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Enabling the Future — Remarks from Pardee RAND Commencement 2016

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RAND president and CEO Michael Rich gave the following remarks at the 2016 Pardee RAND Commencement on June 18, 2016.

To our graduating fellows; their families and friends; Pardee RAND faculty; the Board of Governors; RAND trustees, staff, and alumni; and other distinguished guests, I join the dean in offering you a warm welcome to RAND's headquarters campus on this glorious day for this very special occasion.

I have a deep affection for the Pardee RAND Graduate School because it has played an important role in my 40-year career at RAND. I've taught courses, advised students, and chaired many dissertation and qualifying-exam committees. For a decade, I chaired the admissions committee—including the one that admitted musician Arthur Brooks. If you knew the caliber of the people we do not admit, you would appreciate why that experience is equal parts awe-inspiring, and humbling.

I came to realize that Pardee RAND is even more than an incredible educational institution. It is more than a preeminent training ground for the next generation of policy leaders. It is one of the RAND Corporation's most distinctive and vital assets.

Students, like the ones we honor here today, bring a rich diversity of experience and infuse RAND's environment with important new ideas and perspectives. At the same time, by working alongside RAND's experts on real-world projects—1,000 of them—our students gain insights and practical experience that are simply unmatched among their counterparts at other graduate schools.

This synergy can generate new ways of looking at difficult problems, new methods and approaches for dissecting and rebuilding systems and processes, new ways of outlining options and solutions.

Because the School operates free of the bureaucratic constraints and organizational rigidity of our public-sector clients at RAND, it has unusual flexibility, freedom, and agility, and these can produce a rare spirit of discovery.

In short, the RAND/Pardee RAND relationship can help create and then fuel the sparks of innovation that we need to continue our long history of creative problem solving.

I have a vision for Pardee RAND in which the School plays an even greater role at RAND, serving as a think tank within the think tank—a bold place to think big, to swing for the fences. A place to take important risks, in a world where tolerance for experimentation is sadly shrinking.

The RAND–Pardee RAND relationship is the key to combining the ingenuity and the nitty-gritty practical experience required not just to conceive solutions to major policy problems, but to see them through to implementation. This is the combination that will help RAND transform the science, art, and practice of policy analysis yet again.

The dean and I, along with many others, are working to make that vision a reality. Stand by, because we will need your help, too.

Today, though, we are here to honor an incredible graduating class. We have a remarkable roster of speakers to offer wisdom and advice. I am not going to presume to compete with their insights. But in reflecting on the distinctive brand of policy analysis that was invented at RAND and is taught at Pardee RAND, I always think of a line in *The Wisdom of the Sands*, the memoir of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Paraphrasing the translation, he wrote, “Your task is not to foresee the future, but to enable it.”

Enabling the future. To me, that’s always been a thrilling proposition. A daunting one, too.

Enabling the future is what RAND has been doing for nearly 70 years. Whether it is identifying the building blocks for the space program, the Internet, and artificial intelligence; devising and shaping policies to make individuals and societies healthier, safer, and more prosperous; or tackling the most dangerous and complex risks to our security, we have been helping policymakers base major decisions on evidence about what works and what doesn’t work. We’ve been enabling the future.

Enabling the future is what your time at Pardee RAND has prepared you to do.

Your coursework has equipped you with a sensational analytical toolkit, and your on-the-job training has given you a chance to apply those tools in the role of trusted adviser.

But, your experience here was not really about the tools and techniques you’ve learned. It wasn’t about the products you helped to create—the memos, articles, books, reports, and presentations. In coming to Pardee RAND and contributing to the work of the RAND Corporation, you have dedicated yourself to using evidence to make a real difference in people’s lives: Using evidence to enable the future.

I’m often asked whether RAND-style policy analysis—objective, nonpartisan, based on fact, not conjecture or ideology—what you’ve learned to do as a student at Pardee RAND—I’m often asked whether there’s a role for it in today’s world of gridlocked government and hyper-partisan politics.

My answer is: More than ever.

What else will enable the kind of future we all want and that our children deserve?

To our graduates here today, I say thank you, and congratulations on your achievement.



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ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT
HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE
INFRASTRUCTURE AND
TRANSPORTATION
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
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