

The Medical Commencement Archive

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Mayor Mike Rawlings

University of Texas Southwestern Medical
Commencement Address

Dallas Needs You

Mike Rawlings came to Dallas in 1976 with a couple hundred dollars in his pocket and plans to work as a radio reporter. He didn't think he'd stay long. But over the next four decades, Rawlings proved that Dallas is truly a city of opportunity. Today, Mike Rawlings is the 61st mayor of Dallas and the longest-serving mayor in more than 45 years. During his time in office, he has focused on spurring economic development in the long-overlooked southern portion of Dallas through his GrowSouth initiative, improving public education, combatting poverty and domestic violence, developing parks, elevating the city's international profile and turning Dallas into a top destination for artists, young professionals, families and corporations.

A Borger, Texas, native and proud Boston College graduate, Mayor Rawlings worked his way up from an entry-level position at Tracy Locke, then the largest advertising agency in the South, to become the CEO. Later, he took the helm of the world's largest pizza company, Pizza Hut, and grew it to record sales. He previously served as Chairman and Managing Partner of private equity firm CIC Partners, where he is currently the vice chairman.

Public service has long been important to Mayor Rawlings. In the years before his 2011 election as mayor, he served as the Chair of the Dallas Convention and Visitors Bureau (VisitDallas), the city's Homeless Czar and president of the Dallas Park Board. Voters re-elected Mayor Rawlings by a wide margin in 2015 to his second and final four-year term, which runs through June 2019.

*I*t is an honor to be with you this evening. First, because of the stature and importance of UT Southwestern. To Dr. Podolsky and the faculty, this institution

continues to be an exemplar for excellence in our city and state and a lodestar for scientific excellence throughout our country and around the world.

I'm sure you graduates realize that you are matriculating from an institution where truly great academics and doctors have roamed the halls. UTSW intellectual visionary, Dr. Seldin, who recently passed, had that dream. It was a vision that attracted faculty including 6 Nobel Laureates, 22 members of the National Academy of Sciences, 16 members of the National Academy of Medicine and 14 Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigators, as well as Dr. Jim Carrico, the attending doctor of the mortally wounded President Kennedy.

It has had great Past Presidents like Charlie Sprague and Kern Wildenthal and also one leader especially close to me, my Sunday school teacher for 2 decades, one of the most intelligent men and greatest doctors I've ever met, Dan Foster. He was one of your five chairs of internal medicine. I mention him because Dr. Foster passed away this year as well. He was a renaissance man and was committed to giving back to his city and the country by sitting on President Bush's Council of Bioethics, sat on the DISD Board of Trustees during desegregation and, believe it or not, had his own TV show. A fundamental belief of Dan's was we all, and especially doctors, must be life-long learners.

Which brings us back to the other reason I'm honored to be here. You. You are special. And today is a special day as you venture through life as life-long learners. And I get to share it with you. That is an honor. You are smart, you've worked hard, and you've been taught by the best.

Now, as Mayor, I have selfish motivation to be here. I love Dallas and want to convince you as doctors and scientists to stay here or come back here if you leave for a while. I could give you my Chamber of Commerce speech but that is for another time and place.

I do have to say that I have some hesitation flirting with you like this and bragging on you because honestly, I'm not a big fan of doctors. I know that it is an odd thing to say in a speech like this and it's nothing personal, purely professional. I'll explain my phobia in a minute and hopefully there is a point to it. But even with that personal quirk, I know with my whole heart we need you. I have a vision for Dallas that we can be THE city in the 21st century and won't be able to do it without you on that mission with us.

As Mayor, I have seen how our community needs your work. I saw it just six weeks ago in the emergency room and the critical care unit of Presbyterian Hospital after 2 Dallas police officers and a Home Depot security officer were

shot. Two survived. DPD Officer Rogelio Santander died. As I walked through ICU talking to parents and spouses it was so obvious that we need great doctors.

I saw the same drama in the emergency rooms of Parkland and Baylor the night of July 7th, 2016, when 5 of our officers were ambushed and killed during a Black Lives Matter protest. I saw the best of medicine that night. One of the lead trauma surgeons treating our officers at Parkland was Dr. Brian Williams, a black man who lives in Dallas and in the wake of that awful day spoke powerfully about the fear that he has experienced as a black man interacting with police officers – but he added that he of course would never have allowed his personal feelings to in any way impact the way that he cared for those officers. That night he was a doctor first, an advocate second. But he used his platform as a trauma surgeon who had worked to save our officers as an opportunity to speak in a raw and honest way about social justice... and that has continued in the years since the July 7 shootings. Last year, I appointed Dr. Williams to be the chair of our city's Citizens Police Review Board. He is currently leading a significant reform effort.

I saw it during our confrontations with Ebola when the first 3 patients in America with the terrible disease were in our backyard. Two of them were nurses, a profession that we terribly need and should respect at the highest level. We needed the health care community and the science it brings to help us through our crisis.

I see it small and large. Loved ones with cancer, needy citizens that battle mental illness, our friend's day-to-day chronic maladies. You are our safety net, our back stop, and you are the community that gives us hope that deadly diseases can be overcome.

To be here today, you've had to overcome many obstacles, work harder than you ever worked, probably struggled with real self-doubt about your many God-given (or depending on how you view the metaphysical world) genetically arranged gifts.

Which leads us to maybe the most important existential question you may ever have to ask yourself. Even with all your works and talents, you are amongst the luckiest human beings on the face of the earth. Yes, I said lucky. To be this smart, have gone to the schools you went to (with financial aid or not), have the family support you have, living in the United States of America, in Dallas, Texas in the safest and most prosperous times in history – you had to be lucky. The odds of that happening are one in a gazillion (that's a sophisticated math term). I'm not trying to belittle anybody's work, it's just the truth. It's like you went down to the 7/11 and bought a power ball ticket and won. The insight is not in the luck, the

important insight is in the answer to the important question: what are you going to choose to do with that luck? And only you can answer that.

To start to answer that question, let's start by listening to Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder and CEO, one of the greatest self-acclaimed lottery winners of all time. He made the point that most people get to have jobs, some get to have careers. But few have real callings. And that's the highest level of professional self-actualization.

Around the world, the number one thing most people want is a job. Hundreds of Millions have them. By graduating today, you all are well on your way to that second step, a career, in science and medicine. But what is your calling? The answer lies in the question, what will you do with your good fortune? Will you commit to a calling that you might feel deep inside? A calling that, as the good doctor, Dan Foster, once told me when I was struggling to decide to run for Mayor, is when the world's greater needs meet your personal gifts. St Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians 13 in the end, that we need three things: faith, hope and love. As an evangelist, St Paul suggests love is the most important. As Mayor, I believe that too often hope is overlooked and it is in hope that one can find a great calling.

When each of us is filled with hope, a belief that things can get better short-term or long-term we can gin up the energy, the grit to do almost anything. And as doctors, you will be at your best when you are a hope dispenser.

Your work with patients or in the lab or on a spreadsheet is producing that hope. I know it may be unfair, but in this scientific world we live in when you put on that white coat you are elevated to a shamanistic status, where through you the common villager seeks a greater truth, and real hope. And while each diagnosis is personal, each dosage of hope you imbue is unique to that person's life. And it's in that personalness that you find your power and your satisfaction as a doctor.

Which brings us back to my phobia and uncomfortableness with the medical profession. Bear with me through this self-examination. There are many reasons this is so. First, if I have to go to the doctor, I take it as positive proof that I'm dying, or at least in the express lane of life getting there. Second, I hate forms. I hate filling them out. Especially, for the 3rd or 4th time in the same institution. Third, I have no idea how insurance works and have realized I'm the schmuck at the poker table about to lose all my money. Fourth, I'm impatient and want microwave medicine, get me in, get me out, make me healthy again. All things you will continually see with patients throughout your career.

But it's the fifth reason that you might find insight into that calling question. Someone taught me to ask "why" five times and you finally get to the root real

issue. I figured out when I go to the doctor's office I feel like a thing. An IT. A complicated thing, but still a thing. Like a car being brought into the shop for repair. In fact, I feel more real personal connection with my car dealer (because they know I will have to buy another) than I do with doctors.

Now I understand the concept of throughput and time management. But that's not what I'm talking about, I don't want to chit chat and ask dozens of questions. That's my wonderful wife, sitting right over there. I just want to know you are there for me and with me. And give a dosage of honesty and hope to me. It's hard to express. But better explained by Martin Buber, the great Jewish theologian. He describes most of our interactions in life as I-IT. Even with other people. We treat them as an IT. The lady checking us out at the grocery store is an it. The receptionist at the office is an it. But he suggests that not only are we short-changing respecting and honoring the work that they do but we are short-changing ourselves at the same time because if we treat them like an IT we feel more like an IT at the same time. But if we recognize the divinity in each person and turn those relationships into an I – THOU relationship, the divine in us becomes apparent and we each feel more of a calling and a purposeful life. It is in the dialectic between you and living bodies called patients that you have to treat every day where you decide every day whether you are in an I-IT relationship or an I-THOU one.

These are all personal choices each of you will have to make. Will you fulfill your calling? If so, what will it be? And how will you interact with your patients? Can you be conveyers of science and hope at the same time? I know you will make the right decisions. You are smart enough, you've been taught by the best, and you are lucky. I'm betting on you. And so is our city. Thank you for allowing me to celebrate this day with you.