



**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
SPRING CONVOCATION
JUNE 7, 8, 9, 2006**

Convocation Address

By

Dr. Rudy North

Founder of Phillips, Hager and North and President of North Growth Management Ltd.

An honorary doctor of laws was conferred on Dr. Rudy North during the Faculty of Business Administration Ceremony on Friday, June 9, 2006 at 9:45 am. The following is Dr. North's convocation address.

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. President, members of the graduating class of 2006, honorees and guests.

I am deeply honored to be receiving the Doctor of Laws degree from SFU – a truly progressive and visionary University.

President Stevenson has referred to my business career, interest in supporting education, and passion for environmental issues. This is pretty ordinary stuff compared to the achievements of typical recipients of honorary degrees from SFU. I have no personal anecdotes or good jokes today. I wish instead to congratulate and challenge today's graduating class.

Today is primarily a celebration of this year's graduating class. To say that you have been given a degree isn't accurate. You have earned a degree and been given a certificate to acknowledge the fact. Graduation is an exciting time with the opening up of great opportunities. The real excitement, however, is just about to start as you go out and seize these opportunities.

Having stated the obvious, I am going to attempt a short talk that may seem to border on hyperbole until you reflect on the significance of the problem. This should come from somebody more qualified or credible than me — but — all we can do is work with what we have —so here I go—

In the roughly 250 years since the beginning of the industrial revolution, mankind has benefited from unprecedented growth of material prosperity, technological expertise and knowledge in general. Our way of life, at least in the developed world, and much of the developing world, is good beyond the imagination of earlier generations. To achieve this, modern society has bought into a philosophy of pursuing material growth at a rate that is unsustainable over the long term, and that is destroying the natural environment upon which life as we know it depends. The dilemma is that growth is still obviously needed for society to function:

- There is a challenge here
- Let's just say that a culture of **smart growth** has to be developed.

This is your great opportunity. It will require getting involved by becoming knowledgeable on the issues surrounding sustainability, making your lifestyle less damaging to the environment and, through your employment, looking for ways to make mainstream economic activity more sustainable or even being at the cutting edge of some significant new developments through involvement with one of the many new entrepreneurial businesses or NGO's that stress sustainability. Change is needed; you will find getting involved both challenging and personally fulfilling.

In the meantime, global warming is the most obvious manifestation of the ecological crisis we are creating. Global warming is an accepted fact by the world's leading and most credible scientists, ordinary citizens and responsible governments. It is, as Al Gore says, "An Inconvenient Truth". Pockets of denial are based on short term vested interests of the "business as usual" crowd. Some business people and politicians say we cannot afford to respond as effectively as we know how in order to meet the challenge. They say it would cost too much! These thinkers are, among other things, miscalculating the risk/reward tradeoff between what has become the universally accepted paradigm of economic growth versus sustainable, smart growth.

Wow – what an exciting time to be graduating – there is no other way to describe it. You will not be just another generation on the treadmill of human existence, you have been handed a big bleepin mess which is also the opportunity to launch a new era of human history which will ultimately prove more significant than the industrial revolution.

Congratulations

Thank-you