**A Free Republic – and How to Keep It**

Graduation season, usually occurring in April, May, and June, unfortunately often means that college graduates hear speakers ranging from liberal to radical. Not so at Hillsdale College. In May, 2016, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas delivered a commencement address titled “Freedom and Obligation”. His message to the graduating students can also be worthwhile for all of us as patriotic Americans, and included the following remarks:

*“So much has changed since I left college in 1971. Things that were considered firm have long since lost their vitality… Hallmarks of my youth, such as patriotism and religion, seem more like outliers, if not afterthoughts. …One of the messages constantly conveyed in those days was…that if you did not discharge your responsibilities, there could be no independence, no self-sufficiency, and no freedom. …So there was always, to our way of thinking, a connection between the things we valued most and our obligations or efforts. There could be no freedom without each of us discharging our responsibilities. …Today we rarely hear of our personal responsibilities in discussions of broad notions such as freedom or liberty. It is as though freedom and liberty exist wholly independent of anything we do… It is all too commonly thought that we all deserve the same reward or the same status… This is why we hear so often about what is deserved or who is entitled. …And isn’t this same sense of entitlement often applied today to freedom?*

*“At the end of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin was asked what the gathering had accomplished. ‘A republic,’ he replied, ‘if you can keep it.’ …So many who have gone before us have [dedicated] their lives to preserving and enhancing our nation both in war and in peace… America’s Founders and many successive generations believed in natural rights. To establish a government based on consent of the governed, as the Declaration of Independence makes clear, they…structured that government so that it could not jeopardize the liberty that flowed from natural rights. Even though this liberty is inherent, it is not guaranteed. …Over the lifespan of our great country, many occasions have arisen that required this liberty, and the form of government that ensures it, to be defended if it was to survive. At the risk of understating what is necessary to preserve liberty and our form of government, I think more and more that it depends on good citizens discharging their daily duties and obligations. …Today there is much more focus on our rights and on what we are owed, and much less on our obligations and duties… If we are content to let others do the work of replenishing and defending liberty while we consume the benefits, we will someday run out of other people’s willingness to sacrifice – or even out of courageous people willing to make the sacrifice.*

*“…Some of you will most assuredly be called upon to do very hard things to preserve liberty. All of you will be called upon to provide a firm foundation of citizenship by carrying out your obligations in the way so many preceding generations have done. …[Y]our efforts will help to form the fabric of a civil society and a free and prosperous nation where inherent equality and liberty are inviolable.”*

One of Ronald Reagan’s most well-known quotes is, “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction”. Each new generation in our country needs to learn the responsibility, the duty, that goes hand-in-hand with the rights we are blessed to enjoy (not the “rights” created by activist judges, the ACLU, and aggrieved special-interest groups), in this free, constitutional republic called America.

Priscilla Poese, *AzFRW Americanism*

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