

U.S. Secretary of Labor addresses grades

May 30, 2014



The Drexel University School of Law hosted its commencement ceremony for the graduating Class of 2014 May 21. The event celebrated the successes of 141 class members at the Kimmel Center.

Law school Dean Roger J. Dennis praised numerous notable accomplishments by the entire class, including the citing of more than 14,000 hours of pro-bono service, notable contributions to countrywide case law modifications, and significant work performed by members of the class on trial team, moot court and other competitions.

Law School Board Chairman and **Trustee Thomas R. Kline** greeted the graduates by reminding them of the responsibility that comes with the power of entering the professional legal field.

President John A. Fry awarded honorary degrees on former Ambassador Earle I. Mack and U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas E. Perez. Mack's numerous accomplishments were noted, such as his selection by President George W. Bush to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Finland in 2004, his major community service efforts to assist with the rebuilding process in Haiti following the earthquake in 2010, his induction into the Drexel 100 alumni hall of fame in 1992, his tenure as a senior partner of an enormously large and successful real estate firm, his outstanding leadership in the arts through the New York State Governor's Arts Award in 2000, and of course, his massive contribution of \$15 million to what was formerly known as the Earle Mack School of Law.

While providing a brief speech upon receiving his honorary degree, Mack commemorated the "dream of the late president of Drexel University, Constantine Papadakis, who had expressed his desire for Drexel to have a world-renowned law school."

Perez delivered the keynote speech to the audience, who listened attentively as he gave a set of powerful and inspiring remarks.

He commenced his speech by acknowledging Mack's important role in founding the Drexel University School of Law and went on to thank all the faculty and staff of the school who, according to him, "found the nonmonetary rewards of working at the school to be priceless." Following this, Perez entered into the main content of his address by expressing his desire to speak about three specific topics: "failure in the sense of knowing how to fail, the fierce urgency of now, and justice and responsibility."

According to Perez, "Wisdom is really what you get when you experience the highs and lows of life and understand the learning moments that come from both."

He cited a personal failure by describing his removal from the ballot when running for the position of state attorney in Maryland during the 2006 elections. He connected this failure with his appointment as U.S. secretary of labor because had this not occurred, he might have never been appointed as the Maryland secretary of labor and in turn might have never been asked to lead the federal labor department.

Upon mentioning how his failure was openly publicized in an embarrassing fashion in The Washington Post, Perez said, "You know what? That was the most remarkable learning experience of my professional life."

Perez continued his address by emphasizing how important it is that the class of graduates take reign of their situation in life right now to start doing significant things as soon as possible, due to the "fierce urgency of now." He focused on the lasting legacy that would be left by members of the graduating class and how those around them would perceive this legacy.

Perez described his recognition for this legacy in an interesting fashion: "One assignment I would provide my students with was to write a version of their own

obituary. Some might consider this quite the morbid assignment; however, I really think it is important to understand what our legacy that we leave behind is.”

Another important point Perez made was that there may be a large number of lawyers in the professional legal field, but there is a significant lack of “just” lawyers who are willing to serve the principles of justice.

“There are a lot of lawyers coming out of law school, but there aren’t enough who are doing the things that need to be done,” he said.

Perez expressed his wishes that the graduating class would serve as lawyers who would uphold the principles of justice and responsibility through their work.

Perez recognized graduating student Eva DeLair for her successes even in the face of experiencing the death of her father. Finally, he closed his speech by mentioning and recognizing the importance of the four P’s: passion, persistence, parents and partners.

The important takeaway that Perez had for the graduating class through all of this was that failure can truly provide for some of the most beneficial learning experiences in one’s life and that they should never shy away from such failure due to the constant desire to succeed.

According to Perez, failure can be one of the largest stepping stones on the path to true success in life.

Additionally, Student Bar Association President Bradley K. Wilhelm presented the Dean Jennifer L. Rosato Excellence In The Classroom Award to professor Alex Geisinger and the Carl “Tobey” Oxholm III Outstanding Contribution To The Law School Community Award to Assistant Dean Mary McGovern. Three-quarters of the graduating Class of 2014 voted on presenting the award to Geisinger.