

Doctor Campbell, Board members, Faculty, Parents and of course our Graduates, thank you so much for the opportunity to share such a special day with you.

We should give our graduates a round of Applause!

I am honored to have the opportunity to speak at your graduation. It seems like yesterday I was attending my graduation at Scottsboro High School. Strangely, the one thing I can't remember about my graduation day is what the commencement speaker had to say.

If you are like me, you hope that the commencement speaker will provide some insight on the world and how your life fits into it - but 50 words or less! I hope today that you will be able to take something meaningful from my brief comments. AND I promise to be brief.

Probably one of the most difficult speeches to prepare, you know, is a commencement speech. My thoughts have gone round and round, what can I say that is equal to how special this day is for each and every one of you.

I want to address another special group in attendance:

To the families of these graduates: thank you for all you've done to help these graduates reach this day. For many of you this means a new chapter in your life as well: Your graduate is moving on, and you can take great pride in knowing you helped get them here. To the staff and administration at NACC, thank you for giving of yourselves as well to further these students education.

We are gathered here to celebrate your long educational journey and the hard work that it took to get you here; But I have some bad news for you:

**Your journey is just beginning.** While these past years may have seemed to drag by; trust me: the next 10 years will come and go faster than you can blink your eye and your learning is just beginning too:

This ceremony is called a “commencement”. Most people hear that word and the first thing they think is the “end of something”. The word “commence” means to begin. This ceremony is the equivalent of a mother bird pushing her baby birds out of the nest. We all hope, pray and trust that you have been given all the tools you will need to fly on your own, but ready or not, the world is waiting for you to get out of that nest.

Robert Browning, a famous English poet from the 1800’S, wrote about education and said **it’s a journey not a destination**. Some of you here tonight might be the most outstanding academically in your class and some of you might not be. What you graduate with today might matter a great deal in your journey, and it might not. My point is, your education is a journey, not a destination, it’s never too late to shape how you want that journey to look?

Ultimately your goals and your success in your life is entirely up to you.

Your life right now is a blank canvas. So how will you paint it?

Will you be a splash-painter or will you create a masterpiece with what you have been given?

When you set out to achieve your dreams, I hope you will keep a few things in mind.

**Treat every type person with respect.** Life is just way too short to treat the people we meet in our lives as if they were expendable. If you live your life only trying to advance yourself, then I can tell you right now, your life will be awfully lonely.

*“Senator Dial who has served in state legislature for 43 years recently reminded us that when he first started in the House of Representatives that the “READING CLERK” was a young lady named “Kay Ivey” – she is now our governor.”*

**Don't waste time on jealousy, being envious, or holding grudges.** There is a song that was written around 1999 titled : “Everybody is Free to wear Sunscreen” I would encourage you when you leave

here to google it but the lyric's are something like this;

"Don't waste your time on jealousy

"Sometimes you're head, sometimes you're behind"

"The race is long and in the end, it's only with yourself"

"Remember the compliments you receive, forget the insults"

"Keep your old love letters; throw away your old bank statements"

Something to keep in mind as you begin your new future is Love and Faith!

I am not talking about the kind of love you may feel right now for your boyfriend/girlfriend or your pet. I am referring to selflessly loving people in your everyday life- Family, friend's and Co-'workers – those mentors in your life whomever they may be.

**Increase your faith, in yourself and our creator.**

Every one of us needs an abiding faith to guide us through life's turbulent time's, the loss of our loved ones and those hard decision's you must make.

I am reminded of the story former Senator Zell Miller while running for Governor of Georgia told:

*'You know, as you walk down a dusty country road and see a turtle sitting on a fence post, there is one thing you know for sure---- He didn't get there by himself.'*

It could have been your mom or dad, your professor or a friend who shaped your life and made a difference.

NOW it's up to you to pass it on!

**We are blessed to live in a country where you can do just about anything you want to do-if you are willing to dream and work hard to achieve that dream.**

As young men and women, you might have thought that dreams were for kids. I am here to tell you that the most successful people in life are the ones for whom it all started with a dream.

I would encourage you to never- stop dreaming!

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You think because you have grown up in rural northeast Alabama that your dreams aren't as achievable as those who have grown up in a large city. There are a number of prime examples of the opposite being the truth:

The President of Alabama's largest bank -Region's Bank is Grayson Hall of Henagar

Bruce Culpepper of Fyffe is the President of SHELL Oil

Ider native Tom Kilgore served as President of Tennessee Valley Authority and directed its nuclear energy program.

These successful people were all our neighbors once- they share a common thread-

### **Dependability and Humility.**

As I talk with prospective employers, this is a primary concern they share. Employers are looking for those who are dependable both at home - at work and willing to be part of team to succeed.

As I Close tonight, I would ask you to look around at your fellow classmates. Together You have been on a long journey, and now it's about to end- this may be the last time you see each other. Take it all in and enjoy.

To the class of 2017, I congratulate you – wish you the best and always – KEEP DREAMING!