



Congresswoman
Rosa L. DeLauro

Press Release

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DeLauro Delivers Commencement Address at Eastern Connecticut State University

Willimantic, CT – Congresswoman Rosa L. DeLauro (Conn.-3) delivered the commencement address this morning at Eastern Connecticut State University. Below are her remarks as prepared for delivery.

“Thank you for this opportunity and for this honor. It is a pleasure to join friends, family, and faculty as we celebrate the graduation of Eastern Connecticut State University’s Class of 2007. Congratulations! I know you have waited for this day for a long time, and I do hope that you will savor it. I am very proud to receive the President’s Medal and honored to have this chance to speak to the Class of 2007.

“I am sorry that President Nunez could not be here. Though, like so many proud mothers here today, she is celebrating her own daughter’s commencement ceremony elsewhere, and so we forgive her absence. And we thank her for her leadership, strength, and direction at the helm of this proud institution.

“Chancellor David Carter, I have always been proud to partner with you in our work for Connecticut’s students and families. In your years of service to Eastern – and now the entire Connecticut system – you have made a tremendous impact on so many lives in so many fields. When today’s graduates began their careers at Eastern, you were the University’s president. Since then, you have moved on; today, they are moving on. But together, all of you will always have your memories of this beautiful campus and the many lessons you learned here. I know that you will cherish them.

“Please, also let me thank and congratulate, everyone gathered on the platform with me today. Dr. Michael Pernal, Reverend Richard Duvall, Senator Edith Prague, State Representative Walter Pawelkiewicz, First Selectman Michael Paulhus thank you for your leadership. Trustees, alumni, administrators, professors, community members – your dedication for the Eastern community has contributed over many years to its ongoing success. Your passion and vision

promise a bright future for years to come.

“In addition, we congratulate Dr. Christopher Dahl, President of Geneseo University, not only for his honorary degree today, but also for his extraordinary contributions to higher education and our understanding of the important role that institutions like Geneseo, Eastern and others play in the life and success of our communities. We are honored to have you.

“And so, many thanks to all of Eastern’s faculty whose commitment has made this day possible by teaching, challenging, and shaping today’s graduates. The Class of 2007 arrived ready to learn – about business, health care, education, agriculture, the arts, and the sciences. Whatever their area of focus, they depart today poised to make a difference. They have you to thank for that.

“This is a special day – and college graduations are always a remarkable occasion. For the students, it is a day filled with conflicting emotions. There is the adrenaline that has left you sleepless and bleary-eyed, and probably not a little worn out from hauling family around these last few days. There is also the nagging feeling that you may be leaving behind some of the best years of your life – a time in which you learned from others, but more importantly, you challenged yourself.

“Indeed, one of the great things about college is that you have no choice but to be challenged. In your time here, each of you faced new ideas, new cultures, new causes and communities – many of which did not make sense to you at first. Along the way, you embraced some of these ideas and discarded others – but not before you weighed their merits and determined whether they were right for you.

“And now, you are wondering if you are leaving all that behind – not simply your friends but also the environment and communities in which you felt you could take those risks and face those challenges.

“For the parents, graduation day is something very different – the day in which all your hard work has finally paid off. Sending a child to college is exciting but never easy – for most of us, it is the first time our kids are completely on their own, free to make their choices, to succeed or fail. In that sense, it is the first real test of our parenting skills. So, to the parents and family here today, I say – congratulations. You sweated it out together, but you made it together. And together, you have earned this moment.

“For sure, the hard work does not end here – nor does the anxiety. As nurturing an environment as Eastern has been to all of the graduates today, the world out there is very different from a college campus – I hardly have to tell you that. Indeed, many of you are already looking for that next community – that next place in your lives where you can build new friendships and safely

explore new challenges and intellectual pursuits.

“Perhaps you will be lucky enough to discover these things in a job that allows you to make a living focusing on your passion. Perhaps you will find a new circle of friends who stand by you should you not succeed the first time out.

“Regardless, that world will push you in a very different direction than college did. Indeed, where college dared you to take risks and face problems head-on – where college supported you when you did – the world out there is a much less supportive place, much less likely to reward risk and chance. And so, in that world, you can choose not to take those risks and you have the option to join the crowd and go along – simply putting on your headphones, plugging in, and tuning out.

“That option, that temptation to turn away from new challenges and big risks, will always be there. And, it is hard to blame anyone who gives in, anyone who chooses to disengage? As Americans – particularly those with an advanced degree – we are blessed with so many choices in life that it can be overwhelming. How ambitious and how brave will we be when we face an ever-growing, incredibly daunting world of choice?

“Now in the spirit of full disclosure, I should share with you the fact that after I finished school, I went and got a job as a go-go dancer. Growing up I wanted to be a tap dancer, and so, this seemed like an appropriate, exciting next step. But, in truth, I did not share this with my parents because education had opened up a world of choice that they could never imagine themselves. My mother worked in the sweatshops on a sewing machine making pennies sewing collars on shirts, and she would make me come see her every day at work. Her message was clear. Get an education. Make choices that will give you a better life.

“I do not know what choices led me to my current course, but I do pause when I am in the United States Capitol and stare at that statuary, of Jeanette Rankin, the first woman in Congress, of Henry Clay, Benjamin Franklin, Daniel Webster – men and women who debated and decided the big issues that created our nation. So, I do pause and ask, how is it that I get to join those debates today?

“For many – particularly those arriving on our shores today – that sense of possibility and opportunity my mother instilled in me still defines us as Americans. And, as my mother also showed me, we all know that opportunity must not be taken for granted.

“Eleanor Roosevelt, captured this idea when she said, “Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being. With freedom comes responsibility. For the person who is unwilling to grow up – the person who does not want to carry his own weight – this is a frightening prospect.”

“Few recent innovations have created more opportunity – or been more frightening – than the explosion of technology and the Internet, the most remarkable communications tool the world has ever known. Today, Americans have more choices than ever – more freedom to live our lives as we please.

“Yet, in addition to creating tremendous opportunity, that instant connectivity, that information revolution which people have been talking about for well over a decade now, brings seductive dangers as well. Each new astounding development has the potential to alienate us further – tied to our gadgets, removed from the community, disconnected from real human interaction, unable to face big problems with bare hands and clear minds.

“In other words, we have learned long ago that the so-called revolution will not be televised – as the now-cliché phrase subversively suggested almost 40 years ago. But these days it may in fact, show up on You Tube, in some new form. The revolution will not be televised, certainly, but it may be uploaded, emailed, blogged about and shared, after all.

“What I mean is that real change and vital reform, however you define them, are not something you can expect simply to come to you. These enduring values require more than just a witness; they demand your active participation and understanding. Dialogue. A live performance.

“But instant connectivity and extraordinary technology has not just changed our public discourse. It is also changing our world economy – something you know all too well, as you enter the job market. Off-shoring was once limited to the basic principle that anything which could be put in a box and shipped, was the only thing that was tradable overseas. But, day by day, the rules that define what is tradable are fading away and, in the process, transforming the way we interact around the globe.

“Digital bits of data zipping around the globe faster and faster have put more and more work and business up for grabs. Once-stable jobs and services that were once performed and provided locally are suddenly at risk of leaving. And with a weak safety net stretched thin, individuals who bear the brunt have a very difficult time bouncing back.

“This is a new industrial revolution, bringing great opportunity and great risks. Together, they call for a new response. If we are going to answer the call – if we are going to provide all Americans with the tools and the protection they need to survive and succeed – if we are going to embrace our comparative advantages as a national community: technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship – if we are going to face these big challenges together (and I believe we will, because we must) – then we must step up and stop playing it safe.

“It was 75 years ago this week that Franklin Delano Roosevelt , addressing another group of

college students, said simply: ‘The country demands bold persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.’

“We are still a nation infused with so much possibility, resources and talent. There has never been a challenge America has not responded to with creativity, energy and determination. And as history teaches us, responding starts with accepting that we have a role to play, no matter how small.

“I ask you to not simply accept that responsibility, but embrace it with that uniquely American spirit – that affirms our belief that, big solutions are possible.

“Indeed, pursuit of the common good is a powerful aspiration. As part of the rich Catholic tradition in which I was raised, I was taught that we realize our dignity and rights in relationship to others – that we grow and achieve fulfillment in community and have a broader social commitment and responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society.

“But working toward the common good does not have to be a matter of religious faith – nor is this a plea for altruism or looking beyond our self-interest. To be sure, the reasons to fight for the common good are, at their core, almost disarmingly practical. Because when we take some responsibility for what happens in the civic sphere, we know from our history all of us will benefit.

“That is what has sustained us through our country’s most difficult moments – it is what motivated the millions of women who worked in factories and shipyards during World War Two. It was what inspired those who marched on Washington with Dr. King during the Civil Rights movement. It was the driving force behind the millions who donated their blood in the aftermath of September 11th.

“There are so many challenges before the country today that require us to return to thinking that way – the crisis in our health care system, the need to strengthen our public schools, to protect our air and water, and to bring our troops home safely from Iraq, to name only a few.

“So I hope you’re ready, because this nation is ready for you. Whatever your path in life, please leave room to participate – to help us pursue goals rooted in the common good. Regardless of whether the solution takes place in the public or private sectors, at the grassroots or in corporate boardrooms, on your turf or theirs, help us transcend our differences.

“You know the stakes of debate, better than any of us, because you are the ones with so much at stake. You have your whole lives ahead of you – careers, families. So let me close, by suggesting there’s no time like the present. Our nation is changing, and believe me: People are

listening to what you have to say.

“Consider this an official solicitation. Take part by making yourselves indispensable to candidates and leaders not only as voters but as valuable resources too. Take part by contributing your time and your energy, but also your optimism and your ideas.

“I look out at this crowd, these proud graduates today and I know we have the talent. We are brimming with it. And unlike any other country on this planet, we have our Constitution, which gives America the freedom to control *its* collective destiny, just as the diploma you are about to receive allows you to control yours.

“Such choices are never easy. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, they make a huge requirement of every human being – of each of us. If my own experiences have taught me anything, it is that bringing your values to the public sphere is not a matter of expediency but of moral and civic obligation – a call I hope each of you choose to answer.

“So, again, to the Class of 2007, my congratulations. Thank you again for this special honor and the opportunity to speak at this special institution. I wish you my very best as you embark on the next phase of your lives. Thank you.”

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