

**OHIO COLLEGE OF PODIATRIC MEDICINE  
COMMENCEMENT SPEECH  
Chancellor Eric Fingerhut  
May 25, 2007**

Thank you President Melillo, graduates, and distinguished guests.

When I accepted the position of Chancellor a few months ago, one of the perks of the job for me was the opportunity to participate in ceremonies like this one, in which we celebrate the lives and accomplishments of Ohio's graduates.

Of course, I recognize the limitations of my assignment here today. As Gary Trudeau once said at an occasion like this:

“Commencement speeches were invented largely in the belief that outgoing college students should never be released into the world until they have been properly sedated.”

I'll try my best not to do that to you today.

I do want to take a moment to thank Gov. Ted Strickland and my colleagues in the House and Senate for the confidence they showed me by naming me to this position. I was hired as Chancellor a few months ago, but my role changed significantly yesterday when I was officially sworn in as the first Cabinet-level official to oversee higher education in Ohio.

I'm happy to be able to share my first public comments in this new role with you---the 2007 Ohio College of Podiatric Medicine graduating class.

In many ways, you graduates and I are going through the same thing right now. I imagine you can't help feeling a little trepidation as you embark on the rest of your lives. Well, I've had the same jitters ever since I was named Chancellor, wondering what the future holds and if I can make my vision of higher education in Ohio a reality.

And what is that vision? Oh, it's modest enough – I want Ohio's higher education system to be world-class, with people from all around the globe clamoring to attend our schools. I want a higher education system that offers every kid growing up in Ohio opportunities that will allow him or her to stay here, prosper, and raise a family. And we need a higher education system that gives every adult in Ohio the opportunity to go back to school, improve their skills and earnings.

Of course, I'm not so naïve as to think any of this will come easily. But I'm optimistic enough to believe we can do it here in Ohio.

If I were to come back here in four years to address the incoming freshmen at their graduation, I would hope to be able to tell you that we are well on our way to building on the traditions and successes of Ohio's great universities and colleges, making your degree from the Ohio College of Podiatric Medicine even more valuable than it is today.

I hope I could say that we are developing unique missions and centers of excellence here in Ohio that establish our global leadership.

And I would hope to be able to brag that we are keeping our most talented students here at home and attracting the world's talent to our doorstep. Talent is the currency of the new economy. You are part of that talent and new economy.

My respect and admiration for what you graduates have accomplished is boundless. Your college education has already enriched your lives, I know, and in the coming years, it will continue to do so in ways you may not be able to imagine just yet.

In many ways, this fine institution is a model of what I envision for higher education in Ohio. As one of only 8 accredited podiatry schools, 70 percent of the students here are from out of state and Canada. Did I mention world-class? Your school already is.

One of the things we're working on is how tie our universities and communities together. You are already doing that here, with affiliations with important medical facilities in Northeast Ohio and externships to medical students in 300 private practices.

This is exactly what I envision for every medical school in Ohio.

And to set an example for all institutions of higher learning, you have worked to eliminate costly duplication through course offerings and affiliations with other universities.

If I could take just a moment for a personal aside, I'd like to tell you that on several occasions in my life, the science of podiatry came up big for me. The first time was when I was a teenager and I was in so much pain I couldn't put on my shoe.

My family didn't have health insurance to cover this, and we relied on the medical services provided in the community. My mother called the Cleveland Foot and Ankle Clinic.

I'll never forget my gratitude to the doctors there who were able to not only treat my ailment but give it a name -- onychocryptosis, which I remember sounded a lot cooler than in-grown toe nail.

One of the reasons that I accepted the opportunity to come speak to you today as Chancellor --- out of the many invitations I've received --- is to come back and say thank you.

The second time your profession had my back was a few years ago, when I ran for the U.S. Senate. Someone -- I think his initials were EF -- had the bright idea that I should walk across Ohio as part of my winning strategy for election.

I learned two things from that experience -- one, all the walking in the world won't get you in the Senate, and two, if you're going to do what I did, your podiatrist is more important to you than your campaign manager.

I recognize that some of you, like me, are first generation college graduates. I am the grandson of immigrants and the son of two hardworking people whose own educations ended with high school. I was the first in my family to obtain a college degree, and I learned what an education can do to a person's life.

For me, it meant a life of public service. I can remember as a little kid reading the newspaper every day...but only the Cleveland Indians and Detroit Tigers baseball stories. I thought that the rest of the newspaper was just a wrapper they put around the sports section.

Then one day I started reading the front page and was amazed to discover that there were people out there making important decisions and trying to make the world better. I realized around then that public service was what I wanted to do, too.

I could not have imagined then the path my life would take, the elected offices and now, Chancellor of the Board of Regents – opportunities that would have been unattainable without my education and my sense that I wanted to be of service to my community.

As doctors, I know you share a vision of public service, too. Yours is a compassionate profession known for giving back to the community, and I know you will carry on that noble tradition. I can only imagine how many children, senior citizens, and other patients you will serve over the coming years.

There were no shortcuts to where you find yourselves today. The diplomas you are receiving from this fine institution can only be earned through commitment and hard work.

And while acknowledging that hard work, let us not forget to take a moment and thank those loved ones here today who have supported you on this journey. Whether you've got your mother or father or husband or wife or siblings or children --- watching you here today in cap and gown accepting a diploma that represents the culmination of a dream --- we say thank you. We salute all of you for the support and encouragement you have given to make this college degree a reality.

Graduates, the education you have received will benefit your fellow man, and it will enrich your own lives in ways you can't yet imagine. You all have your own stories to write. Your dreams, your purpose, your life all are waiting to be discovered.

**DREAM BIG DREAMS**

Thank you and congratulations.

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