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David H. Getches, Dean, Univ. of Colo. Law School,
Commencement 2009 Remarks, "Go Where You Are
Needed" (May 8, 2009).

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Commencement 2009 Remarks **“Go Where You Are Needed”**

Dean David H. Getches

Friday, May 8, 2009

On behalf of our Colorado Law family—faculty, staff, and alumni—it is my honor to welcome the families and friends of the Class of 2009. And congratulations to a wonderful group who arrived as students and will leave this hall tonight as alumni—the Class of 2009! You are our reason for being here. Cherish this day. It is all yours.

You share the celebration with your families—mothers, fathers, spouses, siblings, dear friends, and other loved ones. To the loving families and friends, I say congratulations, too. You were patient. You paid, in so many ways. You tolerated the distractions and absences and the mood swings. You hid your amusement when a simple conversation turned to sentences that began “it could be argued ...” They could not have done it without you. We thank you, the loved ones whose support made this day possible; the Class of 2009 thanks you.

At graduation, we are reminded of the importance of family and many of this class carry a legacy from earlier generations. The celebration is even greater for families of our graduates who are themselves alumni of the Law School:

- Annelise Garlin, daughter of Alex Garlin ’76
- Nick Anesi, son of Frank Anesi ’62
- Ty McKinstry, son of Michael McKinstry ’73
- Amy Kramer, sister of Courtney Kramer ’08
- Martin Galloway, nephew of Dan Galloway and Kim Allegetti, both ’91
- Melanie Jordan, niece of the late Dan Jordan ’78
- Ben Parrott, son of Phillip Parrott ’81
- Carrie Covington Doyle, wife of Ben Doyle ’08
- Beth Pingrey Mankamy, wife of Jay Mankamy ’08

Speaking of family, Michael Aaronson who is graduating today is the son of our Clinical Professor Norm Aaronson.

Seated on the stage with me are Deans Matthew and Trujillo, Registrar Cindy Gibbons, and our hooding professors, Richard Collins, Mark Loewenstein, Paul Ohm, and Laura Spitz—who flew in from her visit last semester at Emory Law School to be with us today.

Also with us on the stage is our distinguished speaker, Governor Roy Romer ’52, who you will hear from later.

Seated behind me are the faculty and administrators. Second only to the satisfaction and pride of your family is the satisfaction and pride of these people. As Colorado Law students, you know them as teachers and mentors, who do what they love to do, and do it well. They are known beyond this campus by their publications and accomplishments as authors and experts. But whatever satisfaction they gain from the books and articles they publish is eclipsed by the enduring value we appreciate from seeing the contributions and accomplishments of students who go forth to serve the profession and the community.

I ask that our world-class Colorado Law faculty please stand.

Please help me recognize and thank our staff members who are assisting today, at work even now. Led by Danielle Hayward, they have assisted your class officers in organizing and orchestrating this event.

And now to the Class of 2009.

What a wild and wooly ride this has been!

The world around us went through changes you never could have contemplated, profound changes that would have been chalked off as preposterous if someone had predicted them three years ago. Deepening armed conflict abroad complicated by misdeeds of American officials, some in high places, some lawyers now facing disbarment for their legal advice in the heat of national fear. An historic election. A worldwide economic crisis. And more.

You stayed the course you set in the fall of 2006, and many of you became more committed to the urge to make a difference that led you to law school in the first place.

You were the first class in the history of Colorado Law to spend all three years in the Wolf Law Building.

The crusty old 2Ls and 3Ls told you that you never knew how bad it was in the old building, that you were like spoiled kids, being raised with wireless Internet everywhere, flowing lattes, a gas grill in the courtyard, and attending classes in a technology-smart and very “green,” LEED gold-certified building. They didn’t even have electrical outlets when they were 1Ls.

Shortly after the start of classes that year, you celebrated the building dedication with Justice Stephen Breyer and Colorado alumna ABA President Karen Mathes. A large number of your class helped plan and carry out the gala event on Dean Trujillo’s team of organizers. Carlos de Dios was honor guard leading the procession and you all were part of the festivities on that rainy September day, a celebration that ran into the night to the music of Onda. The party was at the same site where you will top off your time at Colorado Law with the reception tonight.

You graduates all know well the story of the building project; perhaps some of the families do not. As an academic building that is 61% student funded—the rest from donations—the Wolf Law Building is unique in the nation. The project depended on your paying a \$1,000 tuition differential every year, plus a campus-wide fee. The fee was the result of law student advocacy. It was passed by a student government for 29,000 students whose legislative council included your classmates Joe Neguse and Amy Kramer, while they were mere undergraduates. It enabled the construction of four buildings on the Boulder campus; a remarkable story of civic responsibility for any law school, any group of people.

Your enduring memories of law school will include what happened in the classroom. Of course your memories of piercing the corporate veil and the fertile octogenarian and *res ipsa loquitur* are burned indelibly into your memory—at least until the end of July after the bar exam.

Every class has its distinct personality traits. And the Class of 2009 is distinguished by its spirited engagement and leadership. It is a class of supportive smiles, a can-do attitude, and of seeing the glass at least partially full rather than in terms of empty.

These traits are part of your personal make-up and they will be part of your professional make-up. In her very first year here, Jen Dill found out about how professionalism and personal caring can mix in a competitive environment. Her computer with a semester’s work on it broke down during first-year finals, and she was overwhelmed with offers of notes and assistance from her classmates.

For full-bore engagement in academics, how about Paul Shoning who captured the highest overall grades?

Everyone on the journals knows the meaning of engagement; special huzzahs to those who toiled late into many nights, and particularly Editors-in-Chief Brent Jordheim, Beth Mankamyer, and Hiwot Molla.

And, those class officers—Joe Neguse, Mike Fredregill, again, Beth Mankamyer, and Ben Parrott—were elected and re-elected all three years. Leadership, engagement, big-time smiles.

And for leadership, engagement, and a winning smile, think of Hiwot and the SBA officers. They also epitomized the traits that permeate this wonderful class: Hiwot Molla, your president—also an Editor in Chief, as I mentioned; La Kischa Cook and Shanelle Kindel, each vice-president for a year, and David Lee Treasurer last year. La Kischa and Shanelle also starred on several moot court teams.

All of the people I mentioned as your leaders were always there, always working—not just a politician satisfied with the status of a title and resume entry! They were hands-on, leaders by example—selling tickets, setting up, taking down, enlisting, and inspiring others.

As I have indicated in repeating some of their many engagements, these leaders are multi-faceted, multi-taskers.

But for multi-faceted, let me single out Joe Neguse. Besides his enthusiastic engagement as a serial class president, he has been in four moot court competitions. If that isn't enough, last November, Joe was elected to the University of Colorado Board of Regents from the 2nd Congressional District. So now, he is my boss. Joe Neguse, a natural leader.

The accomplishments of this class are many and varied. And not necessarily tied to elected offices. Consider the incredible leadership and hard work of Kim Perdue in putting together the National Native American Law Students Moot Court competition hosted by Colorado Law.

There are many, so I mention these people only as exemplars.

The civic engagement of this class carries a legacy you will leave to future generations. Many of you led the way to the creation of the Public Service Pledge Program where students commit 50 hours of volunteer work during law school. In this first year of the program, several of the class earned this distinction in only a single year.

The class propelled the Loan Repayment Assistance Program that assists students who go into low-paying, full-time public interest work with their debt load. You helped to make the program permanent and expand it by fundraising and lobbying to get legislation passed in the Colorado General Assembly a year ago. And soon our guests will hear how the Class of 2009 will make a lasting impact on LRAP when Beth presents the class gift.

Volunteerism is already a way of life for many of you. Thousands of hours committed. This became obvious during your first year when a delegation led by Jessie Freer and Valerie Gaimon went off on break to help out hurricane victims in New Orleans needing legal assistance.

Your third year was a particularly powerful one for volunteering. Large numbers of this class worked for [olitical candidates—in races from President to Regent, to monitor polling places, and to campaign on issues, such as opposing Amendment 46.

All this fabulous engagement has not been a barrier to your having a good time on occasion—speaking of the glass half-full. The many happy times you enjoyed together tempered some of the intensity of school.

In true Boulder form, many of you excel in athletics, doing for fun what others consider painful. Emily Walker, Lindsay Hutchinson, and Jessie Freer all ran marathons. Nine people participated the Steamboat Pentathlon. And Alison Flint raced a cross country ski marathon. Of course, there's Tyrone Glover's remarkable skill in martial arts.

Many—a surprising number of you—had time not only to balance your growing professional life with the occasional party or snowboarding trip, but also for growing and even starting families while in law school.

This weekend we also celebrate Mother's Day. In this class we have lots of new or almost moms. Will all the mothers or about-to-be-mothers in the graduating class please stand.

We want to pause to recall two people who started with this class but who are not here today. Tom Sawdei passed away this year, and he is missed today.

Jay Perry suffered a near fatal climbing accident a few months ago and, happily, we are counting on his returning to school in the fall to finish.

Now, let me say a few words about the world you are entering. This is a radically different world from the one you walked as you decided to come to law school. One way it is different is that it needs you more than ever before.

Now, some of you may think, “If the world needs me more than ever, why is it so hard to get a job?” I want to speak to you about that.

First, let me say this family here on the stage is not finished with you. We are with you in your hunt for an entry point to a career. Dean Susani Harris and Eric Bono and Karen Trojanowski of our Career Development Office are working overtime to assist. They will have a table inside the building during the reception where you should sign up for an individual appointment to work with them. Starting tomorrow—well, Monday anyway.

We have also established a few fellowships during bar study for those who have financial need while studying and are willing to work a few weeks this summer. These are funded by companies, firms, and organizations. And yesterday we announced five fellowships to work with faculty for a few weeks this summer. We are funding this with law school money even as we must cut other budgets.

For students who have been told they must defer starting at their law firms, we will line up public service work for you—employment where you are especially needed.

The Office of Career Development has launched a series of programs on finding jobs in this difficult economy. Check them out. One is on alternative careers. And Dean Dayna Matthew has helped to create another on starting your own practice.

OCD has started a networking program with members of our Law Alumni Board for job counseling.

Please take advantage of these programs. And do please be open-minded about the kind and location of your first job. Flexibility may be the key to opening a door to interesting possibilities you never considered.

Think of three 1968 graduates, Norm Brownstein, Jack Hyatt, and Steve Farber, who were turned away from all the big firms when they graduated in 1968 and so started their own firm—which now has hundreds of lawyers in a half dozen cities.

Think of Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor who told us her story when she was here this year—of how, she graduated from Stanford Law School in a day when few women were lawyers. She was told by a senior partner that he could not hire her as a lawyer for the firm, but could start her as a secretary. She found her way, through a series of lesser jobs to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Think of Ted Kowalski, a 1995 graduate, who told me he longed to work for the Colorado Attorney General but they told him that they had no positions. He did not take no for an answer and worked for nothing for several months. They found they could not do without him and today he has one of the most important water law positions in state government.

Think of Glenn Jones who visited at the law school a few weeks ago. He graduated in 1961 and saw an opportunity for bringing television to mountain towns by cable and slept in his old Volkswagen between stringing cable and selling subscriptions. He put together innovative financing to build his business, Jones Intercable, one of the largest companies of its kind, which he sold for more than a billion dollars.

I have the privilege of meeting our alumni all over the country and have seen the variety of their careers. Widen your realm of possibilities and you will find your place.

My most important advice is to find where you are needed. That's the job you want.

If we taught well and you learned well, you know how to solve problems, and you have internalized the professional ethic of service. That potent combination makes you profoundly valuable to the world—to communities and individuals that you will serve. You are needed. And that is what opportunity is all about.

As for professionalism, we hope we have taught well, and that you have supplemented the morality you brought here with you. Professionalism is not just about rules of professional responsibility but is about honor and integrity. In a tough economy, the temptations to stray are more intense than ever—from clients who want to cross over the line, to firm management overly concerned with the bottom line, to your own exasperation over making ends meet or pay off debt.

The Rules of Professional Responsibility that will guide much of your future work, like our own Honor Code, do not cover everything with precision. But by this point in life, you know what to do. As Marcus Aurelius said, “If it is not right, don’t do it; if it is not true, don’t say it.”

Many here will be judges, trusted counselors, leaders in communities, states, and the nation. You will go where you have never dreamed.

Think of our speaker Roy Romer. At his graduation from Colorado Law 57 years ago did this boy from Holly, Colorado ever imagine he would—after a few years in private practice—own businesses, including a flying school and a ski area, be elected to serve in both houses of the legislature, as state treasurer, then Governor?

Each move was to a job where he saw he was needed more. He became passionate about education in these jobs. And so it was that after being Governor of Colorado, he took on the job of superintendent of Los Angeles Unified School District—the hardest job of his lifetime, a new career at 71, because he was needed more than ever. And now he continues, a zealous advocate of education in the next phase of a career of leadership and engagement. He should be an honorary member of the Class of 2009 and though he doesn’t know it yet, he will soon be inducted with this Class’s Order of the Coif members.

The Class of 2009’s signature characteristics of engagement and leadership make it a fair prediction that this is a class that will be heard from—loud and clear, far and wide.

You will fulfill the desire to make a difference that brought you here. Your ability to tackle and solve problems with professionalism will blend with your propensity to be engaged and lead. You are sorely needed in this world you are entering.

My wish for you is that you will know the satisfaction of serving where you are needed throughout your career and in so doing, I am confident you will give honor to our profession and live a fulfilling life.

Thank you.