

Rep. Chaka Fattah (D/PA) Commencement@Vaux Middle School 6/24/96

To your great Principal, the Assistant Principal and to the staff and administrators of this great school and to the class of 1996. Let me just start out by saying that you know it to be true that you did not arrive here at this moment all by yourself. That there are some people who are grinning ear-to-ear just to be able to see you in caps and gowns--your parents, your grandparents, family--why don't you give them a big, big round of applause (applause). This has been a day for the President of Morehouse College. He was the President the day as Martin Luther King, Jr. walked across the stage as he handed him his diploma. If he had been alive today, as an educator had any say a lot of people have remembered the fact that Dr. King when he said that the calamity of life is not about risking your dreams, but having those dreams That you should never allow with his message. That whatever you appoint to do with your life, you should seek to do it so well that neither the living nor the dead That's your challenge. And I hope that each of you as graduates now of Vaux Middle School will aim high as you move forward from this point in your life. Aim high as shooting for the stars in knowing that to do less than your best is knowing that it will disappoint you and will, in fact, disappoint others. I challenge each of you today to think about this commitment and celebrating some hope along life's highway as if you were driving down the road heading in the right direction and you remember Head Start, kindergarten, you remember leaving elementary school, and now you are passing through the school, but where you are going is a variable, and you have not arrived at a destination. I was hoping that you would take what you have learned here and use it as a foundation to build on. I'd like to personally congratulate each and everyone of you as an individual for what you have accomplished. I'd like to thank those who were members of the Honor Society and made honorable. Give them a round of applause. Those who have had almost perfect attendance. Those who have always felt it appropriate to look out for their classmates and tried to help them in school. Those who have done their absolute best each and every day they've been at this great school. I'd like to thank your acceptance for your natural faith that is what this school has the ability to provide (applause). And it's great to see you come here and turf because each of you represent a very bright hope for your individual family. They look at you as future doctors and lawyers, engineers and architects, astronauts. They look at you as people who will be going to go on to be police personnel and work as

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) Commencement Talk (6/24/96) -1

teachers and administrators. I hope one of you or two of you will go on to Congress or be Mayor or Governor. I hope that you would aim high because there are others before you who have been Mayors and Congress people. Think about the White House, think about what it is that you can achieve in your life that will make your living I would challenge you to think about this commitment, this graduation, as just a moment in time in which you have passed another important milestone. But only one, because your parents and grandparents--those that have loved you, who will come to a few more graduations--they want to see you at a high school graduation (applause), they want to see you at a college graduation (applause), Board of Trustees, Penn State, Lincoln University, Community College, there's some other young person, who is working hard every day to get in. some other young person who is going to studying hard, working to get in. You need to aim high so that you don't not only disappoint your family, but disappoint yourself. Think about what it is that you really want to do in your life, and then dedicate yourself to doing it. Because the truth is that you can achieve anything that you focus on, anything is about hopelessness, it's about getting rid of distractions and focusing in on what it is that you want to accomplish. Now each of you hopefully already have some idea about what it is that you're good at, what it is that you like a part of yourself. Some are better than others at math. Some are better than others at science. Some are more gifted in their athletic ability, for example--whatever beautiful talent that they may bring. Whatever your talent, whatever your gift, you just do the utmost. Be thankful for the teachers that you have had and ones that you will have in high school that will help you, train your aim, train your focus. Be thankful for your parents who will wake you up early in the morning so that you won't miss days of school. (Applause) I was raised with my five brothers. My Mom was a single parent at that time and had to work at a number of jobs. My grandmother had the responsibility of getting us off to school. She had one simple rule--either you were dead or dying or you were going to school. (Laughter) And when we would really get confused about what was going on, she would ask us to go get the deed on the house and point out our name. Well over the refrigerator, whatever rules we had, we could pick out. So it was clear to us that there was work that we had to do as students and that there was work that adults were doing so that we would have a clear mind enabling us to do our work. As young people, I know that you think that the world began with you. I know that's so because I have teenager myself in

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) Commencement Talk (6/24/96)-2

school and somehow I think all young people assume that everything just started with them. there's not much new under the sun. In that there's no place where you're going to find success before work, except in the dictionary. (Applause) You are going to going to high school... high school, college, don't compete for last place in school when you get there. Focus on getting on the honor roll. Focus on being a part of the debate team. Take that great playing all the games of life apply yourself. You are to be congratulated for what you have accomplished. But if you stop now, all these things that have been invested in you, have all been a waste. This is just a preparation to send you off to high school, and then to college, and then to graduate school, and then professional school. This is just the beginning, for the big league, when you'll have the responsibilities to serve in Congress and to be inducted into society that we live in. You represent the true future of our cities, and our country and, believe it or not, the entire world. We can't afford for you to fail. We need each of you to be successful individually, and we need you to be successful collectively. I believe it was who said that we make our deal with life for..... and life will give us no more. And nobody Challenge yourself to be the absolute best that you can be. Remember the life of a who wrote the book, Give Us A Hand. He was an eighth grade student at a middle school, single parent, row house neighborhood in a big city, just like ours. He said he had no competition for last place in middle school. He owned last place mother and grandmother, he decided with some encouragement from them to apply himself. He graduated top of class from high school, with straight A's and honor roll. Top of his class in college, and on to medical school. Top of his class in a specialized program in pediatric neurosurgery from Johns Hopkins University. He became the first doctor ever to separate siamese twins, joined at the head, and hoped they would live. This young man had but he would never had known this, we would never had visited this, if he had not applied himself. Each of you, as you sit here today, don't just pat yourself on your back for achieving this milestone, even though it's important. Push yourself forward, aim high. Don't make a deal with life because life provides for each of you so many more opportunities and I'm not going to give a long speech, and I'm about to conclude. But let me just tell you this. That I'm counting on you and your parents are counting on you and your families are counting on you. That your teachers who have

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) Commencement Talk (6/24/96) -3

invested and will be seeking the best from you, believe in you. But that when it's all said and done, not your teachers or your parents, not the people who love you, or push for you, not even those who are rooting against you, life is not always fair perhaps the fellow single parent household, or because you might not have all the money in the world, or because you went to a public school, or because you came up in the inner city or whatever excuses that may come to you, let me tell you this: that none of those excuses matter. If you are determined to do your absolute best, if you're willing to do whatever you want to do with your life, don't rest, that neither the living nor the dead nor the unborn can do it any better.

Congratulations and God bless you (applause).

Chaka Fattah (D/PA) Commencement Talk (6/24/96) -4