



Mayor Daniel Rivera's Commencement Speech Northern Essex Community College, Haverhill, MA May 17th, 2014

Good morning Graduates, & Parents, Spouses, Children, sisters and brothers of graduates. Thank you to President Glenn, chairman Moynihan & Members of the board of trustees for this great honor to speak before the graduating class of 2014. Thank you to the members of the faculty & Staff that have made this event possible. Commencement is such an important part of this great accomplishment for the graduates so thank you for making it special for them!

As you heard I am a Lawrence kid whose mother came here from Dominican Republic, to make a good life for her children. So I share much in common with many of you. I am also veteran, a homeowner, a husband and like you now we are all **college graduates!** I am also like many of you for another reason. **I am not supposed to be here.** I am not supposed to be the Mayor of Lawrence. I was not supposed to win that election. The reality is because, I am a child of an immigrant, from a single parent home, that came from the projects, a Hispanic boy from Lawrence who grew up in bad economic times; I wasn't even supposed to graduate from high school.

Yo soy common mucho de ustedes, hijo de inmigrantes, de una madre soltera, el primero de mi familia que llevo a graduarces del colegio. De nosotros no se esperaba esto. El mundo no esperaba que hibanos estar aqui hoy usted grauandoces del colejio y yo como alcalde de Lawrence.

But like the oldest graduate here today who is 73 years old, and the youngest who is 17, we are here and we have accomplished what many thought for us could not be done. See for the people that helped me in my campaign and voted for me, we took on the hardest thing in American politics, a campaign to unseat a sitting popular mayor. Now I know we did not win by much I know we did not win because everyone loved our positions or loved my chubby cheeks or my ties, we won because a majority of people desperately wanted change. So we won an election to change a City. And we are working hard to make the City of Lawrence a safer place to live and raise a family. We are working to make people proud of our City and to be sure not to let them down.

But You. Those graduating today, Wow!

Ustedes si hicieron algo especial aqui. You have truly accomplished an amazing thing. There are graduates to day that are mothers with small children, mothers with multiple children, there are people that did not graduate from high school and worked to get their GED and now are here graduating from college. Today graduating are Single moms and single dads, people who have lost their jobs after working at them for many years, people are graduating today that are part of the long time unemployed, the under-employed and the forgotten. People are graduating today here at Northern Essex Community College that started this journey not having any understanding at all of the English language.

So this is hard for me what do I say to a group of people who have worked hard, who have fought against great odds, and overcome great obstacles to get here today. What words can I possibly give you as you enter your new chapter...This is what I came up with. This is what I came up with. Wish me luck. Today....Come up here...walk across this stage, get your diploma and Celebrate this accomplishment. Enjoy yourself tonight, tomorrow night and next week. Have some cake, a beer, a glass of wine or two ... enjoy the love and admiration of your family and friends. Hug your mom and Dad or your best friend or your partner....post most of it on Facebook (not all of it) you still need to get a job. Celebrate because you deserve it. You have earned it.

Then after tonight, after this weekend, after next week...once you have done all the celebrating you want. Once you can't dance one more Merengue or Bachata, or that your face hurts from smiling or feet from dancing.... once that is over; Take a deep breath..... **And Get back to work.**

Get back to work going after your next set of hopes and dreams! Use this achievement to achieve something else, something more. Look for some other thing no one expects you to do. Get another degree, apply for a bigger job, start a business, do something that others may say her do that? I don't think that she will succeed. And use this experience to remember how far you have come and how strong you are. Work towards something new something more that you might hope for. Remember the hard night's studying after working all day, Remember trying to stay awake in class, remember how hard it was to make sure you had a baby sitter to watch your child or sick mom while you went to class. Remember how hard it was just to get to class...on timeevery day.

I often think to myself after growing up in the projects, going to army basic training, and the military police academy and being an MP in Germany, and being sent to war, and fighting in Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the gulf war....how bad can anything I take on possibly be? So, you must do the same. Your journey has forged a stronger you. You must take your new hopes and dreams and work for them President Obama talks about the Audacity of Hope in his book by the same name....I looked up Audacity and it means boldness or daring, especially with confident or arrogant disregard for personal safety, conventional thought, or other restrictions. The president says...." ...the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; ... the hope of a millworker's son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too.

Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. This is the audacity of hope! You hoped to come to Northern Essex and complete your degree despite all the evidence to the contrary, and you did it. Now you must do more. I have found that one of my most important jobs as Mayor is to tell people that change and success is possible. Although I am not the mayor for many of you, I am telling you today that the thing that you really want to do, but you think that you can't,.... That thing... **IS Possible.**

Let me tell you a story about two of my lawyer friends One of the hardest things of becoming a lawyer is the bar exam a 2 full day test you have to take to become a lawyer, Many people take it and fail, it's

hard. Many people never pass it. One of my friends took this 2 day test while she was pregnant, another friend did it while she had a small child at home and she was a single parent. The audacity of these women both Hispanic, both immigrants, to hope beyond their current situation beyond what people thought about them! The audacity of a small City on the Merrimack River to hope to be the industrial giant it once was; the audacity of those of us that are fighting to change people's minds about Lawrence. This audacity the president tells us is what will make our City better, our lives better, it will make us better. So after you celebrate get back to it. Back to hoping, and back to working...Because we are waiting...waiting like your families will be when you walk out of this tent....waiting to celebrate you and your accomplishments, ready to love you and post our selfies with you on Facebook.....Me too I will be waiting for you in Lawrence to welcome you to our changed City....We are all ready and waiting for you to show us again how truly great you are! Because you have shown us once already and we believe you can! Congratulations!