

Remarks of Rear Admiral James E. Rendón
Superintendent
Coast Guard Academy Convocation
17 August 2017

Good afternoon everyone and welcome to this fabulous assembly of our community...our team...our Coast Guard Academy family!

As the Dean already recognized all of our special guests here today...I will not repeat individual recognitions, but rather, a collective heartfelt thanks to all of them...all of you here...for choosing to be with this afternoon.

There are two additional individuals that I wanted to mention, however, and of course the first one I had listed here...seemed to have jumped the gun a bit...out ahead of all of us. That would be the energetic, excitable, and fun loving OBJEE...how about a Go OBJEE on the count of three 1, 2, 3.

And secondly, up here on stage...a newcomer in the front office... our new Command Master Chief...Master Chief Petty Officer, Brett VerHulst.

He comes to us from Alaska, where he served as the Command Master Chief of the 17th CG District...supporting two different District Commanders over his time in the job...both of which made it a point to call me to say what an awesome senior enlisted leader he is...that we, the Academy, would be well served with him as our CMC. So, Master Chief, welcome aboard to you and to your wife Tina, and your two kids...thank you for your leadership and service, here at the Academy, and throughout your career. How about a Go Master Chief...1, 2, 3, Go Master Chief!

Again...Welcome Everyone!

OK...First...let offer a quick shout out to each of the Classes here this afternoon.

To the class of 2021...

Congratulations on being here for your first Convocation and for completing a very busy summer. My personal observations are that you have worked hard and assimilated well as followers. You've developed strong teamwork skills and become a cohesive unit – it was clearly on display last week during Sea Trials. I thank you, and your Nation thanks you, for making the Academy your choice...for raising your hand on “Day One.”

And of course, from your “Day One” - to the Mystic Flag Ceremony - to EAGLE - to today probably seems like an eternity...but realize just how far you've come and how ready you are to take the next step into 4/c year. As you've heard me say before...You can do this...you will do great!

To the class of 2020...

Congratulations on earning your stripe. I trust your summer has been stimulating... and refreshing...making the transition from “followers’ to “role modelers”... gaining valuable experience you need to deepen your professional knowledge...now focusing on your major area of study to further develop as a leader. Continue to set the example for others to follow... Set the RIGHT EXAMPLE. Set the example that you want to see in the very best of those who lead you.

To the class of 2019...

As you know, we entered together two years ago... and I’ve been watching you closely—you’ve done a tremendous job with the class of 2021...our Scholars...and our Aimsters, this summer.

How super cool it’s been...watching you embrace your cadre leadership responsibilities... and refine your own personal leadership style... and philosophy.

As we discussed earlier this week, in the recent past, we’ve referred to 2/C, during the school year as filling a “mentor role” and not referred to them as cadre. But we are changing that moving forward. Your role as “cadre” – defined as a core group of trained personnel who assume control and train others – is vital to the Corps and the Academy, not only during the summer...but rather all year long. A cadre is that group of vital DIRECT supervisors who implement the direction of organizational leaders, the 1/C. All cadre should be mentors, but not all mentors are DIRECT supervisors. Therefore, we will now use “cadre” to refer to the role of all 2/c, to emphasize that vital role in the corps. Take this job to heart... and continue to strive to be the leaders that the nation needs you to be.

I also encourage you to really dig into your academic major while exploring the many ways to apply it in the future.

Also, Class of 2019...exchange students...Army, Navy, Air Force ...welcome and thank you for choosing to spend a semester with us...and for enhancing the Corps.

I enjoyed chatting with you yesterday...as I said, I guarantee you’ll enjoy your experience here...and of course, I already know you’re enjoying our food. Just like all other past exchange students...it good to hear you too comment that “The Coast Guard Academy has far greater grub than where you come from... So enjoy it here...chow down...bon appétit...welcome aboard!

To the Class of 2018...

Welcome back to all of you.... You are merely months from graduation and commissioning....279 days away, but who's counting?

Know that I...or let me say, "We," all here, are relying on you each to be active and effective organizational leaders of the Corps of Cadets. We look to you to lead by example... and provide recommendations and counsel for me...for any, and all of us on staff. We know you are up to the task... and we look forward to our interactions throughout the year.

And to all cadets...YOU, THE CORPS... as classes begin... rekindle your resolve to engage with faculty and staff, and work to enhance your relationships with leaders... in all developmental domains.

Believe me...the investment will pay dividends over and over as your careers progress.

To all of the faculty and staff...

Welcome and welcome back! As always, it's been a busy summer filled with activities and experiences that are so necessary in developing our leaders to meet the challenges facing our Service. Thank you for the tremendous job you continue to do in supporting our cadets, our Academy and our Coast Guard.

And so before I get to this year's convocation message...let me just ask one thing of each of you...It's been a while since we've ALL been together...in one place...as a community...as a TEAM...as a family. This summer, I really missed our collective energy...our collective voice, our collective pride... So how about it...all of you, one loud and proud GO BEARS...on three.

1...2...3...GO BEARS!

Truly a beautiful thing...I love this place...thank you!

The essence of my message today is that our Nation... and our Coast Guard... are being challenged like never before.

Each of our eleven statutory missions are evolving continuously... and demanding more and more of our infrastructure, our cutters, our boats, our aircraft... our increasingly complex systems... and most of all -- our outstanding people.

In the meantime, we are recapitalizing our Service at a rate that has never been seen, within my career... and I would go far as to say, within the career of anyone in this assembly today..

I never thought I would see the day where we would be acquiring, designing and/or constructing four different major classes of ships...at the same time (reference to NSC, FRC, OPC,

icebreakers)! Certainly, this is a sign of the immense operational challenges we face...and the associated resource demands that accompany such an effort.

In short, “BUSINESS IS GOOD! And while business is good, our ability to carry out our collective Mission is certainly not getting any easier.

I reference the most recent comments of our Commandant during his State of the Coast Guard Address this past March...

ADM Zukunft noted the adjective that former Secretary Kelly used to embody his feelings about the men and women of the United States Coast Guard...the word is: “phenomenal.”

He went on to emphasize the key focus areas for our Coast Guard as... National Security... Border Protection... and Economic Security – If you haven’t watched the address, I highly encourage you to do so.

Finally, he stated that... “we live in a “VUCA” world.”

“V-U-C-A,” an acronym that he used when he last spoke with us during his annual Academy Leadership Address last spring.

“VUCA,” an environment that is:

“Volatile,” “Uncertain,” “Complex,” and “Ambiguous.”

A VUCA world changes quickly and unpredictably..., is difficult to interpret or model... and sends mixed messages to those like us who are in the prevention, response and mission support business.

It’s characterized by

- transnational criminal organizations;
- relentless cyber threats to our information systems and marine transportation infrastructure;
- increasing complexity in maritime commerce;
- a warming Arctic; and
- an ever increasing focus on the security of our Nation’s borders.

This VUCA world challenges our leadership like never before... and forces all of us to get outside of our comfort zones... in making decisions... managing risk... solving problems and leading short and long term change... at ALL levels.

It goes without saying that OUR future leadership sits right in front of me at this very moment!...those “Leaders of Character” who embody the Coast Guard Core Values...those who influence and inspire others to achieve a goal... by seeking to discover the truth... deciding what is right... and demonstrating the “courage” to act accordingly...ALWAYS!

Those leaders in the audience...ALL OF YOU...who MUST, I repeat MUST, excel in this VUCA world.

Here at the Academy...indicators of OUR adaptation to this VUCA world are emerging all around us...:

- Our plan to convert our boiler plant to a Co-Generation facility
- The transformation of our Core Curriculum
- The completion of our waterfront resilience project
- The emergence of our institutional Equity Scorecard
- And the hardening of our IT systems...just to name a few.

You know, this past year...we’ve been working “together” in developing our next Strategic Plan that will be distributed shortly. I appreciate the immense TEAMWORK to date... from all corners of the Academy in developing this plan. The plan covers a five-year period and is:

- a plan that offers an optimistic outlook... but recognizes that goals cannot be achieved without sufficient resources
- a plan that seeks innovation and efficiencies... yet forces difficult prioritization, and...
- It’s a plan... that challenges us to continue to improve in a VUCA environment... but also recognizes a point that the Commandant made in his address. He forcefully noted that -- although we, as an organization, “punch well above our weight class,” “it’s time that we get resourced to be in the correct weight class.”

This strategic plan is reflective of the VUCA environment that we are in. It focuses on looking inward... and re-affirming what we call our “core business,”while looking outward for the right opportunities to support the Coast Guard... and Nation.

The plan accentuates the business of ensuring our Shared Learning Outcomes are embodied in all our graduates... and that ALL work as a team to ensure we... cadets, faculty and staff... collectively embody and demonstrate these qualities.

First, we MUST be leaders of character... who understand and apply sound leadership principles and competencies including:

- the ability to direct, develop, and evaluate diverse groups;
- to function as ethical leaders, followers, facilitators and team members;
- and are able to constructively, and honestly assess ourselves and others.

“Clearly a necessity of leading in a VUCA world”

Examples of our efforts include the recent Class of 1964 Leadership workshop sponsored by our Loy Institute for Leadership... development of a curricular leadership rubric... and our upcoming athletic team captains leadership initiative.

Next, we must maintain a professional lifestyle that embraces the Coast Guard Core Values of Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty.

- An understanding that “integrity” is our standard;
- that we value our diverse workforce... and treat others with fairness, dignity and compassion;
- and that we are “Professionals”... committed to the achievement of our organizational goals.

“Clearly a necessity of leading in a VUCA world”

Examples include our focus on frequent quality interactions, within what one of my predecessors called a “sea of professionalism,” ...our focus on developing “organizational cultural competency,”... and our dedication to community and institutional service.

We must also have the motivation and skill to engage in “lifelong learning.” Including the ability to efficiently access a broad range of information sources, interpret data, employ technology, and integrate in-depth knowledge to address challenges.

“Clearly a necessity of leading in a VUCA world”

Examples include our immense portfolio of cadet capstone projects that directly benefit our Coast Guard... and DHS; our Cyber Laboratory facility that will begin construction this year; and our partnership with the Alumni Association to convert our aging waterfront facility to a “Maritime Center of Excellence.”

We must be able to accomplish complex tasks... in a broad range of contexts... by applying the basic skills of critical analysis... systems thinking... quantitative reasoning... risk management... creative problem solving... and value-based decision-making.

Most certainly a necessity...for leading in a VUCA world!

And finally, Communication Effectiveness...we must communicate clearly... with civility... to thoughtfully listen... to respectfully exchange ideas... and to persuasively write, so we harness the previous objectives to accomplish the task at hand, within the groups in which we operate – the classroom, the Corps, teams and clubs...across the Academy...within the Coast Guard...with our partners and in the public.

“Absolutely...a necessity of leading in a VUCA world”

These Learning Outcomes define the unique qualities that allow us to be effective leaders, mentors, and public servants in this increasingly VUCA world.

I emphasize that in order to do so, the “world” that exists here within our Academy community must **NECESSARILY** be one that is supportive, respectful and inclusive. These are required attributes of an environment that allows **ALL** to reach their greatest potential.

You know, last month, I had an opportunity to represent our Coast Guard abroad. My wife, Felicitas, and I, attended the graduation ceremony of the Heroica Escuela Naval Militar -- the Mexican Naval Academy, in Veracruz, Mexico.

As you all know...we, the Coast Guard, and this Academy enjoy a very good relationship with Mexico...we graduated 3 Mexican cadets last year, and we have 5 more within Corps today...

What an honor it was to represent this Academy... and our Coast Guard. I must say, as proud as I am of our commencement exercises each year, I was overly impressed with the Mexican Naval Academy's ceremony...

Such tremendous pride, professionalism, precision, passion, and patriotism on full display by our Mexican Navy colleagues. It was, to say the least, quite spectacular...from start to finish.

This short visit to Mexico served as a reminder of the value our international cadet program provides, not only to U.S. diplomacy, but to the Academy. Our 28 international cadets here today...from 13 countries, certainly get to learn a lot from us...but, there is much that we learn from them. How enriching they are to our Cadet program...to this Academy. How about a round of applause for all of our international cadets.

This experience also served as a vivid reminder to me, that ...as good as we might think we are...we all have much to learn from others...others who may not be exactly like us. Those around us with different cultures...experiences, perspectives...they too are good, and they too can help us all be better.

And learning from others applies directly to the ideals of Diversity and Inclusion...the strength of Diversity that our Commandant talks so much about. There is indeed "Strength in Diversity"... strength in our differences...gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, geographic origin, religion, and so on...but this strength only occurs when there is inclusion.

Inclusion includes understanding, appreciating, learning from, and accepting each other...and our differences. Sometimes this inclusion piece can be hard...it takes effort...but we must make the effort.

Inclusion...it's what TEAMWORK is all about...it's what you've heard me say over and over again. "Get to know each other, help each other, support and learn from each other...to work as a team, and when you do, amazing things will happen."

This will continue to be a priority of mine...because it's right...because it's powerful...because it's what our Coast Guard is all about.

Now...I am certainly not naïve to think that such an ideal inclusive environment exists here at the Academy for ALL.

Yes...through the hard work of faculty, staff, coaches, and committed partners and volunteers, the Academy Corps of Cadets is more diverse today than ever in our history with 32 percent URM, 35 percent women, all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, 3 U.S. territories, and 13 countries represented.

Yes... we have processes and people to identify areas in need of focused effort, and we are expanding them...

But there is much work still to be done in cultivating and maintaining an inclusive environment. We have hard work to do... that involves difficult conversations... significant introspection... and enhanced accountability.

It is up to our entire community... each and every one of us...to make this a priority. We frequently say that “Leadership is everybody’s business,” and that is so true.

But it is also true that “Diversity and Inclusion is everybody’s business.” In fact, good leadership and inclusion are inseparable.

Continuing to diversify our faculty and staff is also a necessity. We have not achieved sustained progress in this... We must continue to work hard in recruiting and retaining both military and civilian teammates.

When faced with the recent tragic and disturbing events in Charlottesville, we **MUST** unequivocally state... that bigotry and hatred have no place at our Academy, in our Coast Guard or anywhere. We must work together to immerse our cadets, faculty and staff in a culture of respect. We share a common mission to develop and be leaders of character.

On a daily basis we reaffirm our commitment to the Coast Guard’s core values of honor, respect and devotion to duty. It is important that each and every one of us is committed to our shared values... and to helping others learn and grow when situations inconsistent with Coast Guard policy or core values arise.

Because to be an effective leader in this VUCA world... one must be ethically strong, culturally sensitive and socially conscious... so one can effectively lead ALL members of the team. And for the Coast Guard... this competency begins here... where the officer corps is created.

And so...I challenge all of us, including myself... to continue to embrace this VUCA world...this environment of challenge and opportunity...this environment of continual growth for each of us personally... and for all of us organizationally

This Convocation has brought us together today at this time...at this place...to welcome one another...to celebrate achievement...to better understand the part we play in accomplishing our noble Coast Guard mission that transcends us all. Let this gathering this afternoon set the stage for a GREAT academic year. I know that we will all do our very best each and every day.

For me, I’m humbled and proud to be your Superintendent... and feel so fortunate to be around such enthusiasm and energy here at the Academy. As we start the year, I look forward to interacting with you in the classrooms, on the athletic courts and fields of play...in Leamy...in the

community...and within the multitude of military training venues that shape us as one Academy Team.

Go VUCA! Go Team! and forever...Go Bears!