

*Adrian Tembel**

GRADUATION ORATION TO GRADUATES FROM THE 140TH YEAR OF THE ADELAIDE LAW SCHOOL

I OPENING

Thank you for your warm and generous welcome, Chancellor Catherine Branson AC KC and thank you for your distinguished career of service to South Australia and more recently this University. Thank you to the University for inviting me to speak today, I'm delighted to be here.

II MY GRADUATION

Graduates, it is clichéd to say, but it only seems like yesterday that I sat in my graduation robe in this magnificent hall, just as you do now. I was happy, but in my innocence — perhaps better described as ignorance — I had no appreciation at that moment of the wonderful possibilities that lay ahead.

With the benefit of all the intervening years, and sadly as you can see from my receding hairline, there have been many intervening years, I wish to address you today on why I believe Adelaide Law School graduation ceremonies are significant.

Not just significant for you, your families and friends, but for all South Australians.

III STATE HISTORY

South Australia is a wonderful State. But it is yet to fulfill its potential.

It has enjoyed periods of strength and national leadership but its long-term economic performance has been mixed.

Fortunately, our recent performance has been stronger and we are now at a critical and positive stage of our history.

* Chief Executive Partner at Thomson Geer; Chair of the South Australian Productivity Commission; and Director of Menzies Research Centre.

This is an edited version of the oration presented at the Adelaide Law School Graduation Ceremony in May 2024.

Will we seize the long-term economic opportunity or not?

This will depend a little on luck, but mainly it will depend on the quality and energy of our most talented young people.

IV SPECIAL

Meanwhile, a little east of this hall sits the Adelaide Law School.

Since its establishment in 1883, this special South Australian institution has been a vital source of strength for our State.

Adelaide Law School graduates have not just enjoyed prosperous, interesting and respected lives, but just like Chancellor Branson, they have traditionally formed the nucleus of our legal system, government and in more recent years, business.

That means that you are all a select and important group of South Australian women and men.

You are not just fortunate, but you are the talented young people I was referring to a moment ago, the group who will decide our State's future.

V ADELAIDE WILL BE REWARDING

Many of you will feel compelled or attracted to leave Adelaide soon to experience different worlds.

I do not discourage or encourage you to do so. You must choose your own path.

I do, however, want you to know that a deeply stimulating and influential life is available if you stay in Adelaide or return home in your professional prime.

This opportunity is open to every one of you. Not just the established or gifted, but also those of you who perhaps like me, may have at the start of your law school life, felt socially and culturally a little out of your depth.

For me, leading and then building this city's largest national law firm, the only major Australian law firm today that is not headquartered in Melbourne or Sydney, has been a rewarding experience.

In parallel, as the Chair of the South Australian Productivity Commission, helping drive our economic policies towards prioritising education and research has been fulfilling.

All of this and more has been experienced while living in Adelaide. A city with a rich history of its women and men making their mark nationally and internationally in the sciences, industry and public affairs.

VI CHOOSE SOUTH AUSTRALIA

So, while as a graduate of the Adelaide Law School I want you to know that each of you now has personal prosperity within reach; I want you to also understand that you have the unique and important opportunity to play a lead role in the development of our State in a historically significant way.

That is why this ceremony is not just important to you as graduates, and your families and friends, but to all South Australians.

Because if the talent in this hall grasps the local opportunity I described, I am confident our State will capitalise on its current momentum and finally take its rightful place as one of the great cities and states of not just Australia, but the world.

This outcome would benefit all South Australians, particularly those less fortunate than us.

VII CLOSING

From the heights of these exciting possibilities, I close this speech with some measure that I believe will serve you well.

As my grandfather would quote to my father, and my father would quote to me, and I'll also say to my children, including my little 11-year-old daughter Ginger who is here today (she only agreed to come so she could get the afternoon off school!): 'Life wasn't meant to be easy'.¹ This was of course a phrase made famous in Australia by our former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser.² It has a slightly gloomy outlook.

But it was based on George Bernard Shaw's quote that gets the balance right: 'Life is not meant to be easy, my child; but take courage: it can be delightful.'³

Congratulations to all graduates. I wish you all long and happy lives, that are hopefully South Australian lives.

¹ Interview with Malcolm Fraser (Mike Walsh, Mike Walsh Show, 16 August 1978).

² Ibid.

³ George Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah* (Floating Press, rev ed, 2010) 519.