Madam Chancellor, I present to you Mr. Samuel Belzberg, a man of commanding inner strength and outer reserve who has been diligent in commerce: in service, without peers. We are each of us bound by our character in life and Mr. Belzberg’s character comes home to this: a genius for bringing ideas into action and for recognizing that from great dreams, great responsibilities arise.

Sam Belzberg’s enterprise is evident both nationally and internationally yet western Canada rightly regards him as a native son. Born at Calgary in 1928, he received his education from the University of Alberta. As a young man his personal energy and business acumen helped build a small, family-based real estate firm before he went on to establish City Savings and Trust Company with his brothers in 1962. Changing its name to First City Trust in 1978, the company which he now serves as Board Chairman, along with its parent organization, First City Financial Corporation Ltd., stands in the first rank of Canadian financial institutions.

His achievements as a financier are matched in full by his record of philanthropy. Unobtrusively acting on the conviction that civic duty must attend upon good fortune, it is not so much the generosity of his gifts as the manner of their giving that sets Sam Belzberg apart. Citing only two examples, the Dystonia Medical Research Foundation owes its existence to his creative counsel and financial assistance, while with his wife Frances, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre’s Beit-Hashoah Museum of Tolerance has been established to aid the powerless of the world in their struggle for fundamental human rights. In large measure, it is Sam Belzberg’s talent for stewardship and his ability to act as a catalyst for the support of others that these and many other charitable causes continue to flourish.

Mr. Belzberg has long been a friend to institutions of higher learning. He served with distinction as a member of the Universities Council of British Columbia from 1981 to 1986 and currently sits on the Board of the Rockefeller University Council, the Simon Fraser University Foundation and as Director of the Canadian Society and the Weizmann Institute of Science. But nowhere is his dedication to the cause of higher education more evident than in the leadership he has given over the past two years as National Chairman for Simon Fraser University’s Bridge to the Future Campaign. No mere figurehead, Samuel Belzberg set the pace for the University’s capital fund raising drive. Without his managerial wisdom, without his guidance, and without the credibility his presence brought to the undertaking, success would have been beyond our grasp.

James Boswell, no stranger to the subject of friendship, had this to say:

We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship is formed. As in filling a vessel drop by drop, there is a last drop which makes it run over; so in a series of kindnesses there is a last one which makes the heart run over.

Our vessel is full indeed and there has been no finer friend to Simon Fraser University than the man we honour here today. Madam Chancellor, on behalf of the Senate of this University, I present Samuel Belzberg for the Degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.