

Freedom With Responsibility
Kansas State University Landon Lecture
September 19, 2003

by Paul Harvey

Good morning, Americans. Dateline Manhattan, Kansas, Sept. 19, 2003: 1,700 concerned Americans have converged on Kansas State University to evaluate the challenges and the prospects for our country in this new century to ascertain whether the republic once worth dying for is now worth working for, and if so, how best to proceed.

That should have been today's Page one headline. Instead these were: Isabel wallops East Coast; Fed does something here; Stock Exchange is leaderless; post office crisis in land O'Lakes -- a post office crisis-oh, a post office crisis in Land O' Lakes, Fla. The postmaster is refusing to allow mail deliveries to the Paradise Lakes Resort. That's the area nudist colony. Postmaster Henry Thompson says he will not compel his letter carriers to expose themselves. That is, he says, to expose themselves to possible embarrassment.

Paul Harvey, why don't you newsmen report more good news instead of all of that tragedy and destruction and discord and disaster and dissent. Well, now wait a minute. My own network, ABC, once tried broadcasting a program of just good news. You know how long that lasted? Thirteen weeks. Not enough listeners wanted just good news.

In Sacramento, Calif., a little tabloid called itself The Good newspaper, printed just good news, lasted 36 months before it went bankrupt. As far as I have been able to ascertain, there's only one newspaper in the USA today printing just good news. It's a little tabloid, comes out once a week in Indiana and they have to give it away, because that good news that you all keep saying you want just won't buy. And that's why you can listen to any broadcast, and records are crashing and it's the worst wind and the worst flood or fire or earthquake or whatever, because noise news makes news, and sex and noise and sin make news, and one gunshot makes more noise than a thousand prayers. It doesn't mean it's more important, just that it sells more newspapers.

Weather forecasting. That ought to be the easiest job in the world. All you have to say is 50 percent chance of rain, then whether it rains or not you're right. I guess I must have had in deference to our Chicago forecasters, that they did predict 11 of last winter's two snowstorms.

We never did have such uncomfortable winters before somebody invented that chill factor, and with increasing competition for your attention from a multiplicity of media the situation is worsening.

Birth control pills are good for you. Birth control pills are bad for you. Take your choice. Oh, in Jackson, Miss., last April the IRS office got a phone call from a fellow who wanted to know, "Are birth control pills deductible?" And the alert IRS agent on the other end of the phone said, "Only if they don't work."

And news isn't just news anymore, it's around the clock warning. You know, one issue says aspirin's good for you and aspirin's bad for you. And now the Food and Drug Administration wants to declare mother -- the FDA wants to declare mother's milk unsafe? The Food and Drug

Administration suspects that mother's milk may be unsafe, but so far nobody has been able to ascertain where to put the warning label.

Let me see if I can help you better understand today's headlines. For one thing, bad news pays. I'm on a foundation board, the McArthur Foundation, which dispenses large sums for research, and I can tell you that a lot of institutions secure money for research by producing bad news about population, about resources, about environment. For another thing, there's a demonstrable fascination with, there's a proved public preference for bad news, because what's bad news to somebody is good news to many. The listener or the reader of bad news can say to himself, "Well, at least I'm not as bad or as bad off as those fellows," and then the printer whose printing machine broke down, or the builder who bid too low, or the salesman who lost a sale, or the farmer who lost a crop, or the wildcatter who drilled a duster, he can see his problem is not so bad after all. After all, bad news is good news.

The reader does not want to read about some rich man who's healthy and happily married. But if the rich man is divorced or diseased or loses his money, that's more interesting reading, because then the reader can feel himself to be better off. There's always somebody in any hospital ward just enough worse off to help us feel comparatively fortunate, and noisy news serves that purpose. And thus the plane crash which does not involve you, the billionaire in bankruptcy, the charity boss caught stealing, the movie actor charged with murder, these will continue on Page One as long as the fire which burns them warms the rest of us.

I'm not going to talk politics today. I just don't think it's appropriate. However, when our question session -- after I finish with these remarks and if you ask politically related questions, then the responsibility becomes yours, you see, not mine. But I will concede that it is entirely possible when we speak of noisy news that a former president, Mr. Clinton, might very likely have his likeness one day engraved on the side of Mount Rushmore, if only from the waist down.

So if Page One is a myopic fun house mirror, if Page One cannot be trusted for perspective, does that mean that things are not really so bad after all? Well, now there is one substantive if in our outlook, and we're going to get to that. But measured in dollars and sense, Americans, the best of times is right now. Productivity in the United States is expanding this year by a healthy substantial three percent with near zero inflation. The income of Americans is up. The stock market has restored an appropriate equilibrium. More Americans own their own homes than any time in history. The headline says employment, or -- no, no, the headline will never say that. The headline says unemployment 6.1 percent. Have you ever wondered why they headline unemployment? They do. Why doesn't the headline say employment, 93.9 percent. Well, new claims for unemployment -- new claims were down last week to the lowest level in a month. Fewer than 400,000 new claims. The International Monetary Fund reported yesterday morning that our nation's economy is growing faster than expected, and the recovery should continue for as far ahead as we can see into 2004, with a healthy improvement of 3 percent or 3 percent plus in 2004.

You do realize we can have unemployment and more employment at the same time, if only because of the increasing population, home grown and other. For employment, credit our economy. For unemployment, credit our generosity. Nonetheless, with most every newspaper advertising for willing workers we have almost 4 million Americans receiving unemployment pay. All of those Help Wanted signs everywhere and 3.8 million plus Americans are collecting

unemployment pay, But then as Cowboy Perk Carlson always used to say, "If life were logical, it's men who would ride side saddle."

So our nation continues to slow grow and one who has ridden this roller coaster through nine boom and bust cycles, thusly prefers slow grow. With you holding the whip and Allen Greenspan holding the reins, things are getting better all of the time. And tomorrow's going to be better than today. You know what, history says it always was. But I suggested earlier that there's one if in our outlook and we're going to get to that now.

Self-government won't work without self-discipline. Self government without self-discipline is everywhere falling apart. It's been what, a dozen years since communism collapsed in Eastern Europe? Those nations are free at last. But freedom implies responsibility and most were not prepared for that. So what, Yugoslavia is in chaos. Bosnia is on life support. Albania is mired in economic chaos. Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania found freedom too difficult, they've already reverted to caretaker communist governments. The Russian people, free, free at last, out from under communism and free, but freedom implies responsibility and the Russians were certainly not ready for that. So crime in Moscow is pandemic, the economy is struggling and the Kremlin's up for grabs.

Well, self-government won't work here either without self-discipline. The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, a native of Ghana, Africa, yet recently he looked at the tribal wars going on out in the Sierra Leone and the Congo, the central African republic, Angola, Ethiopia, and he said, and this is a quote, "I don't think we have a chance of moving on to economic and social development." Self-government won't work without self-discipline.

Here, either in our streets or in our executive suites, the FTC says that half of all the car repairs that American motorists pay for were not needed. Self-government won't work without self-discipline. Shopping for a used car, you can't just trust the odometer. Hundreds of thousands of Americans are buying used cars with those mileage gauges rolled back. Research involving 103 different brands of bottled water reveals that 1/3 of them are no more pure, no more healthful than the water out of our kitchen faucets. So Congress is now contemplating what, more strict labeling standards? Self-government won't work without self-discipline.

As when an upstate New York company was caught selling defective control cables for airliners. Self-government requires self-discipline. Years before 9-11 traditional American freedoms had been abridged. Back then you were not free to go out and get on an airliner without submitting yourself to search and your luggage, and if indicated, your underwear. Why? Because there's some dictator in Washington determined to dictate? No, that's not why, it's simply because we had a handful or airheads running around a long time before Saddam Hussein. We had a handful of loony birds with guns and knives and homemade bombs long before New York's tragedy of 9-11. We've had American sickies hiding razors in apples so that whole states had to outlaw Halloween. And they've taken away our fireworks. They've threatened to take away our guns because some misuse theirs, and it's not because there's tyranny in government, it's because -- no, it's not because of the Taliban -- it's because there is anarchy in the unbuttoned brains of a handful of looney birds who don't deserve to be free so the rest of us can't be, and it's down that road that whole nations go from regulation to regimentation to tyranny.

My own profession is struggling with self-discipline right now. The Federal Communications

Commission is trying anew to prohibit what it calls indecent radio and TV broadcasts. The Internet is becoming a red light district, distributing violent pornography, helping to organize pedophiles, and so far there's no reliable way of detecting or intercepting the prurient messages and pictures. And by the way, while we're weighing the evidence of hypocrisy in public policy, isn't there something absurdly incongruous about a society which regulates so rigidly what we put into our mouths and into our nose and so timidly what goes into our eyes and into our ears?

However, if there is one irrefutable lesson to be learned from history, it is that excesses ultimately, inevitably, eventually are their own undoing. We will behave or we will be forced to behave.

Landon Parvin says that you can tell a lot about people from the papers that they read. People who read the Washington Post think they own the country. People who read the New York Times know that they run the country. People who read the Washington Times think the Washington Post runs the country. People who read the Wall Street Journal think they own the country. People who read USA Today couldn't care less who runs the country as long as the weather map is in color.

Advertisers in the United States are going to spend \$249.3 billion this year -- and, by the way, that's 5 percent more than last year -- telling us all of the good things, real and imagined, about their respective products. Isn't it a rotten shame that with noisy, distressing, depressing news hour after hour, day in and day out, by our own emphasis on all of the bad things, crime and inflation and pollution and floods and fires and discords and disaster and discontent, by our persistent preoccupation with negatives, we tend to unsell ourselves and our impressionable offspring on a way of life, which is the envy of the rest of the worlds. And repetition is effective. Repetition is effective. Repetition is effective.

Bob Barker asked a game show contestant, "For five hundred dollars, name two famous brothers who made it possible for men to fly." Without a moment's hesitation the contestant replied "Ernest and Julio."

Self-government requires self-discipline all the way to top, and all the way down to us, then -- then we may lead the world as we once did. For our nation's first 150 years we led the world, not with guns, not with butter, not with money, but by example. The French threw off the yoke of their dissolute aristocracy. England initiated sweeping democratic reforms. Mexico, Central America, South America freed themselves from Spain just watching our example.

Well, Paul Harvey, suppose we do demand discipline of ourselves, then what's in it for us? If I may presume to project the future, what will the next millennium be like? A year-round fabric for clothing, temperature controlled by a battery in your pocket; a fabric for furniture, that does the same thing indoors. We will manipulate the time space continuum, we will travel in time, backward or forward. In the lab we will slow the speed of light to no faster than a man can walk. In the firmament we will explore our universe beyond a collapsed time. The first years of the new century will add whole pages to Webster's Dictionary as we continue to dream and to do. We're going to harness the limitless energy of the wind for three pennies per kilowatt hour and then cold diffusion will catapult power and of a whole dimension. We're going to learn the language of animals, and what a difference that will make in our human behavior toward them. We will propel vehicles for a year on a thimble full of fuel and if we are very, very bright, we might even make vehicle bumpers the same height.

Medical science will evolve from curing disease to preventing it. As the last half of the century taught us how chemistry creates the electricity which operates each humanoid, the next half century will teach us how to regulate it for enhanced efficiency. Now we know the brain thinks, tomorrow we'll learn how. Einstein revealed that energy is equivalent to mass or matter. In a womb in this room may be the Einstein who will reveal that empty space is not empty at all.

The accelerated evolution of medicine keeps specialists studying day and night. Boy, what an exciting time to be alive. Physicians in Australia's National University believe that they've replicated Star Trek's transporter. They have successfully teleported a laser beam of light.

They disembodied a laser beam in one location and rebuilt it in another location in a fraction of a second. The project leader says, "No, no, this does not mean that we can now beam humans between different locations, but" -- I'm now, wait a minute, and I quote -- "in theory there is no longer anything stopping us from doing it," quote. My prediction is that the teleportation of an atom will probably be accomplished by someone in the next three to five years. The future is rushing toward us at warp speed.

If you have uncontrolled Type I diabetes, there is ongoing research right now which involves transplanting healthy insulin producing islet cells by infusion. It is accomplished with a needle through the skin. There's now a variable treatment for Alzheimer's. Is it viable? Well, our government is conducting multiple studies of the drug Memantine for people with moderate to severe Alzheimer's, and in one of the studies, at least, Memantine does slow down memory loss and physical decline. Combined with another drug it actually has improved memory and thinking skills.

Fewer American babies are dying during their first year. That's a triumph for nutrition, medical science, some encouraging evidence of parental self-discipline. How long will you live? Well, how long do you want to live? Improved sanitation nutrition and medical science are adding 16 weeks to the average human life span every 24 months. All a golfer has to do these days is just hang in there and it is entirely likely that he will indeed one day shoot his age.

So Americans, I'm not ignoring the ferment in the Middle East and the clouds that hang heavy over the Far East, but it's testing time again and every generation has had to be tested on this rebellious planet. Storms are a part of the normal year-in and year-out climate of life. We earn the sweet by-and-by by how we deal with the messy here-and-now. Sometimes the storm takes the shape of an economic holocaust or a prolonged drought. Sometimes internal civil strife, sometimes a military confrontation. You know, Churchill said that the war years were Britain's finest hour, and we face a new testing time every lifetime.

Some of us have been professional observers of several lifetimes. We remember epidemic TB, and the crash of '29, and the dust bowl and Hitler's holocaust and Pearl Harbor. We resent challenges, but we're no longer panicked by them. Osama bin Laden epitomizes for this generation what we called hippies or flower children in the last generation. These anti-establishment unwashed, counter-culture rich kids have hijacked Islam for their personal aggrandizement, where the previous generation of student radicals identified with peace, the seminarian Taliban spoiled brats espouse holy war, a parallel perversion of a worthy purpose.

What will it take to get terror and terrorism off Page One? We already have. Osama bin Laden has

much more to worry about than you do. All leaders have to be very careful to look back over their shoulders once in awhile, make sure that their followers are still following. Bin Laden's press agents had told him that he had two billion loyal disciples all over the world. They had him convinced that if he could just knock the top off New York City, two billion people would rise up all over the world and on 40 different fronts overthrow us overnight. Not one did.

A few years ago our anxiety focused on the hideous force of the unharnessed atom, but now in retrospect we can see that the A-bomb was a disguised blessing. We Americans are outnumbered by potential enemies 7 to 1. War with bayonets we couldn't win. The big bomb was and remains the equalizer that cuts the limitless hordes down to our size. Now we can see that an all-wise Almighty entrusted this hideous instrument to our tiny fraction of the planet's population first, not for our destruction, but for our deliverance.

Times don't change. Time goes in circles. The atom bomb altered the potential strategy of war, but we are never without war for very long. In the 3 1/2 thousand years of recorded history, fewer than 8 percent of those years have been warless ones. It's been barely == my goodness, it's been barely 138 years since we were at war with ourselves. So times are part of the planet's normal climate. An eternity is being prepared somewhere, a perfect place, and we have to demonstrate here whether we deserve to be there. And if there were perpetual sunshine there would be no victory. So it's testing time again. From everything I have seen, man alive, we're passing this test again and with our colors flying.

Members of Congress huff and puff and hold hearings and strike poses. In between the Teapot Dome and Enron, we have endured two big wars and assorted lesser ones. During each a frightened segment of Americans were convinced that our country was going to hell. It never did. Many times it went through a little hell but it always came out on the other side of the crucible heat tempered and better and strong and more prosperous than before.

I discover in my travels that America is falling in love again with America. If the future appears darker than it is, it's because of the slimy bugs on the windshield of the world. The social misfits that we used to dispose of quietly are in the courts longer and in the news longer, but Americans are pledging allegiance again, and soldiers are saluted again, and college-agers are taking baths again, and the kids are coming home.

Young Americans after a generation of rebellion against the establishment are the establishment. More of them going to college, more of them interested in military careers, more filiality, expressing unabashed love for their families. One of the reasons so many of us sometimes yearn for the past is that we were all younger back then, but Robert Orbin says Americans should look forward to the golden years, enjoy them. Orbin says we should not dread the prime time years, we should anticipate them with enthusiasm. He suggests that one thing that might help is to raise the drinking age to 65.

And, you know, we can live even longer if we would behave ourselves, if we just practice self-discipline, because most of what ails us is self-inflicted, resulting from smoking and misuse of drugs and venereal disease and overdrinking, overeating. With nothing more than self-discipline, the New England Journal is convinced this generation could expect to enjoy an average active hundred years. Life expectancy of a girl baby born today is already 100 years. Kansas State, in this particular equation you are something else.

I'd rather talk to you with the world eavesdropping, when I start to say something that sounds like it might just be flattery for the home folks, but those 95 esteemed scholarships just in the wee fall of years, my goodness, what have you done to us in Chicago and Cornell and MIT? What have we been doing wrong? Well, 10 minutes from this minute one secret of your excellence will not be a secret anymore. It has to do with geography.

In Paul Harvey's career there were many WKRP's between Tulsa, Okla., and now. My first tentative steps away from home were to Kansas. A Dr. Brinkley had used his radio station in Abilene to sell young goat glands to old men and he was evicted from the United States. He fled to Mexico and his station with studios in Abilene and Salina and Milford was bought by Farmers and Bankers Life Insurance Company, redesignated KFBI, Farmers Bankers Life Insurance. The negotiation moved the station to the company's home base, Wichita, or wanted to, but the FCC was not going to let them make that move. They had to demonstrate that the station couldn't otherwise survive out there in the plains of Kansas. So what they did was to hire the least experienced teenage applicant they could possibly find to help them lose money and that was me. And when I made the station profitable I became disposable, but not before I had become a flag-waving Kansan.

Those were desperate depression days. Pop Conard, the fellow who wrote the greeting cards for a living, he offered me his Hays, Kansas radio station free if I'd move it to Fort Riley. I couldn't. Traveling to Kansas corners with the Norse Gospel Trio from our radio station to Many Mennonite churches in the state, I learned to love God and country and Kansas. Before you were born I was born again in Kansas. It was years later in Gov. Landon's gracious Topeka home on that beautiful screened-in porch that we discussed why he had never abandoned his roots. Then I learned from the author of the Gazette, William Alan White, how he had embraced a whole world with his wisdom without ever leaving Emporia, Kansas. And from those examples I never abandoned my own Midwest roots. My broadcasts to this day are home-based in Chicago.

There is a historic parallel in the inspiring founding of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. There are the Doctors Mayo inherited traditions generations deep, traditions of hard work, cleanliness, yes, godliness, and to this day Mayo of Rochester benefits from the environment, as do you. So your secret's no secret anymore. I wish I could promise you that other educational institutions would emulate yours, but I have watched Mayo Clinic proliferate elsewhere, Phoenix, Fort Lauderdale, and those were never quite the same.

So the common denominator in these historically fruitful lives, the brothers Mayo, the country editor from Emporia, the gifted statesman from Topeka, they converged genetically on the grass roots of this great nation and then they bloomed where they were planed, and so, Lord willing, shall you.

I want you to think on something, if you forget everything else I've had to say today. If by the dawn's early light tomorrow the American flag were flying over every minaret in the Middle East, if all of that were under our command, oil as fuel would still be doomed. The tomorrows are eight months pregnant. With wind power and assorted alternate energies, who else in the world is growing enough fuel for most of us and growing enough bread for all of us. In this new century, in this middle most of the Middle West, you are where the action is about to be. Kansans have been windblown and weathered, yet stubborn and tenacious. They have inherited and acquired qualities of character presently in desperately short supply. Kansas State is a rare lighthouse. Keep

that light lit, please.