



Patrick F. Leahy

Graduate Commencement | May 16, 2015

I.

Well, congratulations, Graduates. You did it. We are so proud of all of you. Before I address our most recent alumni, allow me to thank some people. First, let me thank the hardest working person here today, our sign language interpreter, Jamie Lynne Hill. Next, let me recognize both the Wilkes Civic Band under the direction of Professor Phil Simon and the Wilkes Chorus under the direction of Professor Steven Thomas. Thank you all for enriching this ceremony. Also, while I'm at it, I'd like to thank the unsung heroes of this weekend here at Wilkes — all of our colleagues in the physical plant, public safety, and food service — for their hard work in preparing the campus for this celebration. Thank you. Finally, I want to recognize our student speaker today, Nate Jabjiniak. Thank you, Nate, for your inspiring words. Nate and his family join us today from Mesa, Arizona, where Nate completed his MBA studies at our new Mesa site. We are delighted to have you, Nate, and your family here this morning, especially your dad, Bill, who has been so instrumental in our westward expansion.

II.

Today, we return to a centuries-old ritual that brings students, faculty, staff, and families together to celebrate a new beginning, not an ending. After all, for years this day has been called Commencement Day; not Completion Day, but Commencement Day. It marks a beginning. After all of the many hours you have spent in Wilkes classrooms here on campus, or at any of our off-campus locations throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, or at our site in Mesa, Arizona, or in one of our on-line classrooms, you have made it to this day. We prefer to think of this day as the first day of the rest of your life, not the last day of your time with Wilkes University. So, as we begin this Commencement Day together, I'd like to offer two thoughts for our graduates to ponder. The first is gratitude; the second is dreams.

First, gratitude. I know that all of you graduates have mixed emotions today: pride, relief, satisfaction, maybe some anxiety. But, I hope you also feel a deep sense of gratitude. In particular, I hope you feel a sense of gratitude for all of the people in your life today. No one arrives at a Commencement Day without the help of many people along the way: family members, friends, Wilkes faculty, classmates, even employers. I hope you will find a special way today — your Commencement Day — to thank all of these people for helping to make today possible for you.

And, second, dreams. For many of you, this Commencement Day is the fulfillment of a dream: to obtain a graduate degree from an American, private university – the best education at this level in the world. Upon receiving your diploma, you will have achieved something that very few people worldwide obtain: a master's or doctoral degree. Congratulations on achieving this dream. But, I hope the

realization of this dream today simply makes possible what it is you really dream about. Start today — on your Commencement Day — to dream anew. Dreams give life purpose and meaning. Woodrow Wilson said, “We grow great by dreams.” So, if you plan to be an entrepreneur, dream about being a successful one, like your fellow alumnus and Wilkes Trustee — Jason Griggs, who joins us today. If you plan a career in business, dream about becoming an international businessman, like your fellow alumnus and honorary degree recipient at today’s undergraduate ceremony, Seymour Holtzman. If you plan to be involved with your alma mater, dream about serving on our Board of Trustees for 33 years, like your trustee greeter and fellow alumna, Elizabeth Slaughter. Whatever you plan to do, dream. And, it is our hope here at Wilkes that your dreams, in one way or another, involve serving others. That’s one way to take a dream and make it big. Put it to use serving others. Some people will tell you that your dreams — whatever they are — do not matter in the long run. Do not listen to them! When the world tries to tell you that your dreams are unrealistic or unimportant, think of this day — your Commencement Day - and your commencement speaker, Senator John Yudichak. He has a dream, that is, to ensure that every child in his district has an opportunity at a quality education. It is his commitment to this dream that led him to start the SHINE program in Luzerne County, a program that we at Wilkes are proud to host. Few people advocate more for Northeast PA than John. All of us at Wilkes owe him a debt of gratitude. Thank you, senator, for being here today and for sharing your wisdom with us. Most importantly, thank you for dedicating your life to improving the prospects of Northeast PA.

III.

So, as we celebrate your Commencement Day, I ask you to think about gratitude and dreams. If you can wake up and start each day both with gratitude for all of the people in your life, and with dreams for the future, today really will be the first day of the rest of your life — the first day of a full, rich, meaningful life. Congratulations, graduates. It has been our privilege here at Wilkes to play a small part in helping you achieve your dreams. And, thank you for the contributions that you have made to enhance this special learning community called Wilkes University. We wish you all the very best.