



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

CELEBRATING **20** YEARS

Reclaiming Excellence

By Hank Brown

Remarks accepting

**The Philip Merrill Award
for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education**

with

Tributes by

John Cooney

Jerry Rutledge

Jerry Martin

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ACTA's 20th Anniversary Gala
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The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent non-profit educational organization committed to academic freedom, excellence, and accountability. Launched in 1995, ACTA has a network of alumni and trustees from over 1,100 colleges and universities, including over 20,000 current board members. The quarterly newsletter, *Inside Academe*, reaches nearly 13,000 readers. ACTA receives no government funding and is supported through the generosity of individuals and foundations.

Reclaiming Excellence

by Hank Brown

Thank you for those kind introductions. I am so thrilled to receive the Merrill Prize and the early American “Fire Clubb” bucket that marks the award. You know, I’ve had a number of jobs where a bucket would have been very useful—I did start in the cattle business, and there was a product that I didn’t realize I would find in other locations as I went along in my career. It may even have some relevance to the topic we’re going to discuss tonight.

Two decades ago, in a Georgetown hangout called the Tombs, Anne Neal and Jerry Martin laid the foundation for the organization that we now know as ACTA. At the time, American colleges and universities were recognized as “the envy of the world,” but Anne and Jerry understood that major reforms were needed for these treasured institutions to remain a source of pride for the nation. Joe Lieberman and I in the Senate were privileged to have our names associated with that effort, and I have followed the quest of those two temperate radicals—Anne and Jerry—ever since. I have been thrilled with the innovation and creativity they have brought to higher education. ACTA’s forthright call for academic quality is critical to America’s future and has echoed throughout higher education and government ever since ACTA began.

The company here tonight is a reassuring sign of broad interest in advancing new standards of excellence in higher education. All of you are part of that campaign. It is inspiring too to see past winners of ACTA's Merrill Prize. These are extraordinary individuals, as was the man in whose honor the award is named. I am delighted to be in the company of Tom Rollins, whose Teaching Company courses are my constant companions as I travel. Tom, you should know, is a major source of carbon dioxide pollution—the courses are so good I just stay in the car to finish listening to the CDs. KC Johnson, the distinguished professor of history and brave defender of academic integrity, is here, as is Louise Mirrer, whose guidance has so remarkably advanced the mission of the New-York Historical Society. We are also graced with the presence of David McCullough, whose inspired books on America's history have brought to life our nation's struggle for a "new world order." He is my hero and the hero of many Americans. And when I teach my course on the U.S. Capitol, I use his works so often that I freely confess to copyright infringement. I am honored tonight to be, along with Benno Schmidt, one of the two Merrill Prize winners who have served as a university president. Benno has set a standard of service worthy for all to emulate.

How do we understand our alma maters? Neil Simon authored a play called *Biloxi Blues*. It was made into a movie and the substance of the closing lines have stuck in my mind. At the conclusion of the film, the main character says: "As I look back now, many years later, I realize my time in the army was one of the happiest times of my life. I am not sure why, as some awful things happened, but it may have been wonderful, because I was young at the time."

We all have fond memories of our youth and the colleges we attended. We assume that the terrific experience we had is still happening for the young people who go to those institutions. But is it the case? Have things changed? The need for ACTA and its vision

of academic excellence is greater now than it has ever been. ACTA holds the promise for a bright future if it is successful in ensuring that academic quality survives.

In the 1970s, Nan and I lived in Greeley, Colorado—I worked in the livestock and meat business. Greeley was founded in 1876, the same year as the state, and on the centennial anniversary in 1976, there was a big parade and celebration in town. I recall a local radio reporter doing street interviews, and one of the interviewees was an elderly gentleman named Jan Swenson. The reporter asked him how long he had lived in Greeley, and he replied, “99 years. I was the first settlers’ child born in Greeley.” The reporter said, “My goodness you must have seen a lot of changes in that time.” Jan said, “I have, and I’ve been against every darn one of them!”

Here are a few changes I’d like to see. I hope you are not against every darn one of them!

Let’s start with cost and debt and the drivers of cost and debt. There has been a dramatic change since World War II: the remarkable increase in cost of higher education. Almost every U.S. endeavor has benefited from the development of technology over the last 60 years, but higher education has consistently increased in cost at a rate much higher than inflation, in spite of the advance of technology. Why is this?

The amount of teaching expected of faculty has a huge effect on cost (to say nothing of educational quality). When I left the U.S. Senate—it was such a privilege to serve there—I happened to come down in the elevator with Mark Hatfield, a wonderful gentleman who had served, before coming to the Senate, as governor of Oregon and before that as a teacher. He asked me what I was going to do, and when I told him I had an appointment as a professor at the University of Denver, he recalled his first job teaching, which was shortly after World War II: five courses each term, each one three semester hours, and that while also being an assistant dean and doing his research on the side.

As most of you know, senior tenured faculty today teach one to two courses. The implications for college cost are self-evident.

I want to suggest another major influence: the way we assist higher education at the federal level, with our wide range of Pell Grants, student loans, and other assistance programs. In most economic models, if prices rise, fewer consumers with limited resources can afford your services, and thus, market forces limit your ability to increase the cost to the consumer. In higher education, however, government grants and loans help cover the increasing prices for those with limited resources. Generally, the higher the cost of attendance at an institution, the greater financial assistance students receive from the federal government. If you hold down the operating cost of your institution and with it the price that students pay, the result is that your students receive less assistance. Is it really a mystery why tuition has risen?

Furthermore, if you are a student and you work hard to pay for your own college tuition—I worked 30 hours per week and two jobs in the summer to pay for my undergraduate tuition—they reduce the amount of scholarship assistance. If you don't work and save for college, they increase the assistance. It is exactly the wrong lesson for our students.

Research shows, interestingly, that a moderate amount of employed work means students do better academically. Finally, think about how we grant loans. Loans are granted without connection to a major. Students regularly take out loans that accrue way beyond what the career will pay. These loans cannot be discharged in bankruptcy. They are a lifetime gift that follows students wherever they go.

Simple common sense would bring reality to higher education.

But I'm afraid I'm not finished cheering you up. Let's look now at curriculum and academic quality.

Many of the great private colleges and universities started as religious institutions. Their curriculum, based on denomination, brought a wonderful heritage of theology. Gradually, American schools developed a curriculum that would have made the ancient Greeks proud: rhetoric, logic, history, and more. No less a personage than Woodrow Wilson—the only U.S. president to hold a Ph.D.—also contributed to the collegiate core curriculum. As president of Princeton University, he called for a core that embraced such topics as classics, mathematics, and science. As president of the United States during World War I, he addressed the need for Americans to understand their history with an initiative to make such courses part of the college curriculum: Its implementation in the midst of war fervor was problematic, but at its heart was the simple truth that we need to know what it is we are defending. Over the years, however, many of our universities have modified their general education requirements to favor courses that faculty wish to teach rather than courses that society sees as essential for citizenship and for producing a living.

It is natural as we go forward as a nation that new disciplines and new skills would become part of core curricula, reflecting the thoughts and needs of our society. These decisions should embrace the ideas and suggestions of trustees, employers, and other stakeholders, as well as the faculty. To be relevant, the core curriculum must reflect more than just the judgment of the faculty alone. The desire of faculty to teach favorite courses doesn't trump preparation for a successful career and meaningful citizenship. Trustees must stop delegating to faculty sole authority over what is included in the core curriculum.

The weakness of the core curriculum is matched by the weakness in grading standards. Every day others judge us and measure our performance. Understanding how others see us can be very helpful whether we agree with their judgment or not. When an audience falls

asleep during a speech, it sends a clear signal to the speaker. When the young lady you ask out on a date declines your invitation because she has to wash her hair that night or must watch *Bowling for Dollars*, it may convey a message about your approach. If your teenager rolls his eyes during your “heart-to-heart talk,” you have a clue about whether your message is getting through.

Measurements and feedback from others are not always pleasant, but they make us better people and better performers. Somewhere we gained the impression that our youth will be damaged by frank evaluations and criticism. The aversion to keeping score in the little league soccer games has spread to higher education. My alma mater vehemently denies that it has experienced grade inflation. But a grade average that put you in the upper tenth of your class when I went to college now earns you a ranking in the middle of the class at the same institution.

Things were different not so very long ago. When I was at the University of Colorado, students told the story of Mrs. Rayburn’s freshman English class. On the first day of class, there was no “Good morning,” no “Welcome to Freshman English!” She would simply tell the freshmen how Byron “Whizzer” White, destined for the U.S. Supreme Court, had straight “A’s” from grade school through Yale Law School, except for a B-. From her class. And she advised, “He was damned lucky to get it!” As students trailed down to the dean’s office, they were given the heart-stopping information that they were not allowed to drop that course. A different era.

I recall mentioning to one of the professors that I most admired that 90% of the graduating class of Harvard had earned honors. As a justifiably proud Harvard graduate, he emphatically pointed out that their classes were made up of incredibly bright students who merited recognition. He was, of course, correct about the quality of the Harvard

students, but how do you differentiate among any group the good from the great? How do you motivate high performers when nearly everyone gets an “A”?

Grading is an essential communication in helping the student learn and perform. Without rigorous grading, we don't help our students; we cheat them. It is a cancer eating away at the motivation so essential for strong performance in higher education.

We are, overall, slipping into a system of grading so dishonest that it dishonors the academy. It leads us to recognizing a final challenge I want to raise tonight: the intellectual breakdown we risk through the erosion of academic freedom.

Over five centuries ago, Sir Francis Bacon advocated what became known as the scientific method. Conclusions were to be based on objective reasoning and empirical evidence—not preconceived notions. Happily, institutions of higher education came to embrace this freedom of thinking that respected and even encouraged inquiry and protected those who might hold viewpoints out of the mainstream. Academic freedom is a product of Bacon's worldview, and our reverence for academic freedom has played a part in our advancement in the realm of science, as well as political and economic understanding. At the heart of all of these wonderful developments is a willingness to listen to those who disagree with us. It is the essential catalyst of progress.

But in recent years, academia has moved away from intellectual diversity. Departments too often favor those who think like they do. They give short shrift to their obligations to prepare students to understand a wide range of viewpoints rather than a dominant academic point of view. Incredibly, some universities have begun to restrict certain works or concepts from being mentioned. Concern for the feelings of others is appropriate behavior, but thought control is the enemy of true scientific inquiry.

I don't know about you, but when I look at our political debates, I am disheartened. The gulf between the parties and their rhetoric is such that often the shouts are louder than the logic, and we fail to listen to each other and to the good ideas that others may bring. If we build a society in which we divide ourselves into camps and are unable to honor and understand people with different ideas, we have permanently harmed America. Periods when mankind embraced real intellectual freedom and stood up for the rights of those who expressed new and different ideas have in reality been few and brief, but they were special moments when society moved forward. Friction and the competition of ideas make a more creative and progressive society. That must always be the ethic of the colleges and universities that prepare our citizens and future leaders.

We have been a nation of problem solvers, and although I've shared a lot of worries tonight, ultimately I am optimistic that we will find solutions. We will reclaim and regain excellence. ACTA's 20 years have raised the bar for our expectations of higher education. ACTA is needed now more than ever before. Thank you for being part of this effort.

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The following are excerpts from tributes given in honor of Hank Brown at the presentation of the Philip Merrill Award on October 16, 2015.

John Cooney

*Associate Vice President for Administration, University of Colorado;
former Senior Professor of Psychology, University of Northern Colorado*

It is a joy for me to be here to recognize the Honorable Hank Brown for his outstanding contributions to liberal arts education. I had the distinct honor and privilege of twice serving with him during my career in higher education: first during his presidency of the University of Northern Colorado and subsequently during his presidency of the University of Colorado. His record of accomplishments is truly astounding. I will highlight only a few of his remarkable achievements in the often frustrating world of higher education.

At UNC, President Brown cut administrative expenses by approximately 10% and persuaded the trustees to implement policies to cap administrative spending. Average faculty salaries increased approximately 26% during his four-year tenure. Hank believed that would make it possible to recruit better faculty and that better students would follow. It reflected Hank's deep respect for faculty. He is, at heart, a student and a teacher who values the complexity of teaching, scholarship, and artistic endeavors.

But raising faculty salaries meant reallocating resources. It meant eliminating over 100 administrative positions. He took the brunt of the criticism and all of the responsibility. At every turn, he was open, transparent, and accountable for his decisions.

UNC was funding a public radio station at \$500,000 a year. Now it is supported entirely by its listeners—a novel concept. Gauging the

outrage from the faculty, you would have thought the president had eliminated tenure. Instead, he preserved tenure and gave faculty a raise. The campus bookstore was privatized and remains successful today as a private enterprise. Savings were redirected to the core mission of the university. Having once served as a student body president, Hank knew to challenge the quagmire of student fees. The net result of his efforts was to consolidate student fees and lower total fees by 15%.

His work began to pay dividends. Levels of private giving set records each year, doubling assets from \$44 million to \$93 million. The university's endowment, as well as funding for research and sponsored programs, doubled.

It is a long, hard struggle to change academic culture with its deep mineshafts of self-interest and mistrust, but Hank started the conversation at Northern Colorado—and at the University of Colorado—to help the university community realize and embrace the core mission of the university: the sustenance of the liberal arts and sciences and the professional schools they support. This evening I have revealed only the tip of the iceberg of what can be accomplished when decisions are guided by noble principles. Careful study of Hank's perspicuous lessons by university trustees, alumni, administrators, faculty, and students will ensure the survival of liberal arts education for the next generation. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the honor of being here this evening to recognize your gifts to the liberal arts and sciences.

Jerry Rutledge

President and Owner, Rutledge's Inc.; former Chairman, University of Colorado Board of Regents

It is a privilege to be here tonight and participate in honoring Hank Brown. And what an inspiring evening! When some presidents are hired, they join institutions that already have high academic standards, sound financial support, a growing endowment, and all the other plusses. And then there are new presidents who instantly confront huge challenges. I can assure you, being chair of the Board of Regents of the University of Colorado, that when we hired Hank Brown, he joined that latter group. We had many, many challenges when he showed up. I'm going to mention some of those, and then I will explain how he went about addressing those challenges.

Hank inherited a university that had a deteriorating relationship with our governor, the legislature, the state auditor—and that resulted in a slashing of state support. We also had drug and alcohol problems on one of our campuses, with plenty of negative attention from the media. It was no surprise that the university saw declining donations. And then he had a professor named Ward Churchill who had brought an immense amount of negative publicity. Hearing your laughter, clearly you understand that situation, and I won't embellish that.

Hank's success in dealing with all of these issues was truly remarkable. Almost immediately, because of his reputation and relationship with the governor's office and legislators, he turned around those dynamics. And as a result, the University of Colorado received the biggest increase in state funding in the history of the university. He also more than doubled the donations to the university, reaching a record level. At the same time, he more than doubled the private research dollars. It was evident from the beginning and throughout his presidency that he had changed the fortunes of the University of

Colorado, and under his leadership, the university regained the respect of the public and the media. It took a commitment to transparency and openness, but that paid great dividends. And last but not least, he was able to do something seemingly impossible and fire a tenured professor: The Ward Churchill saga finally came to an end.

Hank Brown's presidency is one of the high points in the history of the University of Colorado. He led with integrity, transparency, decisiveness, humility, and a great Hank Brown sense of humor. He is purely and simply a remarkable man. I would like to thank you, Hank, for your service to the University of Colorado and to all of higher education. And I thank you for your friendship.

Jerry Martin

Founding President, American Council of Trustees and Alumni; former Professor and Chairman of the Philosophy Department, University of Colorado

I found my first hero in life when I was in the fourth grade. My mother took me to see *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*—that wonderful movie with Jimmy Stewart who is a character of common sense, basic decency, and high purpose. It was many years before I actually met Mr. Smith, and it was when I got a congressional fellowship, went to Washington, and found Mr. Smith representing the fourth district of Colorado.

The thing in the air at the time, the major focus of effort, was that deficits were out of control. Yet, hard as everyone looked at the budget, they simply could not find anything to be done about it. Our Mr. Smith thought, well, maybe we could just start at least with our own operations. He noticed we had automatic elevators in the congressional buildings. Why do we have elevator operators also?

I believe our Mr. Smith lost the vote on that occasion. He went on though and won many battles. Those that weren't quite won were close and, ultimately, I believe, he carried more amendments in the Senate than anybody except the majority leader.

Then Mr. Smith went to campus. The same qualities. What did he find? He found the university was paying for two radio stations, only one of which had any role in the instructional program. That had to end. He found there was one administrative unit where the people didn't come to work. They did "work out of their home" and didn't have anything tangible to show for it. So he took appropriate action. And at the end of the first summer session, he called a meeting of all the people involved in the program to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. They responded, "What do you mean? We've never had a meeting on those questions." It was the first time there had been such an evaluation: It was a cultural change for the university. Most

important of all, our Mr. Smith believed deeply that students should be able to hear both liberal and conservative points of view. It was plain common sense, but for today's academy, it was highly controversial. He got to work to make sure it happened.

And then, our Mr. Smith met the accreditors. He was all prepared to talk about the quality of the academic programs, what they were doing to improve student learning, how they were tracking the outcomes of academic programs and of student learning. But the accreditors kind of brushed those topics aside. Were the faculty happy? That was their concern. And they seemed mostly concerned to make sure administrators weren't administering and governing boards weren't governing. To our Mr. Smith, that seemed upside down, so today he is leading ACTA's efforts to hold accreditors' feet to the fire and look at concrete ways to reform that system—in something like Mr. Smith's principles of common sense, human decency, and high purpose.

For all these things, for being our Mr. Smith, we thank you, Hank Brown, we thank you.

Hank Brown



Hank Brown has guided and supported ACTA's higher education reforms for 20 years, serving as a member of ACTA's national council at its founding in 1995 and as a steady advisor ever since.

He is a tireless champion of high academic standards, academic freedom, and integrity in college governance. He has stood firmly for these principles as a U.S. Representative, U.S.

Senator, and college president. From 1998 to 2002, Hank served as the 11th president of the University of Northern Colorado and from 2005 to 2008 as the 21st president of the University of Colorado. At both institutions he put his reform ideas into practice. At UNC, he cut 11 administrative positions, saving one million dollars. He reduced the college budget by 15%, and his reallocations meant that 54% of the university's budget went directly to instruction—the highest percentage in the Colorado system. Hank raised standards for admission and created scholarships to draw more competitive students.

As president of CU, he advanced intellectual diversity, took action against grade inflation, and gave the president's office a reputation for transparency, integrity, and accessibility. A small but revealing sign of the tenor of his administration came on his first day in office when he relinquished the privilege of the president's parking spot. Hank's fearless leadership set a nationwide example for how public institutions of higher education ought to run.

He is now engaged in reforming higher education accreditation as a member of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, which advises the U.S. Secretary of Education. ACTA is proud to have him, not only as this year's recipient of the Merrill Award but also as a great friend and ally in fighting for reform.

The Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education



ACTA is most pleased to present the 11th annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education at our 20th Anniversary Gala. The prize is awarded with the advice of a distinguished selection committee, and it advances ACTA's long-term goal to promote and encourage a strong liberal arts education.

The Merrill Award is a unique tribute to those dedicated to the transmission of the great ideas and central values of our civilization. It provides public acknowledgment of the value of their endeavors and serves to inspire others. Past recipients of the award are Robert P. George, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and founder and director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University (2005); Harvey C. Mansfield, William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Government at Harvard University (2006); Gertrude Himmelfarb, Professor Emeritus of History at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (2007); Donald Kagan, Sterling Professor of Classics and History at Yale University (2008); Robert "KC" Johnson, Professor of History at Brooklyn College and The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (2009); Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., chairman, Board of Trustees of the City University of New York (2010); David McCullough, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian (2011); Thomas M. Rollins, founder of The Teaching Company (2012); Gary Gallagher, John L. Nau III Professor in the History of the American Civil War at the University of Virginia (2013); and Louise Mirrer, president, New-York Historical Society (2014).

The prize is named in honor of Philip Merrill, who served as a trustee of Cornell University, the University of Maryland Foundation, the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, the Aspen Institute, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Mr. Merrill was also a founding member of ACTA's National Council.



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