

Mayor Rothschild's University of Arizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health Commencement Address – December 14, 2012

Good afternoon. Welcome. Congratulations. I say that to the students for your achievement, to the parents for your support, to the faculty and staff for your passion and expertise. Nobody got to where they are today, or in life, alone. We are all connected.

The decisions we make, the actions we take, affect others as well as ourselves.

In many ways, the field of public health is founded on this fact.

A school of public health is unique in academia. Far from being an ivory tower, the connection between town and gown is close, and mutually beneficial. I know Tucson benefits greatly from having the Mel & Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health in our community.

A quick example: As mayor, I'm very proud of our public safety officers. The Tucson Fire Department in particular has worked with the University on several research projects. Most recently, one of your faculty, Dr. Eric Lutz, received a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to study the effectiveness of different respirators in live fire environments – with help from TFD firefighters. Your data, your findings, will help our firefighters breathe easier – literally.

What this school does, what you've learned about in your time here, has direct relevance to people's lives. Your degree matters, and so do you.

You're going to go on to exciting careers, to advanced study. Whether you work directly with populations, data, a combination of the two, or something else, you're going to make a difference. Plan for that difference. Explore, choose, commit to that choice. Decide how your life will impact others.

You know, running for public office is a unique experience. Unless you run for office someday – and don't rule it out, we need leaders with passion and expertise – you probably won't find yourself asked, day after day, "Why do you want to do this?" You probably won't hear yourself answer, over and over, what your plans are, what you're going to do for your community.

You won't have reporters do you this favor – and it is a favor – so you're going to have to do it yourselves. Keep asking yourself, "Why do I want to do this? How am I going to help?"

As I said, I was asked this question many times, and I started out saying the usual kinds of things when one reporter – I have to say, they tend to be a little cynical – said, basically, "What's your plan?" Now, coming from a business background, I know what a plan is. And I had to admit, I didn't have one yet. So I got to work with my staff, with leaders in the community who were willing to share their passion, their expertise, and I

came up with a plan. I called it my 180. And in the first 180 days of my administration, we accomplished most of what was in that plan.

What would we have done without it? Well, I assure you, we would have done a lot, but I don't think, without a plan, we would have done as much. Certainly, we wouldn't have done as much as quickly or as purposefully. So, here's lesson one: make a plan, and commit to it.

Lesson two is this: Your first plan won't be your only plan. The 180 went well. Mainly it kept us on track. So next, we brought out a plan we called the 360, for the next 360 days of my administration.

One of the items in that plan is something I want to talk to you about today. It's called, "Healthy Tucson."

Now, I used that heading in a very broad sense. It includes my Mayor's Advisory Task Force on Health & Wellness, but also four other task forces: on Youth, Seniors, Poverty and Education. Coming from a public health perspective, you see why it made perfect sense for me to put all five under the heading, "Healthy Tucson." They're connected – to each other and to health. Plus, "Healthy Tucson" sounds a lot better than "Mayor's Task Forces."

I could talk about any one of these task forces, but I want to stay with two: Health & Wellness and Poverty. I have outstanding volunteers on my task forces, including one on Health & Wellness who I'm sure you know: Mel Zuckerman. Thank you Mel. I am grateful for your advice.

Because I believe in having plans – or, more specifically, because I believe in having achievable, measurable goals – I've asked this task force to come up with plans we can implement, with our limited resources, that will improve health in Tucson.

I bring this up because, wherever you find yourselves, you too will be working with limited resources. You too will be looking for plans you can implement, goals you can measure, and achieve.

So together, we looked at factors that impact health, positively or negatively. Poverty, as you know, is correlated with poor health. That's no surprise to anyone here. What may surprise some, whether you've lived here a while or not, is that Tucson is the 6th poorest large metropolitan area in the U.S.

We hide it well. Lots of sunshine, scenic desert vistas – Tucson's poverty doesn't look like what we think of when we think of urban poverty – or rural poverty, for that matter.

So what are some of the deficits poverty imposes on health? More important, how can we make up for that shortfall? Again, keeping in mind our limited resources.

I bring this up because those who work in public health have taken on a special responsibility: always to think of poverty and its impact on health.

We came up with an approach I'd like you to remember: AIM. It's an acronym for Access, Information, Mobilization. Access, Information, Mobilization.

First, access. There's access to healthcare. We're still waiting on full implementation of Obamacare – and I call it that because I don't want us to forget who brought about what I consider to be a major advance in public health. As a mayor, though, I can tell you that cities have almost no role in delivering health services. In Arizona, and across the country, it's counties, generally, that receive the healthcare dollars, and shoulder the healthcare burden.

But along with access to healthcare, there's access to a healthy lifestyle. By that I mean healthy food, and opportunities to exercise. There, I think, cities can play a role – especially when we partner with nonprofit and other organizations.

You all learned about “food deserts” – areas without nearby access to fresh, whole foods – and how they tend to occur in poverty-stricken areas. Lack of access to healthy food is a major obstacle to choosing a healthy diet. And an unhealthy diet can lead to diseases such as cancer and diabetes.

Exercise, too, can be more difficult in poor neighborhoods, especially if they lack parks, recreation centers, or safe places to walk.

So, my Task Force and I decided we could work on access – access to healthy food and opportunities for healthy exercise.

In your careers, you too will work on access – access to healthcare, access to a healthy lifestyle, or access to things we take for granted, like buildings.

Not long ago, I was in Nogales, Sonora, about 60 miles from here, where I visited ASORBO, a non-profit that stands for Arizona – Sonora – Border. I toured ASORBO's shop where local workers, some in wheelchairs themselves, are making the RoughRider wheelchair. The RoughRider is a wheelchair suited for developing countries, like Mexico, where sidewalks are the exception, not the norm. You know about this because your college and faculty are involved in this project. I met with one of your faculty, Dr. Burris “Duke” Duncan, who showed me this and other projects they were working on, such as low-cost hearing aids that run on solar-powered rechargeable batteries. Taking that tour, seeing the work that was going on there, I can't tell you how proud I was to have this college, your college, here in Tucson. You are graduating from a special place, with a special purpose.

Back to AIM. After access, information.

Many people don't have the information they need to make healthy choices. They don't

know about lead paint in older homes, or they don't know to watch children around water, or they don't know how to turn healthy foods into delicious meals, or they don't know how much exercise they need to maintain good health.

So we need to get information out there, but we need to make it memorable and relevant, or it's not going to matter. We're all in information overload, all the time. Plus, people have an amazing capacity to tune out what they don't want to hear. It can be tough to get the right message across.

In your careers, you too will work with information – gathering, analysis, and getting findings and recommendations out there. Whatever they are, think about making them memorable, and relevant. Think about getting the right message across.

So that's information.

Next, mobilization – of resources and people.

In my Health & Wellness Task Force, we're doing a little of both. We're going to institute a Mayor's fitness challenge, with physical activity that families can do together, that we can all do together – even with limited resources. To mobilize folks, to get them out the door and moving, we're going to work on making it fun.

I used to have a teacher who said, "It don't cost much to be nice." While it occasionally costs me a great deal of effort to be nice, I appreciate the sentiment.

Fun is right up there with nice. Things don't have to cost much to be fun. So, when you're trying to get folks up and active, as we are, work on making it fun. People run on certain things. Fun is one of them. Children can run on nothing but fun for at least eight hours. I think there's a study that says that. Even people my age – and you've studied geriatric populations, so you know what I'm talking about – even we can be motivated by fun.

So when you need to mobilize people, don't forget to have fun.

Public health is an egalitarian proposition: health for all. A noble goal, it's grounded in practicality. Infectious diseases, chronic conditions, know no boundaries. If we leave them to fester in one population, they will move to another. We are all connected.

We need to work for access to things that make us healthy, that keep us healthy. We need to spread information about how to be healthy. And we need to mobilize people to act – for their own health, their family's health, their community's health.

Access and information put health within reach. Mobilization gets people to claim – or reclaim – the health that can and should be theirs.

Today, you graduate. AIM for health. AIM for a healthy Tucson. AIM for a healthy world. Thank you for what you're doing and are going to do for your communities. We are proud to call you graduates of the University of Arizona Mel & Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health.