

Dr. Paul Davenport

Remarks by J. Robert S. Prichard

April 7, 2009

For a mere graduate of the University of Toronto, this is a pretty heady experience. It is a rare honour to be invited to address so many distinguished graduates and friends of what is widely – indeed indisputably – judged, particularly by its graduates, to be the finest university that ever existed - in London, Ontario. The occasion is all the more rewarding because tonight we pay tribute to an outstanding triple degree graduate of the University of Toronto who has spent the last 15 years sharing his Toronto education by toiling in rural Ontario. Thank you, Chairman, for the invitation. It is, I assure you, far more enjoyable for me than watching the University of Toronto Blues in recent years meet the Western Mustangs on the football field.

The fundamental test for anyone entrusted with the leadership of a great public institution is to leave it stronger than he or she found it. Paul Davenport hasn't just met this test; he has far exceeded it. And he has done so not just for the University of Western Ontario but for the cause of higher education as a whole

At Western, Paul has provided superb leadership.

When he arrived as the new President at Western in 1994, there was real doubt about Western's trajectory. Would the University let its historic place among Canada's best universities slowly slide away, allowing admissions requirements, academic standards and research performance to slip towards mediocrity? Or would Western reassert its greatness, raise its standards and reaffirm its place among Canada's most selective, best performing and most respected universities?

Paul answered this question decisively. His record of leadership is clear. He systematically and successfully attended to improving every dimension of the University's work.

The results are equally clear. Admissions standards are up. The undergraduate academic experience is strengthened. Graduate programs have grown. Research funding and accomplishments have soared. Private giving has reached unprecedented levels. And across the University, sights are being set ever higher and the University is getting ever stronger. The University is on a roll.

As Paul leaves Western, there is no doubt where Western stands: it stands among the leaders, acting like a leader and moving relentlessly forward and upward. The rankings, the performance indicators, the broad support, and the renewed spirit, pride and confidence all reflect Paul's strategy and inspired leadership. He leaves Western strong and confident, a better university than when he arrived and with a secure place among the very best.

One aspect of Paul's leadership and advocacy that I most admire is that he relies on facts, analysis and rational argument. He leads by thinking, teaching, explaining and

educating. He leads with ideas and reason, not bluster and spin, thus not only advancing his case but doing so in ways that are true to the university itself. This is collegial leadership at its best.

Some university presidents focus all their energies on their home campus alone, leaving to others the responsibility to lead the cause of higher education and shape the public policy environment to support that cause. Paul didn't. Instead, he has long been an articulate, principled and persuasive advocate for higher education, both provincially and nationally.

Paul served as Chair of our national organization, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada – AUCC – from 1997 to 1999 and our provincial association, the Council of Ontario Universities – COU – from 1999 to 2001. He was outstanding in both roles.

These were very important years: federally Paul presided over the reaffirmation of the federal role in research and higher education and the magnificent new programs that flowed from it, which have done so much to strengthen all Canadian universities. Provincially, Paul led our preparation for the double cohort, expanded our operating and capital funding and successfully linked the Province's future prospects to ours, thus earning higher education a more prominent place on the Province's agenda.

Both provincially and federally, these were moments of truth for higher education and research, moments when we needed our best in the lead, shaping good policies, engaging government and keeping our cause united.

Paul did this brilliantly in both roles. It is no exaggeration to say that through his service, he made not just his University but his province and his country better.

In my final year as President, the University of Toronto granted this distinguished son of the University its highest honour – an honorary doctor of laws degree – in recognition of his exemplary leadership in higher education. I proudly introduced him to Convocation on that occasion, thanking him for vindicating his alma mater's highest hopes and aspirations.

Tonight, I equally proudly salute and congratulate him. On behalf of everyone who cares deeply about the cause of higher education and research in Canada, and on behalf of all of Canada's colleges and universities, I thank him for all he has done so well, for so long and with such success. As he heads across the Atlantic to France and his retirement, he goes with the enduring gratitude, respect and affection of all of us.

