Madam Chancellor, I present to you Dr. Howard Petch, retiring President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Victoria. We honour Howard Petch today for his academic acumen during 15 years as Canada’s longest serving university president, as a scientist of international acclaim, and as a leader within Canada’s scholarly agencies and learned societies. Esteemed for his astute and imaginative leadership throughout British Columbia's councils of higher learning, Dr. Petch models those ideals Edmund Burke surely had in mind when he wrote, "Example is the school of mankind, and they will learn from no other."

Born in Agincourt, Ontario, Dr. Petch served with the Royal Canadian Air Force from 1943 to 1945. He then returned to academia and was graduated from McMaster University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in 1949 and a Master of Science Degree in 1950, receiving his Ph.D in physics from The University of British Columbia two years later. He began early in his career to balance the love for teaching and research with a spirited vision of university administration. Whether as Chairman of Metallurgy and Metallurgical Engineering at McMaster, Academic Vice-President at Waterloo, or President at the University of Victoria, Howard Petch has been a fierce protector of academic freedom and university autonomy. By stressing the highest possible intellectual standards, he turned a fledgling institution into a university that commands respect across Canada and beyond.

A prolific and exceptional scholar, Howard Petch has been generous with his commitments to local, national and international science bodies. Over the years, more than fifty civic and scholarly organizations have benefitted from his enthusiasm, guidance and good counsel. A Convocation Founder and respected colleague, Simon Fraser University knows well the value of his friendship.

Honorary degrees from McMaster and Waterloo Universities and a Fellowship in the Royal Society of Canada are testimonials to Howard Petch's recognition as one of Canada's premier educators. To these honours, we now wish to add our own. Disraeli observed that, "A university should be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning." Throughout his professional life, Howard Petch has been a forthright champion of university interests and the halls of learning have been illuminated and held free by his presence.

Madam Chancellor, it is my very great privilege, on behalf of the Senate of this University, to present Dr. Howard Petch for the Degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.