

# KENT STATE UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

Chancellor Eric Fingerhut  
May 13, 2007

Thank you President Lefton, Provost Gaston, Trustee Mullin 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 the 2007 Kent State University graduating class.

What a special Mother's Day this must be for the moms, watching your son or daughter in cap and gown accepting a diploma that represents the culmination of a dream for both of you.

Of course, graduations can bring out some conflicting emotions in parents. As Ohio's gift to the world of humor, the late columnist Erma Bombeck, once observed:

"Graduation Day is tough for adults. They go to the ceremony as parents. They come home as contemporaries. After 22 years of child-raising, they are unemployed."

But don't you graduates worry about Mom and Dad. They'll be fine. As long as YOU don't stay unemployed.

And let's not forget about our other moms---those of you *wearing* the caps and gowns today. Or sitting in the audience watching your own kids' dad get his diploma. We

salute all of you for the support and encouragement you have given to make this college degree a reality --- and for making the extra macaroni and cheese dinners all those nights while your significant other studied for his or her exams.

Quite seriously, I consider it a great privilege to join you today in honoring and recognizing these graduates from the colleges of Education, Health and Human Services, the Arts, and Architecture and Environmental Design. Their talents and skills are about to be shared with a world that never outgrows its need for those things.

My respect and admiration for what you graduates have accomplished is boundless. There are no shortcuts to where you find yourselves today. The diplomas you are receiving from this great university can only be earned through commitment and hard work. Your college education has already enriched your lives, I know, and in the coming years, it will continue to do so in ways you can't imagine.

My own experience offers an example of the life-changing impact an education can have. 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 means.

For me, it meant a life of public service. I can remember as a kid thinking 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 decided 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.

That's what education does. It opens doors. It affords you choices you would not have had before, whether you are just starting your life's work, or you have returned to get an education to begin a new career.

We are living in an age of profound transformation, and talent is the currency of the modern economy --- your economy.

Your talents have been honed here at Kent State University, and now you are ready. I encourage you to be bold, to do great good for the world. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century author Johann Wolfgang Goethe said: "Dream no small dreams for they have no power to move the hearts of men."

In many ways, you graduates and I are going through much 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 their families.

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 Kent State 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.

Big dreams? Yes, I'll admit that. But as Goethe said, it's the big dreams that move men's hearts. And, as you will learn, there's room in this world for a lot of hearts to be moved.

I want to take a moment to salute one graduate who could not be here today. Hiwon Woo, who earned a degree in Mathematics Education from the College of Education, is on duty with the Ohio National Guard.

Woo is a former constituent from my old State Senate district. He and his parents emigrated from Korea 14 years ago in search of a better life. Despite the language and cultural barriers he faced, Woo graduated from Maple Heights High School, then served four years as a U.S. Marine.

Woo enrolled at Kent State in 2001, and at the same time signed up for the National Guard. As his fellow freshmen

were getting acclimated to campus life, he found himself serving a tour of duty in Baghdad. He returned to school, then had to leave again when his Guard unit went to the Gulf Coast for the post-Katrina clean-up.

Now that he has finally graduated, Woo's goal is to find a teaching position in a city school so he can work with bilingual middle-school students.

He has served us and is continuing to serve us in so many ways and on so many levels. Stories like his inspire me, as I hope he inspires all of you.

You have your own stories to write. Your dreams, your purpose, your new life's work all are waiting to be discovered. Dream big dreams, our future belongs to you.

Congratulations – and go out there and change the world.