

Good morning. Thank you Dr. Ayers, and thank you graduates for having me here today to speak to you.

Congratulations to each of you graduating here today. Congratulations to you, the parents and loved ones here today for having a supporting role in the lives of these young men and women.

I have three children. 1 in law school, 1 just starting her freshman year, and 1 who is making his own path outside of the college track. I know that a supporting role for our loved ones is one of the most important roles we can have in our lives.

First, I want each of you graduates to remember you didn't get here alone or by chance today, so whoever it was along the way, a parent, sibling, teacher, mentor or friend who encouraged or inspired you, don't forget to say thank you to them today. Not with a text message but with an actual call or handwritten note (if I hear any of you leave a life changing mentor a message on their facebook wall you'll be in trouble).

This is the first commencement speech I've given and as I sat down to think of what I wanted to say I realized that the theme I usually come back to in every speech is probably most applicable to you.

As you leave college, move away, join the workforce, and settling down and making a life for yourself the most important thing I can tell you and what I want you to remember is that we are only a great nation when we take on the responsibility to be great in it.

So that is my challenge to you here today be someone great.

How do I define a great person?

Well, we will start with something I know you can do already. **A great person sets goals and knows that it will take hard work to reach them.**

You made the choice to enter college, wake up and go to class and to meet the demands placed on you and to earn your degree so I know that you're able to do this step. Just remember this is just the first milestone in pursuing your career.

You have to continue to set goals for yourself and when you reach that goal set a new one. Thoreau said "*What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.*" We become better men and women when we aspire to be more and to do more.

A great person is a good friend and a good teammate.

You've forged friendships here at this university that, if nurtured, will last a lifetime. Nurture them because they're worth it.

To this day I still tell stories about the friends I made in college, the wild nights, and the rough games of my undergrad and graduate days. Don't look so surprised, I wasn't always this old. It seems like just yesterday I was on a rugby field playing my heart out. Congress can be a full contact sport much like rugby too so I'm glad I learned to take a hit and push back.

One day you'll look back and the fun of these last 4 years will seem but a moment ago only it will have been a decade. You need to keep in touch with friends here today so when you think back you can pick up a phone and call one of them and see how they remember the same party, event or exam.

It was the team work I learned while pursuing my degrees that guides me today. Teamwork cannot be discounted. You will always be a part of a team and the skills you learned here will act as your guide to success in them.

You will make potential friends of varying degrees every day from here forward. I don't mean networking I mean real meaningful friendships. Nurture those.

Today, I stand here as your congressman but just 3 years ago I was a dentist. In a crowded primary race I beat the odds to win and I did that because my friends, my colleagues believed in me and they supported my efforts.

A great person strengthens the world around them.

With the honor of having a higher degree and from such a respected and highly regarded institution, you have great responsibility. Sure you are expected to be ready for the workforce but that is only one part of what is to come in your lives.

Here the last four years, you became a part of a community. The people around you today are your classmates, tomorrow they'll be your colleagues and they will always be a part of your Embry Riddle family. Our nation is at its strongest when we remember that we are all a part of something great!

It is incumbent upon you to get involved in the world around you to strengthen your community. So as busy as you find yourself remember that a great person makes it a priority to give back with your time, your talents and your resources when we can.

Finally, a great person has passion.

You are excited today as you head towards your next chapter. Keep that excitement. You're going to be challenged and you're going to find that with every cycle in life there are ups and downs.

If you remain passionate about what you're doing and why you are doing it you will be successful.

Don't get me wrong you will fail. We all do but when you do, summon the passion you have to reach your goals and to accomplish big things and try again.

You will take detours that are frustrating and discouraging but if you keep the passion you will find yourself back on the path to success.

Sometimes you will face challenges that stop you dead in your tracks remember solutions are never one sided. If you're finding yourself on the opposite side of someone else's thinking (as I often do in D.C.) remember the person you're up against may feel as strongly about their position as you do yours. Work harder, work smarter and you will find success.

Go out there and continue to be great men and great women. Make yourselves proud, make your family proud and make your university proud.

God bless you all. Thank you.