



# Patrick F. Leahy

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Undergraduate Commencement | May 18, 2013

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Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Diamond City of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., and to its very own Wilkes University. Thank you all for being here today, especially those of you who traveled some distance to be here.

Before I proceed, allow me to recognize both the Wilkes Civic Band under the direction of Professor Phil Simon and the Wilkes Chorus under the direction of Professor Steven Thomas. Also, while I'm at it, I'd like to thank the unsung heroes of this weekend here at Wilkes – all of our colleagues in the physical plant staff, public safety, and food service – for their hard work in preparing the campus for this celebration. Thank you.

Today, we return to a centuries-old ritual that brings students, faculty, staff and families together to celebrate a new beginning, not an old ending. After all, for years this day has been called Commencement Day; not Cessation Day or Completion Day, but Commencement Day. It marks a beginning. We prefer to think of it as the first day of the rest of your life, not the last day of your time at Wilkes University.

The tendency for this university president on a sacred occasion such as this, especially at my first Commencement Day as president, is to try to sum it all up for you. Sum it all up? Sum up perhaps the most productive, interesting, meaningful period of your life in just a few moments? I can't. It's not possible.

So, as we begin this Commencement Day together, I'd like to offer two thoughts for our graduates to ponder: the first is gratitude; the second is dreams.

First, gratitude. I know that all of you graduates have mixed emotions today: pride, relief, satisfaction, anxiety. But, I hope you also feel a deep sense of gratitude – gratitude for all of the blessings in your life, including the opportunity to cross this stage in a few moments to become a college graduate. In particular, I hope you feel a sense of gratitude for all the people in your life today.

I hope you feel a sense of gratitude for your parents – your first and best teachers. These are the individuals who helped to make this experience possible. They have supported you, encouraged you, challenged you. Your achievements today are their achievements, too. An old philosophy professor of mine once told me that there are three times in one's life when pure joy spreads across people's faces: brides and grooms on their wedding day, the first time parents hold their newborn baby, and parents on their kids' graduation day. Looking around today I see in the parents' faces the wisdom of that

statement.

I hope that you graduates also feel a sense of gratitude today for your professors, your coaches, and other mentors that you have had here at Wilkes. These are the individuals who accompanied you on your Wilkes journey. They have dedicated the one life they have to live to making students successful. These individuals will never forget you; I hope you never forget them.

And, I hope you feel a sense of gratitude today toward your friends. These are the people who made your experience here so special. Quite possibly the best friends you will ever make were made here at Wilkes. I hear it from our alumni all the time. Stay in close touch with each other. Dance at each other's weddings. Celebrate each other's successes. Comfort each other during life's difficult moments.

Find a special way on this Commencement Day (or in the days ahead) to thank these individuals – your parents, your professors, and your friends – for gracing your life. Tell them how much they mean to you.

And, second, dreams. For many of you, this Commencement Day is the fulfillment of a dream: to graduate from an American, private university – the best education at this level in the world. Upon receiving your diploma, you will become a college graduate. Congratulations on achieving this first dream. And, if it's not really your dream, then it may be your parents' and grandparents' dream. For you first-generation college graduates, this may be a dream literally generations in the making.

But, I hope the realization of this dream today simply makes possible what it is you really dream about. Start today, on your Commencement Day, to dream anew. Dreams give life purpose and meaning. It was none other than Albert Einstein, one of the really smart people of the 20th century, who said: "Imagination is more important than knowledge." Imagination – the act or power of forming a mental image of something, that is, dreaming – is more important than even knowledge.

So, if you plan to be a teacher, dream about being the national teacher of the year, like your fellow alumnus -- Les Nicholas. If you plan to be a pharmacist, dream about being appointed by two governors to serve on the Board of Pharmacy for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, like our honorary degree recipient at the graduate ceremony – Ms. Pauline Montgomery. If you plan to be a business entrepreneur, dream about starting several businesses, like our Trustee greeter and your fellow alumnus – Jason Griggs. Whatever you plan to do, dream. And, it is our hope here at Wilkes that your dreams in one way or another involve serving others. That's one way to take a dream and make it big: Put it to use serving others.

Some people will tell you that your dreams are not possible. Do not listen to them! When the world tries to tell you that your dreams are unrealistic, think of this day – your Commencement Day – and your commencement speaker, Ron Rittenmeyer. Ron Rittenmeyer grew up in this area and, like all of you, attended Wilkes. He had a dream to become a business executive – a big-time business executive. He ultimately became the CEO of EDS, one of the largest technology companies in the world. When he merged EDS with Hewlett-Packard, he helped to create a company with \$40 billion in revenue and 200,000 employees worldwide. I call that "big-time." Imagine if he had listened to all of the voices who said his dreams weren't possible. Thank you, Ron, for being here today and for sharing your wisdom with us.

Harriet Tubman, who dreamed a dream that all people would be free, once said: “Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” All of you have the capacity to dream great dreams. I hope you will. And, I hope you will start today – your Commencement Day.

So, as we celebrate your Commencement Day, I ask you to think about gratitude and dreams. If you can wake up and start each day both with gratitude for all the people in your life and with dreams for the future, today really will be the first day of the rest of your life – the first day of a full, rich, meaningful life.

Congratulations, Graduates. It has been our privilege here at Wilkes to be a part of your life these past few years. We look forward to celebrating your Commencement Day with each of you.