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Ambassador Christopher Stevens Eulogy

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Monday, September 17, 2012
UC Hastings College of Law
Rachel Van Cleave

I am honored that Borzin Mottaghian invited me to speak here this evening, and I am grateful and incredibly fortunate to have known Ambassador John Christopher Stevens. Chris and I were in the same first year section and we were good friends in law school; he left a lasting impact on me, as he did with so many others. I want to take a few minutes to reflect on our time as classmates here at Hastings and to talk about how even from his earliest days, Chris always stood out.

Every person we take the time to get to know has something to teach us. I learned this from Chris Stevens and I continue to believe this. For certain, Chris was not just an amazing lawyer and leader, he was a teacher in the broadest and most wonderful sense of the word.

Chris was a generous and warm person who was truly open to anyone. It was impossible not to like him, with his contagious smile that could light up a room and his easy-going manner. Chris was so intelligent, but also keenly perceptive about people; he could connect with them despite their circumstances, care about them, and he could easily, and understandably, earn their trust. These are qualities that I know made him successful as a diplomat and Ambassador. ... I learned I could trust Chris because his priorities, goals and objectives weren't about Chris; they were about his family and friends, and his country and the global community. This was Chris' gift.

Chris was a champion of individual rights and freedom, and that's what led his life's work, about which he was so passionate. And so it's fitting to reflect on his legacy by remembering Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address. When this country was on the brink of civil war, Lincoln appealed to all Americans to find "the better angels of our nature." Indeed, Chris touched people in a way that brought out their better angels.

A few examples from law school illustrate how Chris reached out and helped me find my better angel.

After our first year of law school, Chris and I continued to take classes and study together. As we approached exams, Chris invited other students to join our study group. Initially, I was not thrilled – we all know study groups require a certain chemistry and carry a certain responsibility; sometimes newcomers aren't a perfect fit. However, I discovered that when Chris invited the new classmates, he was, in effect, seeking to build a formidable team that really understood the material at a deep level. Although invited to "study" with us, all the members of our group wound up teaching each other the subject matter from the perspectives we each best understood. Chris was able to identify these classmates because he listened and observed exceptionally well. Chris could elicit the best from others and he taught

me to be open to what our peers had to offer and to appreciate that by working together we would all learn and benefit more.

I came to trust him on this and it has been a lifelong approach that I have used in a variety of administrative roles and personal relationships, ... and that I know he continued to use to do so much good in the world.

When Chris was taking Trial Ad, he and his partner asked me to be an expert witness. At first it sounded fun, but actually it was nerve-wracking. It was in some field that I don't remember, but what I do remember is that it involved formulas and math. Chris' partner was a little frustrated that I was not able to essentially memorize my lines. I was frustrated, as well. After all, I think we can all agree that most of us go to law school to avoid math and formulas. Chris realized my problem right away and patiently explained the expert's field to me as well as the specific aspects of the testimony he needed me to master. He recognized that if he taught me the material in a way I could understand it, I'd be able to in turn explain it to the jury and withstand cross-examination. He was able to inspire within me an ability to rise to this challenge. And he instilled confidence in me that I could meet this challenge. He did that for all of us here at Hastings.

Chris was also quite a persuasive leader, but in a gentle way. Once I finished my note for the Law Review, I had decided that I would mentor a second year student, but not take on any greater role. However, Chris was on the Law Review Board and he needed help. He didn't ask for a personal favor, which he easily could have done. Rather, he appealed to my sense of duty and responsibility to convince me to take on a greater role, which, of course, I did and am glad I did. Again, he encouraged me to find the better angel of my nature and contribute to the larger effort.

These are just a few examples that illustrate how incredibly well -qualified Chris was for the responsibilities he took on during his nearly two decades of service to this country.

As I said, Chris was open to learning from anyone, and to teaching them, without regard to a person's religion, race or background. Indeed, he seemed to really relish opportunities to get to know other people. He combined genuine optimism with deep sincerity (as well as a great sense of humor) in a way that drew people to him. For Chris it was effortless, and always for a bigger purpose. We should all try to be more like Chris; the world would be a much better place if we were all more like Chris Stevens.

Chris touched my life, the lives of our classmates, and everyone who knew him. He also impacted people and places; he impacted entire nations; and he impacted the world. I heard a story on the news that he initiated a snowball fight with another diplomat in Jerusalem – a place filled with tension, yet Palestinians and Israelis joined in this playful game. In Libya, people are upset about Chris' death because of

who he was and how he touched them, and how he worked to make Libya a better place. That too was Chris' gift.

All of the qualities Chris embodied had a direct impact on his friends and colleagues, and on a personal level we all learned from him. The quality of being able to listen, to engage, and to be open are indeed part of what made him a successful diplomat, but they are also the qualities that are necessary for all of us when we encounter people who are different from us, whose cultures differ from our own, and whose beliefs may differ from ours. In a world where misunderstandings and distrust permeate so much of national and international relations, Chris stood as an example of how to build bridges between peoples, to reach across differences and to appreciate our common humanity. ... He sincerely believed in the better angels of our nature and sought to elicit them.

One last gift from Chris that I will share with you... and I have come to believe in these types of things...a week or so before Chris died I dreamt that, while I was walking in Golden Gate Park, I saw Chris. We sat down on a bench and talked and laughed for hours (in my dream I had to call my husband to explain why I was so late). We then said goodbye. When I woke up I felt calm, comforted and happy. Chris knew how to do that for all those whose lives he touched.

Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." Ambassador Chris Stevens gave much – to me, to Hastings, to our classmates, to all those who knew him, and to this country and to the world.

Thank you.