

GOVERNOR MARTIN O'MALLEY

University of Maryland, Baltimore Commencement Address

May 15, 2009

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

The University of Maryland, Baltimore

Thank you very much Dr. Ramsay, ... you, along with so many in the UMB community have played such a vital and important role in our City's comeback and our State's return to progress. And in big ways and in small ways, you are making a very real contribution to our country's comeback as well.

I love this university. I am proud to have received my law degree from this university. And in the time for which I've been privileged to serve as Governor and before that as Mayor, it has been an honor to partner with this university in shared pursuit of progress.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore is a place where citizens from all walks of life come to grasp the reins of opportunity; to build better lives for themselves and their loved ones, and to prepare for careers in service to humankind, ... training to heal, training to cure, training to defend our rights, training to serve neighbors both in our own communities, and in the community of nations.

All of us in the O'Malley-Brown Administration are very proud to support the many exciting things going on at this university – whether it's the BioPark, the nursing school expansion, upgrades to Pharmacy Hall, or enhancements to University Plaza. That's why we've increased funding for UMB by \$131 million over the prior three years.

Introduction

To the trustees and members of the faculty, ... congratulations and thank you so much for your contribution.

To the parents and to the grandparents, to the sons and daughters, to the brothers and sisters, to the friends and neighbors who are with us, thank you for your love, your tears, your patience – standing beside and behind these graduates. I know that they're grateful to you as well. We would not be here without your support.

This is especially true of those of you who are long suffering-spouses, ... I can remember when my wife finished up her last year of law school, we had a little baby at home and another baby on the way. And thank goodness, we got through it and so have you. You deserve a lot of credit and gratitude, and I know your graduate couldn't have done it without you.

To the Class of 2009, ... Congratulations, you did it!

We are here today to celebrate all of you. We're here to rejoice in your tremendous accomplishments and toast the possibility of things to come. We're here to honor your struggles. We're here to honor your

endurance. And we're here to celebrate your achievements.

Today we celebrate passage, we celebrate transition, we celebrate high eternal truths and we rejoice in fellowships and friendships and in prayer. We pray in thanksgiving for the gifts that we've been given, we pray in anticipation of the joy of opportunities that lie ahead. And mostly, we pray that the Governor will be brief, so we can get to the parties and the dinners.

Well the very good news is that I will be brief, but I would not be living up to my role as keynote speaker if I didn't share with you a few thoughts about your place in the world, and about our shared future.

Optimism in an Uncertain World

These are not easy times, and I wish I could tell you for certain when this economic crisis will end, but the truth is that nobody knows for sure. What I can tell you, is that because of your hard work, your perseverance, and your decision to pursue an advanced degree, you have put yourself in a far greater position to compete in the new global economy.

I can also tell you that if you look at indices like unemployment, if you consider we are one of seven states to earn a Triple A Bond rating, and if you take into account our #1 ranked, best-in-the nation public schools and the fact that – thanks in large part to you – we have one of America's most highly skilled workforces,... we in Maryland are on solid footing to power through this national recession.

These strengths, I might add, are products not of chance, but of choice,... of difficult decisions we made together as One Maryland to invest record amounts in education and in high potential, high-tech sectors of our economy like the biosciences,... investments which helped bring us to #1 in America in PHD scientists and engineers in our workforce, and #2 in life sciences nationwide.¹

Although our State is in stronger position than most, still I cannot sugarcoat the great challenges before us, in these times when our own human frailty and the compounding of human propensities for self-destruction and hyper-consumption of our planet's resources threaten our American and global way of life as never before,... when the trials we face as Americans, and indeed as human beings, range from global warming to the potential global collapse of marine life and bio-diversity; from global poverty to global AIDS to global terror.

But through all these challenges, I believe we have good reason for optimism. For, in spite of all the perils we face, we live in times of tremendous promise. We need only look at our recent presidential election and the magnificent outpouring of civic engagement it inspired, to remind ourselves of the great possibility before us.

You and I, my friends, have been born at a point in our human existence when our own creativity and imagination have expanded the outer bounds of human achievement and potential as never before, and by exponents never imagined. In a relative instant of human development, we have through our science and technology taken the vastness of this planet and made it intimately finite for the first time in human consciousness. We have gone from manned flight to men walking on the moon, from vaccine to human genome, from plastics to nano-technology, from telegraph to internet all in a relative flash of time.

American Leadership & the Four S's of 21st Century Challenges

¹ Maryland ranks first among all states in the total number of doctoral scientists and engineers as a percentage of total employment (0.98%).

With such great peril and such awesome possibility in front of us, our country is at a crossroads. And as all of you begin this next chapter in your lives, you are at a crossroads as well.

As you ascend and aspire to leadership in your chosen profession; as you make choices in your own communities and households, and in this larger community we call Maryland, you face a timeless human question. It is a quandary as old as recorded time, and for the most fortunate and the least fortunate, for the privileged and the poor, the question is always the same: *will your world change you, or will you change your world?*

The diploma you receive today represents a choice you have made to improve your world; a preference for a better future for your own families, and for your own State and country. Speaking not only as your Governor, but as a parent and a fellow citizen, I can tell you that all of us – your own families, your neighbors, our country’s global neighbors are counting on you to continue making this choice.

As our new Secretary of State has said, “*America cannot solve the most pressing problems on our own, and the world cannot solve them without America.*” We will need your hearts, your minds, your energies if we are going to meet these most pressing problems.

And how can we meet these great challenges? I would argue that we do this by advancing American leadership in what one might call the “Four S’s of 21st century challenges;” – skills, security, sustainability, and most importantly, spiritual pursuits; moral leadership in a troubled world.

Today, we’re celebrating your achievement in the realm of the first “S,” **American Leadership in Skills**, the primary ingredient in innovation. As the global economy becomes more knowledge-based, it’s becoming clearer and clearer that our greatest asset is all of you – your talents, your intellect, your knowledge, discovery, learning, art, and creativity. Our great challenge therefore, is to awaken a renewed commitment and curiosity in what fuels our innovation, particularly the so-called STEM disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and math, where we’re losing ground as a country to our global competitors.

The skills of our people are essential to the second “S” of **American Leadership in Security**. For in this new century, when our adversaries are increasingly non-state, non-arrayed, non-traditional actors, it is essential that we are able to innovate and adapt; to draw advantages not just from our numbers, not just from our technologies, but from our willingness and ability to apply “rational human effort to human problems,” to borrow a phrase from Robert Kennedy.

The third “S” is that of **American Leadership in Sustainability** – the way we use our planet’s limited resources of land, air, and water. Stabilizing and reversing Global Climate Change before it is too late, may very well prove the defining issue of our times, as the keys to the survival of our species, and the keys to our American economic potential will likely rest in our ability to unlock, harness, and advance green technologies; to discover new renewable forms of energy and bring them quickly to scale for ourselves and the world.²

As Americans, we can only lead in any of these first three “S’s” if we’re able to lead in the fourth: **American Leadership in Spiritual Pursuits**, or moral leadership; what former U.S. Senator Gary Hart in his writings calls “America’s Fourth Power.”

² Among other things, in the past two years, together as One Maryland we’ve created the Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund and BayStat, passed landmark Clean Cars legislation, and set ambitious goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption.

Moral leadership is a precious thing; a thing found only in the context of community. Indeed, there is no such thing as leadership outside of the spiritual context of community. It is why *“any seeker of a higher truth or of God, must eventually and inevitably come back to the idea of community.”*³

A former advisor to President Kennedy suggested to graduating students at the New School a few years back that, quote: *“Our greatest strength has long been not merely our military might but our moral authority. Our surest protection against assault from abroad has been not all our guards, gates and guns or even our two oceans, but our essential goodness as a people. Our richest asset has been not our material wealth but our values.”*

Our greatness as a people has never been about how many smart bombs we can drop on our enemies, but about our ideas and ideals,... About how many smart compassionate hands we can offer not only to our own neighbors, but to families in far off villages, in far away lands,... our ability to proliferate what have been called *“weapons of mass salvation.”*⁴

And although our American history is an imperfect one, from our earliest days we have always found our motivation for greatness and sacrifice in higher things: freedom, justice, the rights of man and woman, liberation from the many faces of slavery and oppression. We find our motivation in the truth that *“responsibility is the greatest of freedom’s privileges.”*⁵

Conclusion

Your graduation today is not an end, but a commencement,... a beginning of your pursuit of all things eternal. A choice to change your world, rather than to allow your world to change you. As you embark on the next chapter of your lives, I wish you all the best. And I leave you today with a blessing from the Irish poet John O’Donohue:

*May the light of your soul guide you.
May the light of your soul bless the work you do with the
secret love and warmth of your heart.
May you see in what you do the beauty of your own soul.
May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light and renewal to those
who work with you and to those who see
and receive your work.
May your work never weary you.
May it release within you wellsprings of
refreshment, inspiration and excitement.
May you be present in what you do.
May you never become lost in the bland absences.
May the day never burden you.
May dawn find you awake and alert, approaching your
new day with dreams, possibilities and promises.
May evening find you gracious and fulfilled.
May you go into the night blessed, sheltered and protected.
May your soul calm, console and renew you.*⁶

³ From St. Thomas Aquinas

⁴ From Dr. Jeffrey Sachs

⁵ Robert Kennedy: “Today, as never before in the free world, responsibility is the greatest right of citizenship and service is the greatest of freedom’s privileges.”

⁶ “A Blessing” from *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* by John O’Donohue

Thank you and God Bless.