

Ομιλία Βουλευτή Γρεβενών κ. Χρ. Φώλια στην τελετή αποφοίτησης του Pinewood – The American School of Thessaloniki

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished members of the faculty,

Honored guests,

Proud graduates,

It is a great honor for me to be present in today's ceremonial event. Delivering the commencement speech to the young graduates is indeed a true privilege. I would like to thank the management of the school for this excellent opportunity.

I understand that today's ceremony constitutes a very special occasion, since this is the first graduation held in the spectacular new auditorium of the school's brand new campus. Addressing therefore the opening speech in today's event is an even greater honor for me.

Having received American education myself, I do acknowledge the excellence of the educational system of the United States. It is beyond doubt that it is the best system in the West and in the world, if I may say so. It is a system that not only provides knowledge of the highest quality, but also prepares those that

receive it, to be able to apply that knowledge and produce exceptional practical outcomes.

In this spirit, since its establishment in 1950, Pinewood has been producing elementary and high-school knowledge of very high standards, which constitutes the basis for tertiary education. Far ahead from its time, Pinewood has been cultivating the identity of international citizenship for six decades. The multi-cultural character of the schools has enabled the integration of students with different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. In the age of globalization, this is of utmost importance. In our times, national borders become less significant. What are important are elimination of pre-dispositions and fear of “the other”, cultivation of spirit of co-operation, mutual respect and understanding among peoples with different backgrounds.

And of course, the American International School of Thessaloniki has been contributing greatly to the enhancement of the idea of internationalism and that of the global community. At the same time your school combines the superiority of American education with the uniqueness of the Greek culture and civilization and the values and ideals of democracy which was born in our country two and half millenniums ago. It would certainly not be an exaggeration to suggest that Pinewood is a modern cradle of young men and women nurtured by the ideal of human emancipation, and all the necessary skills and values that will allow them to become useful members of our society and responsible and active citizens of Greece, Europe, and the world.

Dear Graduates,

In your eyes I see, we all see, the future. We see hope. We see an insatiable appetite for knowledge, excellence, success and progress. You have already made a very good start. Attending Pinewood has already guaranteed the potential for a great future for all of you. It has broadened your horizons by arming you with good and solid education and by securing your access to colleges and universities of the highest quality worldwide. It has expanded not only your horizons, but also your options. You have been privileged enough to receive education of the best quality and set the foundations for future academic and professional progress. What you have to do now is to decide how best to utilize this privilege offered to you.

Most certainly, the vast majority, if not all of you, will decide to continue your studies at college and university level. You will decide to pursue a degree that will enable you to materialize your dreams. However, this decision is of utmost importance as it will largely define your future course. It will define what you will become. It is therefore, necessary that chose your field of studies wisely. And in this choice you are not alone. You have your families with you and of course the faculty of the school. Your teachers have helped you develop your skills over the years and are qualified enough to help you design your academic aspirations and to advise you what degrees to pursue.

Since your generation and the ones to follow are the future and the hope of our society, and to the degree to which you are the most important resource of our society, that is human capital, you must decide carefully and responsibly. It is very important that we

allocate our resources in the most efficient way possible. In this sense, it is also very important that we allocate our human resources in ways that will secure our future development, progress and prosperity. Let me, at this point, emphasize the importance of human capital. Those of you that will follow courses on economics and business will soon become quite familiar with the term I just mentioned. Elaborating further on the concept, we must take into account that we now live in the age of information and knowledge. Our society and economy is based on the process of information and the production of knowledge, which in turn produces wealth. Human capital is an integral component of the knowledge – based economy. It is us humans that hold the knowledge which helps us evolve and progress. It is you and the knowledge that you will acquire in the future that will be the driving force of our society and our economy in the years to follow. It is therefore, on you that we, as a society have placed our hopes for a better future.

Designing the future is not an easy task. It is a fascinating one, yet not easy. It requires knowledge, skills, talent, and innovative thought. But most of all it requires a concise plan and strong commitment. I would advise you to always keep this in mind. Commitment is the guarantor of success. Therefore, it is time for you to plan ahead. To plan your future according to your values, dreams and aspirations. It is time for you to set goals and pursue them. And if you are committed you are bound to achieve them one day. If you hold on your goals, you are bound to succeed!

Gradually you are becoming more and more integrated into the society, and soon enough you will be integrated into the economy. As professionals you will find that your education follows you as you will be given the opportunity to implement the skills and knowledge you will have acquired during your academic life. As professionals you will be asked to contribute to the modern society's most important goal; that of development. And by the term, we mean development in all aspects of human life. We mean cultural and societal development and progress, and we also mean economic development and prosperity.

However, in order to achieve development, we must as a society be innovative. And innovation is synonymous to knowledge, and fresh ideas produced by young and daring minds. Your minds! Thus far, we have seen that development goes hand-in-hand with innovation and knowledge. Ideas alone are not always enough to produce development. Knowledge is essential. And knowledge is acquired largely through education. From that point of view then, you are already on the right track.

I repeat that the knowledge that you have accumulated throughout your years at Pinewood, constitute the corner-stone of what you are about to build in the future. Now is the time for you to take your life in your hands and decide what to do with it. It is indeed - to quote Winston Churchill who I am sure all of you have heard of - "your finest hour"! It is time to pursue your dreams. It is time to spread your wings and fly high. And if you are committed, you will fly very high indeed! Through your journey, you will always have with everything that you have learned at Pinewood. All you have to

do is build on that knowledge. Expand it. Enrich it. And put it to good use!

At the same time you should always remain true to your values. Values that you have endorsed here at Pinewood. Because, it is those values that will help you maintain your course during difficult times. And because it is those values that will enable you to become useful and active members of tomorrows vibrant society. It is those values that will allow you to stay on course and keep your bearings while pursuing your future goals and endeavors. It is those values that shape your motivation and re-affirm your actions. In short then, your values are your compass in life. Hold on to them, embrace them and protect them!

Honored faculty,

I am certain that there are no words to describe the joy and pride that you all feel today. It is in the young faces, whose graduation we are celebrating here today, that you see the results of your efforts. It is moments like this that confirm the righteousness of the path you have chosen by becoming educators. Well, today you can be certain that your efforts have produced excellent results. You have helped shape not only the education, but also the character of the young men and women that are standing here before us today. Once again, you have fulfilled your “debt” to the society by completing the “basic training” of these youngsters and delivering them to the world. Their values are your values. And the knowledge that they now hold, is your knowledge. And this is a

contribution for which we are all grateful. Because knowledge is a commodity that should only be accumulated. Rather, it should be passed on. It should be transferred to the next generation so that it can be the “raw material” upon which new knowledge shall be generated.

You have embraced today’s graduates since their arrival at Pinewood. You have guided them through their childhood and adolescence. You have laid foundations upon which tomorrow’s citizens shall be built. You have seen what is best in them, and you brought it to light. You then helped them develop their skills, talents and thought. You have helped them become active and thinking beings and not merely loyal subjects. You have taught them how to think and decide for themselves instead of merely complying. You have taught them to pursue their dreams and not to conform or compromise. You have pushed them to excellence instead of mediocrity. You have taught them that persistence is the only weapon against failure. You have embedded in their young minds values such as co-operation, tolerance, compassion, meritocracy, justice. Values that shall accompany them throughout their course in life.

And you have done so, by remaining true to your sacred role as teachers. By promoting the very essence of human existence, which is of course knowledge. By promoting the same ideals and the same values that you learnt while receiving your education. You have proven that education is in fact the most important feature of a modern, developed and civilized society. You have proven that education is a prerequisite for societal evolvment and

progress. Once again, you have proven that as a society and as a polity, we must at all cost safeguard and promote education, since it is essential for our development. Furthermore, you have shown that there can never be enough investment in education. You have reminded us of our duty, not to sacrifice education by reducing government spending. Today, you are presenting before us the “return of the investment” on education. And what could constitute a better “return” than the sharp and promising look on the faces of our graduates? A look that allows us to be optimistic about the future of our society. A look that gives us confidence, and which at the same time obliges us to do our best not to disappoint them.

Looking at those faces, we know immediately that we cannot afford to fail them. From whatever position we hold, all of us, parents, teachers and politicians we must not fail them. We must embrace them and give them the tools to build the future. If we do so, it is more than certain that they will build a better world than the one we delivered to them. What they ask of us, is not to deprive them of the opportunity. And this, ladies and gentlemen, dear parents and faculty, we cannot deny to them.

Politicians cannot deny the necessary funds to promote education. We must develop the infrastructure needed. We must design a modern, effective and well-functioning educational system. One that gives equal opportunities. One that helps students to elaborate further on their research and field of study. We must create a system where young scientists will have the opportunity to apply their knowledge at a professional level. We must create a system that will deliver the students of the fear of not being

absorbed by the market. We must create jobs and we must cultivate the right climate for the development of entrepreneurship.

Teachers should continue to pass on their knowledge and give their advisory support to students. They should continue to promote excellence and to cultivate the thirst for further knowledge in the young minds they are called to train. They must continue to educate our children bearing in mind that they are shaping the citizens of tomorrow's society. Knowing that the future of our children and our society depends largely on how well they do their job.

Parents should insist on their children's education. They ought to push them towards knowledge and support them with all their powers. They should also guide them in order to help them receive the proper education according to their skills and talents, helping thus in the optimum allocation of tomorrow's human resources. Finally they should always arm youngsters with the values and ideals that are indicative of our society's culture.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Graduates,

I wish to thank you all from the bottom of my heart on behalf of our society for today's ceremony. It is times like this that make us proud of being human. It is times like this that remind us of duties and responsibilities to the society. It is days like today that allow us to think beyond the present turmoil, and be optimistic about the future. It is faces like those of today's graduates that make us

believe that the goal of sustainable development, progress, and prosperity is not only attainable, but also realistic and worthwhile to pursue at all costs.

Once again, I wish to congratulate the faculty and the parents on their efforts, and the young graduates on their success.

May the present day and event truly be the commencement of a new and exciting journey for all of you. I would like to wish the best of luck to this journey. I do promise you that it will be an experience that you will cherish as long as you shall live.

We all express our gratitude and I remind you that the hopes for the future of the society are now in your hands. I am more than convinced that it will be a future as bright as your young faces.

Congratulations,

Thank you for your attention.