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## DR. STOLPER'S CHARGE TO THE GRADUATES

*(as prepared for delivery)*

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It is now my privilege to issue a “charge to the graduates,” but before I do, let me thank our commencement speaker: Dan, thank you for joining us today and for sharing your experience and wisdom with all of us. It has been a pleasure to have you here on campus and we look forward to welcoming you back.

Graduates, the same can be said for you: it has been a pleasure to have you here. I know it might not always have felt that way for you given the intensity and rigor of Caltech’s programs, but all of us here understand that you have achieved something special and rare. And the world needs people with the deep and thorough understanding of science and technology and the creativity to apply this understanding to solving important problems facing our society that are the hallmarks of Caltech and the education we strive to provide. The Caltech community could not be prouder of you, and I hope you are equally proud of yourselves.



And your parents and families as well could not be prouder. I know this because as you have seen, I too, am today the father of a newly minted Caltech Ph.D. Sometimes I have watched, largely powerless to help, as he struggled with difficult challenges in his research program. But with the guidance of his professors, the help and support of his friends and colleagues, and the unconditional love and support of his family, he persevered and I have seen him exhilarated by the joy and wonder of discovery. I know that all of you are equally proud of your child and what he or she has accomplished, and you should be. Occasions such as today’s are a wonderful and special opportunity to celebrate our families and to be joyful in what today’s graduates—be they our children, siblings, grandchildren, spouses, or parents—have accomplished and their promise for even more to come.

But for me, every year the Caltech graduation makes me think about my family, and in particular about my grandfather. He was born in the late 1800s and lived for more than eighty years. He lived through a period in which the world changed an unimaginable amount. He graduated with an undergraduate law degree in 1915, then served in the Army Air Corps in World War I, became an inventor—we would probably call him an “entrepreneur” today—and started a company that manufactured ignition systems for cars; he played semi-pro baseball, started two successful companies with my father, and for 20 years was a professor of constitutional law. Finally, when he was 69 years old, he earned his Ph.D.—almost 50 years after he graduated from college. I remember attending his graduation when I was nine years old. It was one of the most significant events of my childhood, and when he gave me his academic robe for my own graduation, I could not have been more honored. I wore it when I received

my Ph.D and I have worn it every year since at Caltech commencements. It is faded and a bit tattered now, but today it reminds me and my family that four generations of my family are spanned at today's celebration.

I strongly believe, as Dan Yergin emphasized it in his address, that today's graduates will live through a time that will see changes as great as those seen by my grandfather. And for this reason, your paths will likely have as many if not more discontinuities than his did, and your post-Caltech career will surely take you in unexpected directions as the world changes dramatically over your lifetimes. But I am confident that your Caltech education will empower you not only to ride the crests of the waves resulting from these changes, but also to help define some of these changes.

So here is my charge to you: let yourself be willing to explore, to take risks, and as John Dabiri said last night to today's bachelor of science recipients, and Dan Yergin said to us all this morning so well, let yourself be willing to fail. You are well equipped to move in unanticipated directions, and not only is this expected, it is something we encourage and celebrate.

So try to do something special and unexpected. Perhaps more important, believe that you can ... because you already have.

As I mentioned to the graduate students at lunch yesterday and the undergraduates at dinner last night, I believe that the true impact of a university on the world is evident in the accomplishments of its graduates. It is largely our alumni who represent Caltech to the world, and whose lives, work, and impact shape the ways in which Caltech is known. So yes, we expect great things of you, but that is because you have proven already that you are capable of them.

So, to all our graduates and your families, congratulations. It has been our pleasure having you here and we look forward to welcoming you back.

Best wishes to you all!