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Commencement Remarks – Sunday, May 22, 2022

Good morning! Greetings to our trustees, our distinguished guests, our faculty and staff colleagues, to families and friends gathered from far and wide, and to our honorary degree recipients. And most especially, to the incredible University of Vermont Class of 2022 and all those graduating with advanced degrees today. It is my pleasure and my honor to preside over UVM's 221st Commencement exercises.

When I began as president, I was told, “you will love our Commencement ceremony. It’s such a magical setting, right here on the University Green.” I could hardly wait until the end of my first year to experience a UVM Commencement on the Green.

But I’ve waited nearly three years to be here with you! Like so many special occasions during this time, we modified our last two UVM Commencements to smaller events to accommodate health and safety precautions. This makes today’s ceremony, with all of you and your loved ones and your faculty and staff around you on this Green, especially meaningful for me.

Before I proceed, I have a task that gives me great pleasure as I know firsthand the pride and the worry of a parent who saw his daughter graduate from college last year and will see his son graduate next year.

Today is a time to thank those who cheered you on, helped you cope, sent you food and virtual hugs, and supported you during your UVM journey. Would all of the parents, grandparents, siblings, spouses, families and loved ones please stand so we can give you a round of applause? ... Thank you, on behalf of everyone graduating today—our students couldn’t have done this without YOU. Well done, families and friends!

Commencements are full of pomp and circumstance for a very good reason: they create a fitting conclusion to our graduates' time at the university. But, we use the word "*commencement*" for these ceremonies because the conclusion we are celebrating is also the beginning of what comes next.

The dual nature of the day is what makes it special.

As an engineer, that is also how I feel about identifying problems and finding solutions. There is a sense of accomplishment in solving a problem, in reaching the conclusion of your work. And there is also joy in knowing that this is just the beginning of that solution being put to good use. I ask, "What can I make better? Or easier? And how?"

Regardless of their field, that is the question I know our UVM students are asking: "What can we make better? And how?" I know many of you found solutions to these questions. Our Fulbright winners are heading to other countries to do their research, some of you are going to graduate or medical school, some to work for Beta, or in a museum or theater, or in an investment firm. And for those of you who haven't found your solution yet, I know that UVM has given you the tools to find it in the days ahead. Today, you are not concluding your quest for knowledge and greater understanding. Instead, the significant work you did to reach this point in time is just the beginning of the positive change you will make in the world as UVM alumni.

And so, in this new beginning starting today and each day thereafter, when you ask yourselves, "*what* can I make better?", you will continue to find answers in communities across Vermont and around the world, in hospitals across the country, in countless labs and businesses and classrooms, in all the exciting places you will call home.

When you ask “*how* can I make it better?”, your UVM experience will help provide that answer, and you will remember the support of your mentors, your friends and your family as you navigated uncharted territory. Together, all of us here today can make things better, and there is no more capable community for making positive change in the world than our UVM family.

It is an understatement to say you have faced some unexpected challenges on your path to this important day. Whatever path you envisioned upon arriving at the university is likely not the journey you actually took. But as individuals and as a UVM community, you asked “how can I make this better?”, and the solutions you found together were as creative as they were impressive.

You found new ways to learn, in classrooms and in just about every other corner of this campus. You found new ways to experience the professional world, at internship sites and in research facilities. You found new ways to socialize and support each other.

There is pleasure and deep satisfaction in the process of problem-solving. There is growth in the work of facing challenges -- something you’ll hear about from today’s Commencement speaker, whose own journey has been, literally, incomparable. There is pride in making a difference. And there is opportunity to build upon your success and engage in the process again and again.

Today is the conclusion of one part of your quest for knowledge, but your learning is only just beginning. There is no question that there are many challenges ahead; I am confident, though, that everyone graduating here today is fully equipped to be part of the solution.

Congratulations Class of 2022, and godspeed!