

Introduction and Commencement Address  
Virginia Tech University  
Kenneth R. Feinberg  
Administrator, Gulf Coast Claims Facility;  
Special Master, September 11 Victims Compensation Fund  
May 13, 2011

**Introduction of the 2011 Commencement Speaker  
Kenneth R. Feinberg by Virginia Tech President Charles W. Steger**

And now, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this year's commencement speaker — Kenneth R. Feinberg. Mr. Feinberg is an attorney and one of the nation's leading experts in mediation and alternative dispute resolution, and he is the managing partner of Feinberg Rozen, LLP.

When faced with unprecedented disasters, our country has called upon Mr. Feinberg time and again to bring the wisdom of Solomon, and he has willingly accepted the call to serve. He may be best known for serving as the Special Master of the Federal September 11th Victim Compensation Fund of 2001 and subsequently as fund administrator for the Hokie Spirit Memorial Fund following the 2007 tragedy on our campus.

Currently, he is administering the \$20 billion fund for claims following the 2010 BP oil spill. In 2009, he was appointed by the U.S. Treasury Department to oversee the compensation of executives at companies that received federal bailout assistance.

Mr. Feinberg has resolved thousands of disputes involving a wide range of interests and clients. He designed, implemented and administered an Alternative Dispute Resolution settlement program for Hurricane Katrina and other Gulf hurricane claimants. He also has served as distribution agent for AIG Fair Fund claimants, and has been the fund administrator for a variety of claimant funds totaling more than \$1 billion.

Mr. Feinberg received his B.A. *cum laude* from the University of Massachusetts in 1967 and his law degree from New York University. In 2004, he was named "Lawyer of the Year" by the *National Law Journal* and has been named repeatedly as one of "The 100 Most Influential Lawyers in America" by the *National Law Journal*.

Mr. Feinberg has served a unique role in the nation's recovery from some of the most tragic events in our recent history. Please join me in welcoming Kenneth Feinberg...

Thank you President Steger and distinguished officials of Virginia Tech.

Guests, faculty, parents and graduates of Virginia Tech. When I received my invitation, I asked President Steger what I should say. He suggested that I summarize my life over the past 50 years. I asked him how I could undertake such

a task in just a few minutes and he advised: “speak slowly!” A true confidence builder. The President has not lost his touch.

I will obey the first principle of an effective Commencement address – be brief! Since you are so close to liberty and freedom, you should not be unduly delayed by homilies about life, responsibility and obligation. There will be plenty of opportunity for you to confront all three after this evening’s celebration.

I wish to highlight just two basic points.

First, this wonderful school is a very different University than it was some 4 years ago when I became part of your community under very different and tragic circumstances. At that time, invited personally by President Steger to help the University administer a program to compensate the victims of the shooting tragedy, I was encouraged by the sense of community, by the degree of togetherness that bound the University family together. In determining compensation for the victims, we used unsolicited funds contributed to the University by alumni, friends, and compassionate citizens from around the globe.

Confronting this unprecedented tragedy in American history, the entire Virginia Tech Family – the school Administration, its faculty, the students, parents, and the Blacksburg community itself – all set an example of empathy, determination and kindness, to help the victims cope with death and injury.

The idea of the Hokie Spirit Memorial Fund -- the name given these donations -- did not miraculously appear. It was carefully crafted by individuals, exhibiting a healthy dose of creativity, vision, practicality and understanding. I salute all of you, who were here, for the manner in which you dealt with tragedy. You taught the Nation how a community can grieve, while responding to life’s misfortunes.

Second, graduates, take full advantage of the opportunities now available to you with the benefits of a Virginia Tech degree. It is very special proof of your success to date. But, take nothing for granted. Do not assume that your degree guarantees future success. Very little in life is guaranteed. Nor is life always fair. Nowhere is it written that your graduation here this evening provides you a free pass to a successful future. But, it certainly gives you a head start.

My legal career over the past 25 years, starting with Vietnam veterans harmed by Agent Orange, the compensation Fund passed by Congress after the 9/11 Terrorist attacks, the financial meltdown in 2009, and, currently, the environmental tragedy resulting from the BP oil spill – is proof positive of the

uncertainties of life – and death. Taking chances, deciding which road to take, confronting obligations (and opportunities), these are decisions each of you will have to make over and over again whatever path you choose.

When asked to serve by the President of the United States, the Attorney General of the United States, the Secretary of the Treasury, a Federal Judge or the President of this distinguished University, I have responded to the call. Inspired in my youth by the lofty call to public service exemplified by President Kennedy, and later reinforced by working in the United States Senate for Senator Edward Kennedy, I have rallied to the cause.

My love of the law, my commitment to the legal profession which I cherish and my determination to promote the public interest and serve my fellow citizens, have all factored into my decision to accept these challenges.

Your University motto – Ut Prosim, “that I may serve,” has stood me in good stead over the past decades. And, you graduates should also keep the motto in mind as you move forward in various walks of life. For most of you, your daily efforts to make a life will not be as visible as a Hokie Spirit Memorial Fund. But you will make your own life’s dream. It can be the challenge of public service; we certainly need the talents of graduates like you engaged in the public arena. But, public service is only one chosen profession. Many of you will confront and conquer other challenges in business, education, the professions, the arts and sciences. You will reach your own spiritual and practical fulfillment in areas as diverse as human nature.

Your hard work has resulted in your reaching this milestone this evening. But it is the beginning of the race, not its end. The degree you hold in your hands provides you an opportunity, a head start, to achieve your life's ambition. But, do not delay or pause too long to reflect on your past success.

I believe there is a unique Virginia Tech spirit that is both pervasive and lasting. The identity and vision of Virginia Tech – education, growth, opportunity forged from tragedy – endure. It is an identity that is different from any other school in the land. Virginia Tech has become a “special place,” not only in your eyes, but in the eyes of the Nation. As such, you shoulder unique responsibilities, reinforced by the knowledge that you have already confronted and overcome unique challenges.

This spirit of Virginia Tech – its diversity, its generosity, its resilience -- resides in each of you. Every person's life is a story, with its highs and lows, its successes and failures. Personal choice – the road taken or not – makes out a life and helps define your character. It is imperative that, whatever your personal choices, you remember Virginia Tech and what it stands for.

I hope you will fulfill your own individual dreams. Do not be defeated, do not shirk from seeking your life's goal, and do not lose heart. You are our future – and the future is now! Enjoy this evening's celebration and prepare to live life to the fullest.

Remember the important message of that great baseball philosopher Yogi Berra – “When you come to a fork in the road, take it!”

Congratulations!