I believe McGannon’s words perfectly capture – in a single sentence – the UW experience. What you learn during your years here at the University of Washington will provide a strong foundation for the rest of your lives. I can attest to this firsthand. I absolutely attribute much of my success as a Leader, Army Officer and Soldier to the education I received as a student in the graduate school of public affairs, and the invaluable mentorship of the Dean of the School, Brewster Denny.

Over the past 39 years, I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity and privilege of leading Soldiers, America’s sons and daughters, in peacetime and in combat. I am incredibly proud of all that they have accomplished, particularly over the past decade in Iraq and Afghanistan. They have made tremendous progress; and, many of their most important achievements have been towards improving the lives of the people living and working in both theaters. The military profession is a unique calling. Individuals who serve in America’s Armed Forces volunteer to protect and defend the values and ideals of this great Nation. They serve others; they make countless sacrifices on behalf of their fellow citizens. Some make the ultimate sacrifice. We owe them, and their families, a debt of gratitude.

While military service is a principal form of public service, there are many others that are equally important. I am often reminded of the rousing speech General George S. Patton, Jr. delivered to the men of Third Army on June 5th, 1944, the eve of the Allied invasion of France. He told the men assembled:

"All of the real heroes are not storybook combat fighters… Every single man in this Army plays a vital role. Don’t ever let up. Don’t ever think that your job is unimportant. Every man has a job to do and be must do it. Every man is a vital link in the great chain."

This is absolutely true; and, it doesn’t apply just to members of the military. The contributions made by the men and women who wear the uniform of this great Nation are no more important or enduring than those of teachers, public defenders, members of law enforcement, first responders, humanitarian aid workers, public policy experts, religious and community leaders and others.

Unfortunately, these individuals, in spite of their remarkable accomplishments, do not often receive the same level of recognition for their efforts as public figures or uniformed personnel with very visible displays of rank and achievement. Yet, many of their accomplishments are equally or even more significant.

Your goal as you continue on in your lives and careers should be to make a lasting contribution to the

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world. However you choose, in whatever capacity, play a part, lead an effort aimed in some way at making a positive difference in the lives of others. Whether you spend a career in public service or a shorter period of time, make the most of it.

Most importantly, be an individual of character. Coaching legend John Wooden taught his players invaluable lessons about the game of basketball and life, to include the importance of hard work, discipline, character, loyalty and unwavering integrity. He said: “It isn’t what you do, but how you do it.”

Dean Denny stressed to all of us, the cause of public service is a noble one. This esteemed university has prepared you well to be responsible, upstanding citizens, capable and committed to making our world a better place. As Huskies, that should be our shared ambition.

NOTES
* Article excerpted from speech delivered at UW Evans School of Public Affairs Convocation, June 11, 2010

“Leadership is Action, not Position.”