

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) delivered the commencement address at the University of Maryland in College Park, MD, on Sunday night. Below are his remarks:

"Thank you, Jesse, for that kind introduction. I will now spend the next 45 minutes defending myself against your ruthless attack on my jump-shot... even though I haven't taken one since long before you were born.

"Thank you all for inviting me to share this ceremony with you... President Mote... Regents, Tom Finan, and Michael Gill for your inspirational words... faculty and staff... guests... and especially graduating students - who tonight, move from one great experience of life to many others.

"Thank you student government Presidents - Emma Simson, Andrew Friedson and Laura Moore - for your service to this great university. I mention your contributions not only to highlight your dedication to Maryland, but also to demonstrate that I do, indeed, have respect for Presidents.

"Thank you and congratulations to the parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers and friends of the graduates as well. Tonight, we gather to honor the achievements of these young people... and not so young people... who took it upon themselves to build a stronger future for themselves and our communities. I am so very pleased to be sharing this wonderful occasion with all of you.

"And finally, thank you to student speaker Ryan Cooper. I fear that the commencement address has already been given... but I will do my best to complement Ryan's beautiful words.

"No matter how far I've traveled over the last 44 years, my heart has always remained right here in College Park - and my body has been here from time to time as well... not only cheering on our Terrapins in this beautiful new arena, but also cheering on all the facets of growth and development that take place on this campus.

"This university really is special to me. It is where I developed my intellect and where I made

lifelong friendships... where I planned for the future with my late, beloved wife, Judy... where I was inspired to pursue a career in public service after hearing then-Senator John Kennedy speak about making a difference at Cole Field House... and now, where you have graciously invited me to help welcome the Class of 2007 to the Maryland Alumni family.

"Ever since I was invited to speak to you, I have been thinking: What words of wisdom can I give these new graduates? What lessons have I learned since crossing this stage so long ago?

"Let me offer a few of those lessons, which I hope you find helpful in the years ahead.

"First, hard work will be absolutely indispensable to your success... as will your talent. But do not let the ones you love be innocent bystanders of your own ambition. Do not let anyone tell you that a successful career and commitment to family are incompatible objectives. They must not be!

"Second, don't be fooled by the vitriolic talk shows on television. Today and always, civility matters.

"Third, take risks knowing you may fail. Always remember, as Churchill once said: 'Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts.' I have lost my share of elections; each one hurt. But you must understand that today's setbacks are preparation for tomorrow's successes.

"And fourth, you will never reach tomorrow's successes unless you persevere. On this point, I am reminded of a poem from my days in Sigma Chi that speaks about opportunity, authored by Walter Malone:

They do me wrong who say I come no more,

When once I knock and fail to find you in.

For every day I stand outside your door,

And bid you wake and rise to fight and win.

"When I rose on my graduation morning in 1963, I looked forward to hearing my commencement speaker, then-Vice President Lyndon Johnson. But to be honest, I couldn't remember a single word to share with you tonight.

"So, I did what any great-grandfather in 2007 would do. I googled it. Thank you, Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google and member of the Maryland Class of 1993.

"The Vice President talked about advances in science and the significance of America's commitment to discovery. 'We are climbing toward the summit of man's experience,' he said, 'and science is the lifeline that ties us all together.'

"Tonight, I want to speak to you about another lifeline that ties us together in the 21st Century – our long tradition of advancing the common good by serving our fellow citizens... which is especially salient at our nation's public universities, where the taxpayers expect to reap the benefits of their investment in your futures... and thus, our shared future.

"Service is a prerequisite to addressing the great issues facing our nations – extremist ideologies that rationalize and celebrate the murder of innocent people... the proliferation of nuclear and biological weapons... addiction to foreign oil... global warming... and the widening gap between the rich and poor.

"These challenges are daunting, but do not despair. I believe in your generation of Americans. I believe that you will embrace and fulfill the proud legacy of service handed down to you today – just as the generations that came before. History is now yours to make.

"When I left Maryland in 1963, our country was on the brink of upheaval. Our President was stolen by an assassin just six months later. The Cold War raged. The Vietnam War was escalating, and the peace movement was taking shape.

"And the civil rights movement – galvanized by Martin Luther King and one of my closest friends in Congress, John Lewis of Georgia – forced us to recognize that we were falling shamefully short of the values and principles that we thought we stood for.

"We emerged from that era bruised but unbowed – and better for the fight. We emerged from that era stronger than ever because of the men and women who chose to serve causes greater than themselves. And today, your neighbors – at home and around the globe – need you to step up and do the same.

"This does not mean that you must take the political route that I have chosen. Whether their contributions have been large or small, Maryland graduates have always found a way to engage in their own unique variety of service – in education, business and finance, the arts and sciences, medicine and law, and many other fields.

"You should know that you will encounter an infinite and diverse number of ways to positively impact the lives of others in the coming years. And, all you have to do to make a difference is recognize that the Terrapin tradition of service passed down today bestows upon you a responsibility to try.

"Remember, as Robert Kennedy said, speaking to graduates in Capetown, South Africa, 41 years ago: 'Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.'

"I pray that those words will guide you on your journey. If they do, then I have no doubt that you will find happiness, fulfillment and success. And our nation will be better for your role.

"Congratulations on your achievement. Today is a day that you will never forget, no matter what time you leave Bentley's or Santa Fe or Cornerstone tonight.

"Always remember that your education never ends.

"Always remember – spend time with your family, be civil to each other, take responsible risks, and never give up.

"And always remember that fulfilling your obligation to serve others is not only possible, but imperative. My greatest hope for you tonight is that one day, people will be inspired by your actions in defense of others... and that they won't just fear the Turtle... they will revere the Turtle now and forever.

"Congratulations and Godspeed."

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