**John Wilkerson, Professor and Department Chair**

Dear graduates:

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 2020 political science convocation. And welcome also to the family and friends who have supported you and are hopefully sharing this day with you.

This it not the graduation day you envisioned - close your eyes and imagine the HUB ballroom with faculty and staff on the stage, about 400 graduates and another 1,000 family and friends sitting on very uncomfortable chairs – but it is still a special day.

We faculty, staff and graduate students take great pride in your success and accomplishments. It has been a true pleasure to learn with you. We are so fortunate to be able to interact with smart, curious and motivated students year in and year out and we will miss you.

Political science is the study of power - who has it and what they do with it. You chose political science in a time when the free expression of ideas, facts, and democratic institutions are being challenged around the world. What could be more important?

As scholars, you have learned that the political deck is stacked against change, that politics favors those with the greatest resources, and the challenges of collective action. Change does not come easily nor is it predictable. It is easy to become discouraged. Political change requires faith and dedication and persistence.

‘Everyone knew’ that the economic and social forces opposing civil rights, automobile safety, and environmental protection were simply too powerful and entrenched. Nothing would ever change, And then those ‘everyones’ turned out to be wrong.

Of course, none of these problems have been solved once and for all – few societal problems ever are. There has been substantial progress on civil rights, but discrimination and racism are still deeply embedded in our culture and institutions. Auto safety regulations have saved millions of lives, but hundreds of thousands still die every year. Rivers no longer catch on fire, but our oceans and the species that inhabit them are suffering.

Because politics is never ‘over,’ citizenship means playing the long game – staying informed and continuing to exercise our political voices. Trust in your judgment and stay thoughtfully critical of those who claim to know the answers,

You have also learned that we all have our biases. Invite criticism and try to be a good listener. As difficult as this can be, the costs of ignoring criticism and leaving disagreements unresolved (in all aspects of our lives) can be much greater.

Finally, I would like to close by saying a little about the professional value of your new degree. [short pause while parents chuckle]

You appreciate the complex interdependence of social and political life. You understand the value of considering alternative perspectives. You have learned how to ask the right questions, how to find the answers, and how to communicate what you’ve found.­

These skills are valued in the workforce. Don’t believe me? Go to LinkedIn and search for people who have graduated from our department.

Our graduates are:

* analyzing emergent threats and risks at Microsoft,
* directing the King County Emergency Management Program,
* directing the City of Seattle’s coronavirus response,
* running real estate operations at Redfin,
* doing operational intelligence for the Air Force,
* working for human rights and environmental non-profits,
* working for federal agencies,
* overseeing multi-million dollar investment portfolios,
* advising state and federal political candidates,
* serving as the Executive of King County
* and serving as the Attorney General of Washington.

You are graduating during an exceptionally challenging time. But this is also a time of change and with change comes opportunity. Have confidence in your education, your ability and your adaptability as you move to the next phase of your life.

Stay healthy and safe, and have a wonderful day!