

Remarks accepting
The Philip Merrill Award
for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education

Re-liberalizing the Liberal Arts

by Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.

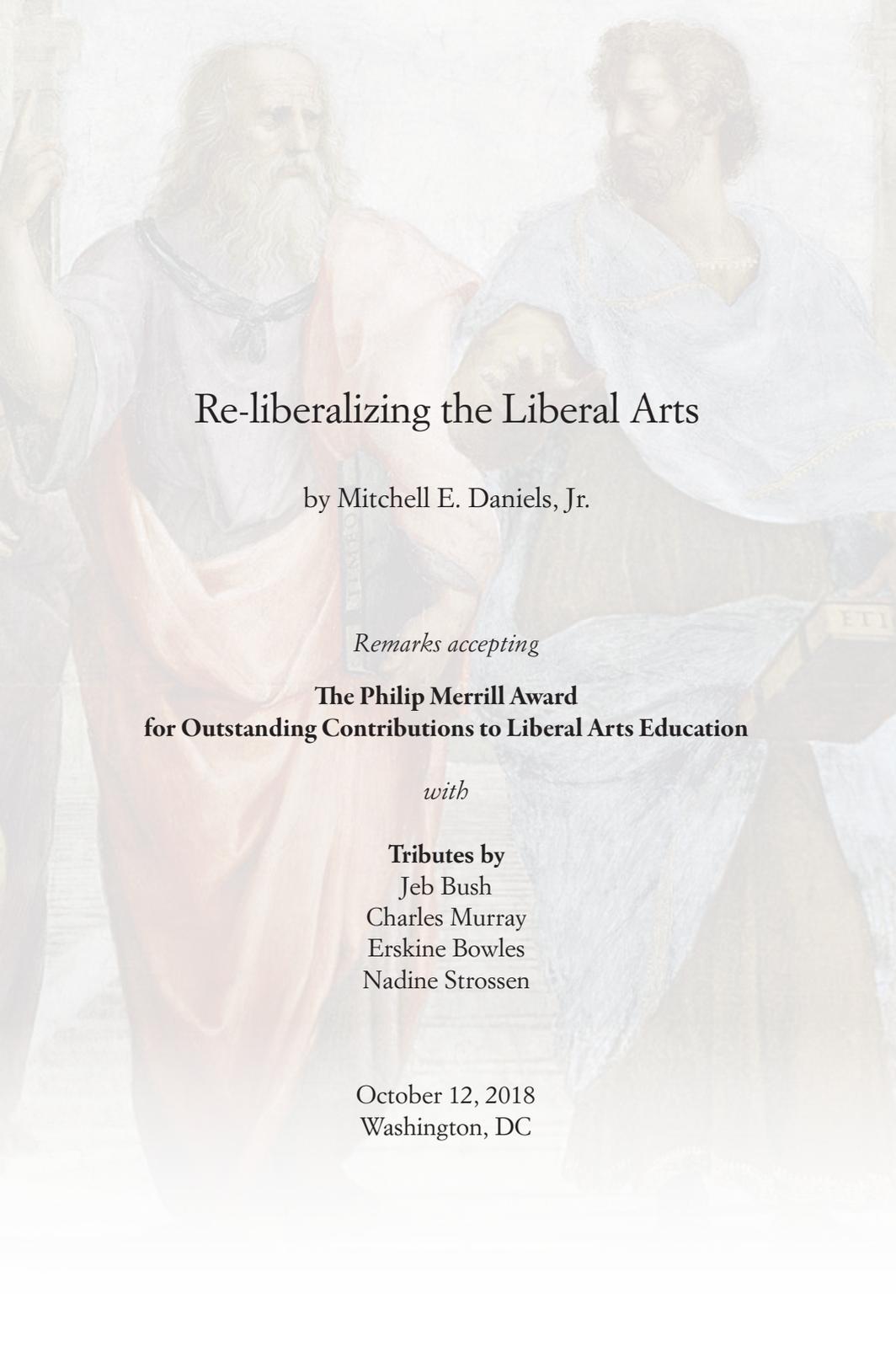
Tributes by Jeb Bush, Charles Murray, Erskine Bowles, and Nadine Strossen



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Jeb Bush

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October 12, 2018

Washington, DC

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Surely I'm not the only person here thinking about Bob Meusel. For the few to whom the obvious comparison has not occurred, I'll remind you that Bob Meusel was the New York Yankee third baseman who, though a creditable player in his own right, followed Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in the Yankee batting order, and is therefore largely forgotten. Following Dr. Robert Zimmer and the Niall Ferguson-Ayaan Hirsi Ali tandem to this podium leaves me in a similar position.

Given the Hall of Fame level impacts of their intellects and sheer courage, anything I've contributed to the cause we honor this evening is minor league. That fact leaves me all the more appreciative for your selection.

I may be almost as miscast tonight as Andrew Jackson was when honored at Harvard. Challenged by a mischievous dean to respond in Latin, President Jackson declaimed, "E pluribus unum, my friends. Sine qua non!", and sat down. I regret to inform this audience that you won't be quite that fortunate.

I was already deeply indebted to each of those gracious souls who risked their credibility by seconding the choice. There is no one from whom I have learned more, or whom I have quoted more frequently, than Charles Murray. That a person so wise, caring, and intellectually honest

should ever have been abused in places of alleged “higher” education is a travesty of the first order.

Erskine Bowles ranks as one of the great citizens of our time. To cite just one of his contributions, Erskine did more for his university in five years than I could hope to do for mine if I stayed for twenty. He has introduced me to more fascinating people and learning opportunities than anyone I can name.

Nadine Strossen is an icon of single purpose in an age of double standards, fidelity to principle in an environment awash in hypocrisy. I value our friendship especially because it coexists so amicably with our many disagreements.

During my last job, I chose Jeb Bush as my role model in all matters, but particularly education. I often consulted my imaginary “WWJD” bracelet when a difficult call presented itself. My deepest thanks go to each of these wonderful individuals, and my apologies at having imposed on their time and good will.

Relative merit aside, the brevity of my time in academic life makes me a highly unlikely choice for tonight’s recognition, or for any involving higher education. I have served only one institution, and that for less than six years, hardly enough time to make a serious dent in affairs. Moreover, I work not at a university known principally for the liberal arts the award celebrates, but at one from the other end of the spectrum.

At Purdue, by our land-grant heritage and by our current conscious strategy, the so-called STEM disciplines predominate; more than 60% of our undergraduates and an even higher share of our graduate students pursue engineering, chemistry, physics, agricultural and biological science, and the like. We are by that measure the third most STEM-centric school in the country. Not where “outstanding contributions to liberal arts education” seem likely to come from, unless one recalls that the medieval quadrivium was the STEM curriculum of its time. Whatever the logic of your choice, I am deeply grateful for it, and will work to live up to it in the remainder of my working days.

But reflecting ahead to this evening, and to the critical objective of redeeming, restoring, reviving, recovering, rejuvenating . . . pick your favorite “re” word . . . the liberal arts as we know them today, I began to think that it is a struggle for which newcomers and outsiders are not so poorly suited. Said differently, if we wait for reform from within the ranks of today’s liberal arts fields, we may wait forever, or at least a fatally long time. The concerns most often voiced about the current university scene—conformity of thought, intolerance of dissent and sometimes an authoritarian tendency to quash it, a rejection of the finest of the Western and Enlightenment traditions in favor of unscholarly revisionism and pseudo-disciplines—these and other problems are not unique to the liberal arts departments, but a host of surveys document that they are most common and most pronounced there.

A monotonously one-sided view of the world deprives students of the chance to hear and consider alternatives, and to weigh them for themselves in the process we call “critical thinking.” But, as this audience knows so well, something even larger is at stake. The entire enterprise of knowledge advancement depends on the clash of competing ideas.

It’s encouraging to see John Stuart Mill enjoying a modest revival. It was Mill who taught, “Both teachers and learners go to sleep at their posts as soon as there is no enemy in the field.” Former Stanford Provost John Etchemendy has written, “Intellectual homogeneity weakens the academy”; he labeled the ad hominem attacks that homogenous tribes often direct at dissenters “the death knell of inquiry.” Perhaps Princeton’s Keith Whittington has stated the point most concisely: “Ignorance flourishes where free inquiry is impeded.”

Incidentally, the widely criticized policy of lifelong tenure was created to protect diverse viewpoints from discrimination; where is its rationale in schools where everyone thinks so exactly alike?

Still, one hears the suggestion that it's not really a problem in an ever more technological world. If some of our English departments and sociologists want to render themselves irrelevant, let them.

I couldn't feel more differently. The worn-out joke about the stakes being so low in higher ed debates does not apply to this one. In the struggle to define what a genuine liberal education should be, the stakes could hardly be greater, because it can be argued that we have never needed effective teaching in the liberal tradition more than today. Even the most gifted young people often emerge from today's K-12 systems appallingly ignorant of either the history or the workings of their own nation's free institutions. Authoritarians of both Left and Right are eager to take advantage of their ignorance. There was a reason that the last sultans of the Ottoman Empire banned the teaching of literature and history throughout their realms.

The most vexing issues generated by the social media and biotechnology revolutions already have shifted from the technical to the philosophical, psychological, economic, and political. Next month, at Purdue's fifth annual "Dawn or Doom?" conference, scholars will examine the societal implications of these innovations, with philosophers and anthropologists and psychologists in leading roles.

The conference is part of our 150th anniversary, which we are celebrating with a year-long, homecoming-to-homecoming ideas festival. As we discuss what a world of 9 or 10 billion people, migration beyond our planet, or an end to human mortality might mean, the scientific questions are mere prelude. For the big matters, we'll be calling in the humanists, from the disciplines that gave "humanism" its name.

The long drift—perhaps "slide" is a more accurate description—from the finest that has been thought and said to the denigration of obvious greatness and the celebration of mediocrity has led to some natural confusion.

Few words I can think of generate more such confusion these days than the word “liberal.” Its use in politics morphed over the years, from describing policies aimed at liberating individuals into a complex of ideas designed to herd them into groups and limit their personal freedom. The dissonance became so apparent that its advocates have recently abandoned the term altogether for the label “progressive.” Fans of irony can savor the fact that self-styled campus “progressives” tend to be the most reactionary voices whenever something novel is proposed, pedagogically or administratively.

In the university context, the “liberal” arts have in many places become centers of the most illiberal viewpoints. Speech codes, forbidden words, compulsory “thought crime” reeducation, and other repressive policies have replaced the lively clash of ideas.

Conformity of thought, enforced by heavy-handed peer pressure and reinforced by generations of self-perpetuating personnel practices, has by now achieved comi-tragic proportions. At one prestigious eastern university, a friend recounts that, when he asked the history department chairman if he had any Republicans in his faculty, the answer was, “Have any? We don’t *know* any.”

Evidence of shoddy scholarship is another dilemma. Hopelessly abstruse, jargon-laden papers from so-called “studies” programs read like self-parodies. The recent findings that fewer than half the published studies across the social sciences can be replicated threaten to impugn entire disciplines.

Worst of all, too many practitioners have achieved the difficult feat of making the liberal arts boring. History has been rewritten without the heroes, the drama, the glory, the human elements. When the most captivating and thrilling literature the past has given us is not being “deconstructed” by inferior talents, it is being displaced by trendy treacle by eminently forgettable authors.

The group think and deep ideological loyalties that now prevail so monolithically across the liberal arts probably make widespread reform from within impossible. But, to twist a phrase, despair is not a strategy. There are some reasons for optimism.

Appreciation for the best of the liberal tradition is growing in other quarters, specifically in the categories of study sometimes disparaged as pedestrian or “vocational.” Businesses constantly tell us that, while technological understanding is essential in today’s workplaces, so too are the “soft” skills of communication and empathy. Here and there, one sees evidence that supply is rising to meet this demand.

At Purdue, our College of Liberal Arts has responded to this interest by crafting a two-year bundle of courses specifically chosen to equip a STEM graduate with the essentials of a liberal education. Enrollees in the “Cornerstone” program will read Locke, Hobbes, and Jefferson as well as other works in the Great Books tradition. Our Engineering College is strongly encouraging its students to sign up, and our Polytechnic Institute has made it mandatory.

And our Liberal Arts colleagues were also the first to respond to our appeal for the creation of three-year degrees. By devising academic maps, through which a student adds a course in certain semesters and takes others during the summer, the department now enables participants to complete the same number of credits in the three years that are conventional in many other countries, launching their careers a year sooner and saving substantial money in the process. Due perhaps in part to this new option, we were delighted to see enrollment in that college grow this fall for the first time in years.

I am happy to report that many of our liberal arts faculty have been active in shaping and promoting a free speech environment at our school. I am even happier to note that both our undergraduate and graduate student governments petitioned us to promulgate strong free

speech policies which, with Bob Zimmer's permission, our board did by adopting verbatim the statement I always refer to as "the Chicago Principles." Entering freshmen are walked through that policy, and then view a series of talks and skits illustrating the value of free inquiry, and the appropriate reaction to speech one finds wrong or, in the current vernacular, "offensive." With the memorable Chancellor of the California system Clark Kerr, we believe that a proper university "is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas."

We have not been without our arguments on these topics. Like many campuses, we experienced a small-scale replica of the eruptions at the University of Missouri. On a campus of some 42,000 students, maybe one or two percent took advantage of our anytime, anywhere protest protection policy and expressed their discontent. I invited about a dozen of the event's chosen leaders into my office, and listened to a list of their "demands."

Although I'd been instructed by one young woman, obviously well-rehearsed by one of our faculty members, not to interrupt with questions, at one point I did so, in order to point out an example of the common ground I had told them I knew we shared. When she announced that "This demand is non-negotiable," I did interject, "Yes, you see there's something we agree on. Because there aren't going to be any negotiations." We believe it is the duty of university leadership to show great respect, but not deference, for the opinions of the young people who, after all, are paying us a lot of money, because there is so much they *don't* know.

The first line of adult supervision must be occupied by people in roles like mine, and many have failed that assignment. But of the various actors who have weakened the performance and reputation of American universities, none has more to answer for than the trustees who over the

years have abdicated their legal and fiduciary responsibilities. ACTA's central mission of recalling these officers to their duty is ideally chosen, and absolutely essential.

I am frequently in front of audiences packed with business, civic, and political figures. No topic more interests such people today than higher education. I always implore them to use the influence they undoubtedly have at one or more institutions to press for the kind of reforms ACTA advocates with such clarity and tenacity.

I relate to them my observation that some of the toughest-minded businesspersons and professionals I know become strangely compliant when they get near dear old Alma Mater. I suggest they use their positions to ask questions like: "What is our free speech policy? If we haven't adopted the Chicago Principles or something closely akin, why not?" "I know about our commitment to racial and social diversity. How diverse are we intellectually?" "What is our ratio of administrative to teaching positions?" "Why are we charging students so much, and what are we doing to hold those costs down?" And, "Can you prove to me that they're learning anything for all that money?"

ACTA has courageously been posing these and other important questions now for decades. There must have been times when the dominance of the reactionaries has left you discouraged. Please press on. Signs of better days are visible.

Incidents of disinvitations and speaker abuse were down last year. Maybe shame still has its effect. As faculty have learned that the student harassment that seemed so amusing when aimed at conservative speakers can next haul them in front of campus tribunals for saying something "offensive" in class, an obvious shift away from coddling such behavior has begun.

So do press on. Your work is important far beyond the academies you seek to redeem. A nation at risk of losing sight of its true greatness,

and its unfinished mission to the world, needs you. A world in search of answers to the new challenges presented by our scientific genius, needs you. Young minds, in danger of missing what Alan Bloom called “civilization’s last chance to get hold of a person,” need you most of all. In so many ways, yours is the essential cause and organization. In so many ways, I am profoundly honored to be your guest, and your ally.

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Tributes

The following are tributes given in honor of Mr. Daniels at the presentation of the Philip Merrill Award on October 12, 2018.

The Honorable Jeb Bush *(by video)*

Former Governor of Florida

Mitch Daniels is one of the most interesting and innovative people in public life. His life has been grounded in complete integrity, intellectual curiosity, and a down-home nature that drives people towards his ideas and his causes. He was extraordinarily successful for eight years as governor of the state of Indiana and now is perhaps the most innovative leader of any university in the United States.

When Mitch took over the reins of the presidency at Purdue, I'm sure there were some skeptics inside the Purdue community thinking, "Ah, a politician coming in to tell us how to do things." And in typical Daniels style, he won people over and built a consensus on how to move forward. That was based on maintaining the high academic standard that Purdue is known for and injecting a really healthy dose of fiscal discipline.

During the Daniels reign, there hasn't been an increase in tuition. He has also been one of the leaders as it relates to protecting academic freedom and freedom of expression on campuses. Sadly, there are many universities today that don't believe that that is a high priority and an important value, but Mitch does. As a result, students hear all sorts of differing views, as they should, and they're allowed to freely express their views. That kind of leadership really matters. His innovation has been brought to bear by establishing a polytechnic charter school as well as the purchase of Kaplan, which will allow Purdue to expand its reach on a global basis. It would be wonderful for higher education to embrace those principles across the board. We would be making the best investment that we can make for our country to remain competitive.

Mitch is hilarious in a funny kind of Hoosier way. He and I had a chance to go with Joe Manchin and Tom Vilsack, as governors, to visit our troops, the National Guard of each respective state, during Easter in Afghanistan and Iraq. We developed an incredible bond, all four of us—to be able to see our citizen-soldiers that were there serving their country and serving their states. The combination of Mitch Daniels and Joe Manchin together was pretty special. He’s got a great sense of humor, he is witty beyond belief, he’s smarter than a whip, and I can see why people would warmly embrace him in a major university.

I want to commend ACTA for giving the prestigious Merrill Award to a great American, Mitch Daniels. I appreciate the work that ACTA does every day to protect freedom on campuses. We have the best university system in the world, but it is threatened by the narrowing of thought on these campuses. But for ACTA, it would be far worse. I commend you for the work you do. I hope you will stay the course and continue to provide the environment for freedom of expression on every campus in the United States.

Charles A. Murray

Political Scientist, Author, and Columnist

I can’t think of anyone whom I would enjoy praising more for five minutes than Mitch Daniels. That’s not hyperbole. I’m sure that lots of people here tonight are like me, and wish that he had become president of the United States. But I bet I am the only one who has not only said that in writing, but also said that Mitch Daniels would have been the greatest president since George Washington. Okay, it wasn’t for the *New York Times*. It was during an interview by a guy who runs a poker website. But I meant it.

Why would I say such a thing? First, had he become president, I could point out that, alone among all presidents since George Washington, he rides a motorcycle. Not some cute little Honda, but a hog; a big, powerful

Harley-Davidson. He's been riding one for fifty years, and he continued to ride it while he was governor, not just meeting people along the way but spending the night in their homes. When a bill was before his desk or a regulation was being proposed, he didn't have to contact the American Enterprise Institute to find out how that bill or regulation would affect the life of a farmer, a small business owner, factory worker, or teacher. He already knew. Not just in his head, but his heart. It speaks to a kind of empathy—not posturing, not “virtue signaling”—but understanding born of close human contact with his fellow citizens that we desperately need in our public servants.

Second, Mitch Daniels teaches by example what traditional American egalitarianism demands: heartfelt affection and respect for his fellow citizens. He truly doesn't believe that being a college president carries more dignity than being an insurance agent. He doesn't believe that being an attorney is more fulfilling than being a carpenter. He also understands that a lot of carpenters are a lot more fun to hang out with than a lot of attorneys are.

I also like to think that Mitch, like me, is a curmudgeon. Maybe I'm kidding myself and he is as nice a guy as he seems on the surface, but when he writes about the problems of free speech on campus, I sense that what he really wants to say to sensitive students who need trigger warnings and safe spaces is, “Suck it up and deal with it.” This inner curmudgeon has surfaced in his campaign against grade inflation at Purdue and his publicly expressed dismay he cannot require two thousand faculty members to stop being such wusses. But I think he'd like to.

None of these is the central reason I admire Mitch Daniels.

The eminent 20th century historian Richard Hofstadter once said that it has been America's fate not to have ideologies but to be one. Mitch Daniels does have an ideology. I think the right label for it is not liberal or conservative, but Madisonian, not excluding an important role for government, but framing that role in the context of the bedrock principle of the Founding, that people should be free to live their lives as they see

fit, as individuals, families, and communities, as long as they accord the same freedom to everyone else, with government guaranteeing a peaceful setting for their endeavors and otherwise standing aside as much as possible. A corollary to that ideology is that a free citizen bears a moral imperative to honor that freedom by spontaneously contributing to the common good.

It is not a way of thinking that is in vogue these days, on either the left or the right, but it was once, not that long ago, shared by all Americans, with our political disputes confined to the meaning of “standing aside as much as possible.” Mitch Daniels understands that bedrock meaning of America profoundly, and has acted upon it with utter fidelity. To paraphrase Richard Hofstadter, it has been Mitch Daniels’s fate not just to share America’s ideology, but to embody it.

Erskine Bowles *(by video)*

Former White House Chief of Staff; Former President, University of North Carolina System

Mitch Daniels is one of the finest, if not *the* finest leader I’ve ever worked with. As I’ve told him many times, he’d make a great President—and I’m not talking about a university president—he already is that.

What I like about the way Mitch leads is that he’s always prepared, he’s always done his homework, he surrounds himself with really smart people—people with different viewpoints—he listens to them, and then he makes the tough decisions every leader must. And regardless of how tough that decision is, Mitch is prepared to defend it. With Mitch Daniels, you always know where his true north is.

Mitch uses the enormous skills he honed during his successful business career at Eli Lilly to bring together people with diverse views to find common sense solutions to tough problems. He uses those skills he learned in Washington as Budget Director to encourage people with different viewpoints to be realistic and cost conscious. And he uses those

great leadership skills he honed as Governor to have the maximum positive impact on *all* his constituents.

All of these experiences have combined to make Mitch Daniels the best leader in higher education in America today. He's smart, innovative, and realistic, but willing to take risks. He gets any job done and done right. It's easy to see why he has earned—and I want to stress that word *earned*—the recognition he receives tonight.

I want to thank ACTA for its great work in advocating for higher education reform—and for its vision in honoring one of America's best education leaders.

And congratulations, Mitch, for earning this well-deserved award.

Nadine Strossen

*John Marshall Harlan II Professor of Law, New York Law School;
Former President, American Civil Liberties Union*

Mitch, it is *not* a coincidence that I'm wearing the colors of your great university, black and gold! But I am grateful to Purdue for choosing colors that I love to wear anyway!

It's a great honor to have the opportunity to sing the praises of one of my free speech heroes—and it's also an enlightening and inspiring experience because it has given me the excuse to re-read some of Mitch Daniels's inspired and inspiring writings. All of his prolific and varied writings are united by certain core values, including our rights and responsibilities in exercising our precious freedom of speech.

Mitch always enlivens those timeless old precepts by drawing on timely new experiences, thanks to his constant pursuit of interactions with as diverse a cross section of humanity as possible—including via his many motorcycle journeys as discussed in his latest *Washington Post* column, which I highly recommend. I stress this, because Mitch's remarkable life and career embody the infinite benefits of free thought

and speech—benefits both to our own personal happiness and to our society and democracy.

This freedom of thought embraces diversity and inclusivity in every sense for all speakers and for all ideas. Let me cite just a few examples of Mitch's outstanding leadership on the free speech front:

He spearheaded Purdue's adoption of the Chicago Principles of Freedom of Expression, working in an important alliance with both undergraduate and graduate student government, making Purdue the *very first* public university in the whole country to adopt these key precepts.

He also ensured that Purdue went beyond just paying lip service to abstract principles. Rather, he oversaw Purdue's revision of five specific policies that were inconsistent with these principles, thus earning the top free speech rating from FIRE, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education—a coveted status that had been earned by only 20 campuses at that point, out of the approximately 400 that FIRE monitored.

Moreover, Mitch instituted a pathbreaking free speech training segment in Purdue's first-year orientation program, which should serve as a model for other campuses. I recently watched it and was so impressed by its interesting imparting of information about fundamental free speech principles, in the context of skits vividly presenting concrete campus situations in which those principles are implicated. It was simultaneously enlightening, entertaining, and inspiring. Mitch kindly has given other educational institutions permission to use it, so I immediately recommended it to Anthony Crowell, dean and president of New York Law School (where I teach); he shared my enthusiasm and promptly made it available to the NYLS community.

For lack of time, I will confine myself to one more example of Mitch Daniels's consummate leadership on the free speech front. He has resisted pressure to which other adopters of the Chicago Principles of Freedom of Expression have succumbed: to depart from those principles

in the face of specific controversial expression. Despite great pressure to do so, Mitch has staunchly abided by them.

For example, almost exactly one year ago, when white supremacist posters appeared on Purdue's campus, he courageously defended the free speech rights of the people who put them up, while he also, appropriately, condemned their messages.

Likewise, at the same time, Mitch even-handedly defended the free speech rights of a Purdue faculty member who espoused dramatically different ideas—ideas that were, though, equally controversial: Namely, this faculty member supported the “Antifa” organization, whose anti-fascist ideas include advocating violence.

In one of Mitch's recent commencement addresses, he stressed the value of humility, which is, indeed, a bedrock of free speech and thought. As the great Judge Learned Hand memorably put it: “The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right.”

One of the sages that Mitch quoted on this eternal theme was Marcus Aurelius. Out of respect for that learned classics scholar Michael Poliakoff, it's especially fitting to quote Aurelius, who said: “Short-lived are both the praiser and praised.” In this case, I hope that prophesy is *not* true for the praiser, Yours Truly! Much more importantly, I hope that it is *not* true for Mitch Daniels, our justly praised honoree!

Much as he has already accomplished and contributed to the free speech values to which we at ACTA are deeply dedicated, we look forward to Mitch's continuing leadership for a long time to come.

Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.



Mitchell E. “Mitch” Daniels, Jr., has served since January 2013 as the president of Purdue University, where he led Purdue to become a model for colleges and universities nationwide by implementing policies to increase cost-effectiveness, maintain high academic standards, and safeguard free expression on campus. During his tenure, Purdue has frozen tuition, cut room and board costs, created a partnership with Amazon to reduce textbook expenses, started the Gallup-

Purdue Index to provide data-driven insights on the value of a college education, and acquired Kaplan University to provide the university with a platform for expanding adult education. In 2015, Purdue became the first public university to adopt the Chicago Principles of Free Expression.

From 2005 to 2013, Mr. Daniels served two terms as the 49th governor of Indiana, turning a deficit of almost \$800 million into an annual surplus of \$370 million within his first year. As governor, he created WGU Indiana, an innovative partnership between the Hoosier State and Western Governors University to increase higher education access statewide.

Previously, Mr. Daniels had a successful career in business and government. Among other positions, he served as CEO of the Hudson Institute, president of Eli Lilly and Company’s North American Pharmaceutical Operations, chief of staff to Senator Richard Lugar, senior advisor to President Ronald Reagan, and director of the Office of Management and Budget under President George W. Bush. He is the author of several books, including best-seller *Keeping the Republic: Saving America by Trusting Americans*. And he has been an eloquent presenter at ACTA events as well as a stalwart ally in higher education reform.

Mr. Daniels earned his B.A. from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University in 1971 and his J.D. from Georgetown University in 1979.

The Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education



ACTA is most pleased to present the 14th annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. The awarding of this prize, made under the guidance of a distinguished selection committee, advances ACTA's long-term goal to promote and encourage strong liberal arts education.

The Merrill Award offers a unique tribute to those dedicated to the transmission of the great ideas and central values of our civilization, and it is presented to inspire others and provide public acknowledgment of the value of their endeavors.

The prize is named in honor of Philip Merrill, a distinguished public servant, publisher, businessman, and philanthropist who served as a trustee of Cornell University, the University of Maryland College Park Foundation, the Aspen Institute, the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Throughout his career, Mr. Merrill was an outspoken proponent of academic excellence and an articulate spokesman for the importance of historical literacy in a free society. Mr. Merrill was a founding member of ACTA's National Council.



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