization of downtown, with homes selling on land that was once thought to be fit only for industrial ruins. We have seen an economic recovery which is by no means done but by all means underway. And we have seen new interest from reporters and investors around the country in what is happening in our small but remarkable city.

I am somewhat humbled to be in this position this evening, where it is customary to try to give useful advice, because I have not been in office nearly long enough to draw many conclusions. And being the youngest mayor of a city over 100,000 in America, it would be a little absurd for me to behave as though I can offer sage advice from a long life of complex experience. If time in government teaches anything, it is caution in judgment; I am reminded of the Chinese leader Zhou Enlai, who was asked in 1970 about the impact of the French Revolution and replied, "it's too soon to tell."

Yet even in this short time I have held office, there has been no shortage of lessons learned. The very first lesson I learned was one of humility. A few weeks after taking office, when there had been a tremendous amount of media coverage and activity surrounding my arrival, I came back to the County-City building after supper to get some work done. I found the inner door to the lobby locked, and tapped on the window until a member of the cleaning crew spotted me. He came to the door, opened the window just a bit, and asked "you work here?"



So far, the most important lesson I have learned in office has had to do with people, specifically that people will make or break an organization, an economy, a community. When I am asked how our administration has been able to undertake such an ambitious agenda for our community—setting up a 311 system in less than a year, reinventing our approach to economic development, challenging the community to repair or remove 1,000 vacant and abandoned properties in 1,000 days—the answer is simple: we punch above our weight when it comes to recruiting, bringing excellent people into government and then getting out of their way while they deliver for South Bend.

Getting people right has been vital to this administration, and we will find the right people wherever they are. When it came to finding a police chief, the right person had been halfway around the world in Tajikistan, where the U.S. State Department had sent him to educate that country's police leaders in how to set up a police department. By contrast, our corporation counsel who is our most recent hire was working just two blocks away from my office, though it took a year and a half to find her: and she started Monday as, we believe, the first African-American to serve as the city's lead attorney in the history of South Bend.

It's not just in the administration that people are everything, but the city itself. If every building in our city disappeared tomorrow, we would still be South Bend, and we would immediately get to work rebuilding. But if all the people disappeared and mere buildings remained, this place would not amount to a city at all. What makes a community is its people—their stories, their diversity, their character, and their knowledge. Which brings me to why we are here tonight.

We are here, most importantly, to say congratulations to today's graduates. Today's ceremony may only be a couple of hours, but it marks countless hours and days that you have invested in your education, in order to come to this moment. Long hours of textbooks, classroom or lab instruction, early mornings, late nights, tuition payments that did not exactly grow on trees... bring you now to the opportunity to celebrate your graduation.

More broadly, you are here because you made a decision to invest in yourself. There are certainly other things you could have done with your time and money than use it to gain the skills that you have studied at Ivy Tech. You could have relaxed, or worked overtime and made a little more money, or spent time with friends and family, but instead you invested in yourselves. You added to your toolkit of skills.

Because you have done that, you have added to our community's strength and readiness for the future. And so in addition to congratulating you, I would like to thank you. Because by deciding to invest in yourselves, you also chose to invest in your community. Whether you were thinking about it this way or not, your achievement is adding to the strength of this community as a whole. And it couldn't come at a more important time.

You are bringing your new skills into the work force at an extraordinary moment in the life of our city, and a little history could be useful in explaining why that's the case. South Bend got



started as a fur trading outpost in the early part of the 19th century. Back then, this was considered the West. Men and women used what assets we had, of which the most important was the river, to derive the income that would allow them to make a living.

Over time, the river became a source not only of food and transportation, but power. Meanwhile, railroads began to crisscross the landscape and new residents, many of them new to America itself, brought their energy, their skills, and their dreams to this place. South Bend became a city, and an industrial powerhouse in the Midwest. By the 1920s, Studebaker alone required 23,000 employees to make its vehicles.

I'm telling you all this not to make you nostalgic about an industrial era that will never look quite the same, but to stress that our economy was competitive because of the resources we had—transportation, people, power, and access to materials. That basic formula is no different today, except that one factor of production has become more important than it ever was in the past: skill.

Today's economy is true to our past but is all about the future. We continue manufacturing, but in advanced manufacturing that keeps us ahead of the curve. We continue to take advantage of the railway lines that run through our city, but we get as much benefit from the fiber optic cable that under those lines as we do the freight that runs over them. And we cannot be ready for this economy without focusing on people. Innovation, skill, teamwork, are not the properties of buildings or dollars, they are qualities found in people.

Physical capital and financial capital are no longer enough to drive industry. We cannot succeed without the third kind of capital: human capital. And that's why you are here today.

Every chance I get, I tour a local business and talk to workers, managers, and owners to find out how they are doing and what it would take for them to create more jobs. And as I do this the single issue I hear the most about is their need for more skilled workers. Their biggest obstacle to growth, they frequently tell me, is that they desperately need employees who understand how to operate sophisticated systems, who can solve problems, who can work dynamically on teams, and who can think for themselves at a higher level. This is not just a local issue—the problem of ensuring that our workers' skills match the demands of a shifting marketplace is a national priority. It is a priority that goes all the way up to the White House, which launched the Skills for America's Future initiative to deal with the problem.

But the solution to the problem isn't coming from Washington. The solution to the problem is in places like South Bend. The solution to the problem is you. You have decided that you would be better off with new skills, and you put your effort into reaching the next level. Doing that lifts up the whole community with you. We need you, and we need more people like you.



Much depends on our ability to provide existing employers, and new ones, with the skills it takes to succeed. Your time at Ivy Tech has empowered you with these skills, whether it's a time-honored trade like the culinary arts, or skills for an industry that did not even exist a generation ago, like nanotechnology. Not only do you need those skills—we need those skills. We need them in our community, in our companies and nonprofits and government. In a time of brain drain for our area, you represent brain gain.

You may have noticed that South Bend gets more national press than you would expect for a community our size. The reason is that our economy is a bellwether for the national economy. Much depends on whether cities like ours—industrial, Midwestern, middle-class cities—can make it. Your readiness to bring our workforce forward brings hope to our community, and our community's comeback gives hope to the whole country.

When I was a student, a professor said to me something that I have reflected on ever since: he said that hope is a consequence of action, more than its cause.

Every investment we make in the future is both a source and a consequence of hope. To make an exhausting journey by canoe, as those first settlers did, is an act of hope. To steam across the ocean in search of a job in a foreign land as the East European immigrants did, or to head our way from a segregated South, or to cross the Texas border, is an act of hope. To invest your savings in a business, to take out a loan and put your name on the door and get up early in the morning and build something up is an act of hope. And to invest in a new skill, to do what you have done, is an act of hope. You would not do it if you did not have the hope that this will make you a better-developed person, and your future a better one, than before.

But now I want you to think about that idea, that hope is a consequence of action. Because you have taken an action by bettering your skills, an action we acknowledge in today's ceremony. And while starting that journey required a measure of hope, completing it must give an even greater measure. To have seen that hard work pays off, first in your ability to do new things and next in your improved readiness for the job market, will give you hope for the future that awaits.

This strikes a chord with me, because that is what our whole community is going through right now. We have spent decades shaking off the hangover of a rude economic shock. Now we are giving ourselves permission to believe in our city again. The fundamentals have always been there—a great location, a rich heritage, a diverse population, and a way of living that prizes hard work, community, and decency. We just need to do, see, and believe. We need to act, and begin to see results that will authorize further hope for the future. The more we act, the more results we will recognize, and the more certain we can be that our community's best days are certainly ahead.

Now, one last lesson I have learned in politics is that when someone has been praising you, as I have done, and thanking you, as I have done, they usually are going to ask you for something. And so it is tonight. I thanked you for investing in yourself and thereby the community, but



remember that the community has also invested in you. State and federal government invested \$28 million in Ivy Tech last year alone. It's a good investment, because we are counting on you.

Counting on you to take your new skills and contribute to the community. Counting on you to make good on your potential to be the skilled worker that the next-generation economy requires. Counting on you, in short, to do nothing more or less than succeed. So I am asking you to invest as much energy and effort in your work as you have in your education, to go the extra mile and do whatever it takes to succeed, because your success will carry all of us forward—and give a whole community proof that our hope is well-placed.

Congratulations and good night.

—*Mayor Pete Buttigieg*