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Commissioner Nils J. Diaz

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

at the

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It gives me great pleasure and also great pride to look out at this group today, and see so many young men and women who have chosen to take their destinies into their own hands. The fact that you are here today means that each one of you has already made a commitment to do good with your lives and have already experienced a significant measure of success and good fortune.

And how did that good fortune come about? Not given, but earned! Miguel de Cervantes knew the answer to that question 400 years ago. He wrote, in *Don Quixote*, "La diligencia es madre de la buena ventura." So I applaud the diligence and the drive that has brought you this far already.

There are some kinds of wisdom that do not get stale with age. They remain as beacon lights to guide us all in good times as well as bad. Cervantes is an example. In the dark days of the Cold War, when Russia was still in the grip of Communism, a man named Natan Scharansky spoke out for human rights. For doing so, he spent 12 years in prison under grim conditions. When at last he was freed, his spirit was unbroken, and he told the press that thinking about *Don Quixote* had played an important part in sustaining him morally, and giving him the strength to carry on.

Miguel de Cervantes, who incidentally had been a prisoner himself, probably could not have dreamed that *Don Quixote*, centuries later, would help inspire and encourage another prisoner. But in reality, life is like that. You do things that are important for yourself, because of your own aspirations and desires, and sometimes you discover, in ways you did not realize at the time, that you have helped others -- clearing paths, lighting the way.

What I'm getting at, as you probably realize, is the question that confronts all of you today. Having come this far down the road of achievement, what will you do now? What use will you make of your abilities? What will your priorities be, as individuals, as Americans, and as inheritors of a Hispanic heritage, with all that means in terms of values, culture, and traditions? Use your talents for God, country, and family.

More than 100 years ago, a great Pope, Leo XIII, issued an encyclical called "Rerum Novarum" -- "of new things." Issued in 1891, it remains one of the great philosophical statements about the concept

of property, the rights of workers, and the relations between employers and employees. At a time when socialism seemed to be gaining ground, “Rerum Novarum” strongly affirmed the right of private property. It said, in words that turned out to be prophetic, and tragically remain an accurate description of Cuba, the land where I was born, that “the fundamental principle of Socialism which would make all possessions public property ... injures the very ones whom it seeks to help, [and] contravenes the natural rights of individual persons.” The U.S., the greatest country and the best democracy in the world is centered on the rights of individuals and asserts the validity of the common protection, like common defense and security.

But at the same time, the encyclical said that for those who possess material property, there is a duty to use it to benefit not only the owners but others too.

In 1991, Pope John Paul II marked the 100th anniversary of the great encyclical by issuing “Centesimus Annus” --- “the hundredth year.” In it, he made a very profound statement that has relevance to every one of you here today. He said:

In our time, in particular, there exists another form of ownership which is becoming no less important than land: the possession of know-how, technology, and skill. The wealth of the industrialized nations is based much more on this kind of ownership than on natural resources.

In that sense, all of you are owners today, and with the opportunity of vastly greater ownership at your fingertips. You should seize that opportunity!

Not everyone does. There are people who will hang back, and look for excuses not to try, not to do their best, not to confront the challenges. People who want excuses can always find them. Make your disadvantage an advantage. Are there those who think that they are at a disadvantage because their families have low incomes? I would answer by saying that there are many different kinds of poverty, not all of them measured in money. To have been raised in the values of the Hispanic family -- of family solidity, of love for children and respect for elders, of prizing education and hard work, of recognizing the role of the spiritual in our existence -- is a treasure that is quite literally priceless. It does not translate into dollars, but would anyone here deny how precious it is?

There may be those who think they will be at a disadvantage because they speak with an accent. I would answer that by saying that to be bilingual in English and Spanish in the America of the 21st Century will be an extraordinary advantage in every sense, not least of which is economic. I would not trade my accent... it is me! This is a plus, not a minus. As time goes on, you will find more and more of your classmates envying you your command of two languages. In fact, you might be rich and you don't know it!

So I would say to you, consider yourselves wealthy, regardless of your parents' bank balance. You may be among the wealthiest people in the world. Think of it -- to grow up in this country, with its precious freedoms and its abundant opportunities, with an engineering education, the benefit of the values of your Hispanic forefathers and foremothers, and with the ability to use two languages. So, if ever you are tempted to feel down because you are not wealthy in material possessions, think that in the ways that matter most, you are very well off.

What will you do with those riches? Wealth that is not put to use decays. It melts away and leaves the owner empty-handed and full of regrets. Don't ever let that happen to you. Put your wealth to use. Learn, work, achieve! You will be better off for it; your family and country will be better off for it;

and the Hispanic community will be better off for it. Every Hispanic woman and every Hispanic man who seizes the opportunities presented and succeeds in this society contributes to the betterment of this country in many ways: intellectually, economically, and by demonstrating to Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike what people from the community can accomplish. Like everyone else, young Hispanics need role models of success, to encourage them to make the most of their talents; thus in helping yourselves, you are helping those who follow in your footsteps. You are a great role model, and to those around you far more effective than the most glittering examples. Be the example to the little ones. You can also contribute to take the blinders off those who harbor prejudice, and in doing so, you benefit not just the Hispanic community but all Americans.

I see so much talent gathered here today; I see so much human potential; and I look forward to hearing about you as the years go by. But success will not be given unto you; you'll have to take it for yourselves. So I'll leave you with a line from an old song: "Take it easy -- but take it."