

Keynote Address
Dr. Douglas A Hicks

Dean Peart, members of the faculty and staff, students, and guests of the Jepson School, I would like to challenge all of us this evening with some remarks concerning the challenge of leadership in a religiously and morally diverse nation. We face a number of public leadership challenges, but I would submit to you that how we think about and deal with the breadth of our deepest convictions and commitments is a keystone to finding constructive solutions together. We can view matters of belief and practice merely as a problem to be solved, or as a hornet's nest—as Thomas Jefferson put it—to be avoided; or we can look at our faith and morality as a set of resources that might contribute to living well together.

“The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present.” With these words Abraham Lincoln urged the Congress to help him lead America out of its greatest crisis. In our time, marked by anxiety over terrorism and globalization, we need a vision of leadership that draws people together for constructive problem-solving. Yet too many of our leaders choose divisive politics over inclusive leadership.

How we deal with these cacophonous expressions of God in public life is a matter of leadership. A former White House staffer puts it this way: In politics today, leaders must reach out to citizens from A to Z—atheists to Zoroastrians. Civic and political leaders will help shape the terms in which we navigate our religious differences and commonalities.

New students in the Jepson School of Leadership Studies: Welcome to our common enterprise that seeks or builds the high road—of understanding the wants and needs, convictions, and aspirations of all parties in the leadership process. By

taking into account the values, group dynamics, and conflicting interests of followers and leaders, we hope to provide insights to make our local, national, and international contexts better and more just communities. I hope you will approach your learning at Jepson with a sense of strong purpose of your education—not only for your own learning but also for the difference the careful study of leadership can make for our fractured world.