



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 12, 2012

CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

Mayor Rahm Emanuel Delivers Keynote Address to 2012 City Colleges of Chicago Graduates

Remarks As Prepared

Thank you for bestowing on me this Honorary Degree.

Chancellor Hyman, presidents of Chicago City Colleges, members of the Board of Trustees, faculty, distinguished guests, family and friends, and, of course, the graduates of 2012.

On behalf of the entire City of Chicago - congratulations.

Before I forget, let's wish all the moms here today a very happy Mother's Day. If I forgot to mention all the mothers in the crowd, my own Mother would never forgive me.

It is fitting that we celebrate your graduation on this Mother's Day weekend. Many of you reached this day because of the support of your families, especially your moms. While the graduates made it through the studying, your families made it through the stress. So, to the families of the graduates of 2012, the husbands and fathers, brothers and sisters, wives and partners, and especially the mothers, thank you for your support. This day also belongs to you.

There is also another holiday at the end of the month, Memorial Day. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize all the graduates who have served, are serving, or will serve our nation in uniform. You represent the true one percent of this country who answered the call of service at a time of great difficulty. You continue to serve our nation by earning the education and gaining the skills that will make America prosper.

I know there are many graduating today who made the difficult decision to return to school after time away from the classroom. I know how challenging that can be because I did it myself. After I graduated from college, I worked for a while before returning to school. And let me tell you, those first three months back in the classroom were some of the most brutal I ever experienced. So, to those of you who have come back to school, I admire your persistence.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

For some of you the road to graduation was not always a straight path. I take my hats off to those of you who pursued your education in fits and starts, but made a commitment and were determined to see it through.

Many of you had to balance jobs and family obligations as well your studies. But because of your sense of purpose, persistence, and perseverance, you have reached commencement day.

There is a reason why we call graduation ceremonies “commencements.” A commencement is a beginning. So, as much as today marks the end of one challenging journey, it is the beginning of another. That journey, to find a job that provides you with satisfaction and a good standard of living, will also be challenging. But, it is one you should begin with confidence and excitement.

I am excited for you and the careers you will begin. Some of you will go on to become lawyers and then enter politics. The rest of you will make your parents proud.

No matter what degree you receive today or what job you go on to do tomorrow, keep hold of that quality of commitment and that principal of perseverance that brought you to this day.

Those qualities are certainly embodied by your valedictorian, Meosha (ME-oh-sha) Thomas. No matter what I say in my speech, I know I’m not going to top yours, Meosha. I also want to congratulate each of today’s valedictorians.

In addition to graduating as a valedictorian, Meosha has a long list of honors to her name. She is a veteran of the US Navy. She is also the first CCC student selected for the highly competitive Civic Consulting Alliance Public Internship, where I was able to work with her personally. Most importantly, she is a mother of two children. So we want to say Happy Mother’s Day to you too Meosha.

What makes me most proud of Meosha is how she has decided to build on her success. Next fall she will start at National-Louis University to pursue her Bachelor’s degree in early childhood education. She is taking what she has learned from her own teachers, to become a teacher herself and transform the lives of others. She is pursuing more than a career, but a calling. I want to recognize Meosha’s choice, and also all the teachers and professors who are with us today who have made a choice to dedicate their lives to their students’ futures.

So today is a day of celebration as well as appreciation. We honor you graduates today as well as all the teachers who believed in you, supported you and inspired you all the way. Take time today to think about the teachers and professors who knew, even before you did, what you were capable of achieving.

The vital role of teachers is not something we can honor with just one day of appreciation. As a city, and as a nation, we can do everything else right, but all our efforts depend on great teachers. Other than a parent, nobody has a greater impact on a child’s future than a teacher. That’s why we are lucky to have great teachers here in Chicago. If we give them the tools, the training, and the time to do their jobs, then, just like Meosha said, even the “sky is not the limit”.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

To all the teachers and professors here today, this is my promise to you: we will save where we can, we will cut where we must, but we will invest where it matters most - in the future of our children.

Teachers are especially important today, as the foundations of our economy continue to shift. Now, more than ever, you earn what you learn. As graduates, you understand that better than most.

In the 20th century economy, if you finished high school, you could expect a good job that would provide a middle class standard of living. In fact, it wasn't until the years after World War II that high school became the norm for American students. Making a high school education the expectation for students fueled America's post-war boom and laid the foundation for a thriving 20th century economy.

But today's economy demands advanced training beyond high school. Making post-high school education the expectation, not the exception, for the modern workforce will fuel America's economic recovery and lay the foundation for a thriving 21st century economy.

More than three-quarters of all jobs today require a post-high school education. As a result, there are about 100,000 unfilled jobs right here in the Chicago area because employers can't find employees with the right skills. Those employers are looking for you and the skills you have earned here at CCC. That is your accomplishment today and that is your advantage tomorrow.

You, the City College graduates of 2012, are the foundation for Chicago's 21st century economy. You have developed many of the skills you will need for the fields where Chicago is strong, and growing stronger – for high-end manufacturing, applied engineering, computer science, IT, the healthcare sciences, and the related fields of transportation, distribution and logistics.

Those skills are the spine of Chicago's workforce and they are central to our economic competitiveness. When I talk to executives from leading companies who are thinking about locating or expanding in Chicago, they tell me that the biggest factor isn't which city has the best quality of life, or the best culture, or even the best pizza. Though, in my opinion, Chicago is the greatest city for all three. The biggest factor is the quality of the workforce.

Now, I like to think I am a pretty persuasive guy. I point to graduates like you as evidence that no other city's workforce can match the depth and diversity that Chicago's has. And right now, we are putting our money where my mouth is.

I am proud to announce that we will create a new fund to encourage local companies to train and hire CCC students in our "Colleges to Careers" program. If a corporate partner agrees to hire a City College graduate, or brings them on for a training program that leads to a job, we will pay a stipend for that person's training, or for the first few weeks of salary.

To finance this program, we will start with a \$2 million dollar fund, with half of the money coming from the City, and the other half coming from CCC and the Department. We will provide the initial dollars to pay for the job training; the company will provide the training and the jobs.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

Whether it's from small-business owners to CEOs, they tell me that they hold off hiring new people because of the expense and the risk. But by holding off on hiring, they miss out on the skills and talent of graduates like you. We are taking the expense and the risk out of the equation so that businesses will have the confidence to locate here, expand here, and hire here in Chicago.

I am confident in you, your City Colleges are confident in you, Chicago is confident in you. Because of that confidence, we are doubling down on your future with this new program. If there is one thing that this first year as Mayor has taught me, it's that you never lose when you bet on the people of Chicago.

The way I see it, this is a down payment on economic development. It is collateral today for careers tomorrow. In my opinion, it's a bargain at twice the price.

- With the 400 jobs they are bringing, Coyote Logistics is betting on the workers of Chicago.
- With the 1,000 jobs that GE is bringing, they are betting on the workers of Chicago.
- With the 1,300 jobs that United is bringing, they are betting on the workers of Chicago.

Since I took office last May, about 25 leading companies have brought around 15,000 jobs to Chicago. The best companies in the world are betting on the workers of Chicago.

More than ever, we will rely on Chicago City Colleges to be educational engines to meet that job growth. That's why we launched our "Colleges to Careers" program this year. Thanks to help from the Governor and the State, as well the support of Chancellor Hyman, we will invest hundreds of millions of dollars to modernize our City Colleges. We are updating our campuses and updating their concentrations to focus on training Chicago's workforce for the jobs of tomorrow.

With our "College to Careers" program and our new initiative to help City College graduates get their foot in the door at top companies, we are making sure that our graduates have the skills they need to compete as well as the opportunities they deserve to demonstrate them.

I am optimistic that each of you will have success as you make your way into the job market. I believe you will experience success, but I'm also sure that you will experience your share of setbacks too. I know the interview process can be difficult. I have some experience with a lengthy interview process having run for Mayor. Hopefully your interviews will go a little smoother. But, maybe I can share with you some of the lessons that experience taught me.

Early on in the campaign, I was ahead in the polls and starting to feel pretty good. That is, until I almost got thrown off the ballot. The case made its way all the way up to the Illinois Supreme Court. Meanwhile, it looked like the ballots would be printed without my name.

Seemingly overnight, the job that I had wanted my whole life, since I went to work for Richard Daley's first campaign in 1989, was suddenly hanging by a thread. The worst part was the uncertainty.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

Every other day, another reporter would declare my campaign dead. It reminded me of the story about when people told Mark Twain that his obituary had been mistakenly printed in the paper. He assured them, “reports of my death were greatly exaggerated”. Or, so I hoped, anyway.

I started my campaign wanting to speak to people about how we could make our streets safer, our schools stronger, and our City’s finances more stable. But before I knew it, I was talking more about what I stored in my basement and my leasing agreement. Not exactly inspirational campaign messaging.

It all came to a head during a court hearing that lasted more than 15 straight hours. Let’s just say, that particular job interview was less than cordial – even by Chicago standards. At certain points, you could say I missed the civility of Washington. I made sure to answer each question politely and patiently. As my wife Amy reminds me, these are not qualities that come naturally to me.

What kept me grounded throughout that long, grueling court hearing was the picture of my family that I put on the table next to me. Every time I felt like giving in or giving up, I looked at them and I kept going. My daughter was studying the America revolution at the time and I kept hearing her voice in my head, repeating Thomas Paine’s quote, in the way that only she says it through her braces: “thethes are the thimes thath thry menths thouls.”

It was a trial for me, literally and figuratively. But, as Meosha reminded us today, it’s more often in our trials than our triumphs that our true character is revealed.

As I am sure you have found in your own lives, trials like that tend to have the effect of focusing you on what you care about most. That’s what happened to me, anyway. As I looked at that picture of my kids, I realized that almost losing the chance to run for Mayor focused me on why I wanted the job in the first place.

Very simply, I wanted to be Mayor of Chicago – the city that my grandfather found a home in as a 13-year old boy escaping the pogroms of Eastern Europe, the city my father came to from Israel, the city that has been good to generations of my family - in order to make it a better place for my children to grow up in, and for other people’s children to grow up in. I wanted to be Mayor to ensure that Chicago was the best place for parents to start a young family, just as it was for my own parents.

To relieve you the suspense of the story, I was ruled to be a resident of Chicago. The election went fairly well – at least in my view. I have tried to just put that episode behind me. The word ‘residency’ is still banned in my house, even if it means losing out on a double word score in Scrabble.

Looking back, in the end, I’m glad I went through it. Not the 15 hour questioning – that wasn’t fun. But the process focused me on my priorities and made me a better candidate.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

It reminded me that it's how you deal with setbacks that says more about you than how you deal with success. How you manage adversity says more about your character than your accomplishments. Because, good fortune is fleeting while character is constant.

So, when you encounter obstacles, take them as opportunities to focus on what you value most and in that you will find your true character. When you find success, as I believe each of you will, take it as a symbol of the character you developed when your goals seemed most out of reach.

To the class of 2012, you have shown character to get your diploma. From this day forward, you have a degree that no one can take away from you. Through success and setbacks, hold on to the character that made your degree possible. Hold on to the determination and doggedness you showed when times were difficult. Hold on to the friends and family members who supported you along the way. Hold on to the memories of the professors and teachers who believed in you. And don't just remember them, honor those teachers by doing what they have done: by working to make the lives of others richer and more complete.

If you do all of those things, there will be no limit to your success, and the success of this City that is your home. On behalf of the City of Chicago: congratulations.

###