

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI  
AT THE PEPPERDINE SCHOOL OF LAW COMMENCEMENT**

**MALIBU, CA**

**MAY 17, 2019**

Good morning, Pepperdine! How's everybody doing today?

Thank you to President Benton for this tremendous honor.

Thank you to Professor Boliek, or should I say Chief Economist Boliek, for your kind words.

And, finally, I cannot accept this honorary degree without thanking Lori Loughlin for making that \$500,000 donation to Pepperdine in my name. Aunt Becky came through!

Joking aside, let's give a round of applause to President Benton on the occasion of his final commencement ceremony. President Benton and I bonded backstage over the fact that we are both Kansas natives. I won't bore you with our stories about home. I'm saving that for the post-graduation luncheon.

Make some noise for your professor and my colleague Babette Boliek. Professor Boliek has been a tremendous addition to our team. Now that I'm seeing what she's given up to be at the FCC, I am even more grateful for her service ... even if it raises questions about her judgement.

Congratulations to incoming President Gash. Funny coincidence: The summer after my third year of law school, I worked at Kirkland and Ellis in Los Angeles. One of the lawyers there was none other than Jim Gash. I'm happy to report that I finally have that memo you asked for.

Finally, and most importantly, congratulations to the Pepperdine Law Class of 2019. It is an honor to be with you on this special occasion at this special place.

I still can't believe this is really a law school. For me, going to law school on the water meant a frozen Lake Michigan. Pepperdine feels more like a set from *The Bachelor* than a law school. Spoiler alert: Everyone is getting a rose today.

This is truly one of the greatest honors of my life, but I do have one minor complaint: I can't believe I'm the follow-up act to Mike Leach.

This is my first time giving a commencement speech at a major university, and I'm following a man who gets paid millions to motivate 20-somethings.

I can't predict the future, but I'll bet that this will be the first class from Pepperdine Law to cover the spread against UCLA.

As it turns out, seeing Coach Leach on the program wasn't the biggest surprise I came across in preparing my remarks.

As I mentioned earlier, like President Benton, I'm a proud native of Kansas. More specifically, I grew up in a town of about 10,000 called Parsons in the southeast corner of the state. I'm telling you that to tell you this.

This past weekend, I thought I'd read up on Pepperdine, and in particular, its founder, George Pepperdine. When I looked at his bio, the first thing that jumped off the page was the fact that he grew up in Kansas. But I couldn't believe what I saw next.

George Pepperdine had a Parsons connection. To be specific, he was a graduate of Parsons Business College in Parsons, Kansas. Now, I'm from there, but even I didn't know there ever *was* a Parsons Business College. The fact that somebody famous went there is too much. I was thinking of how to describe how mind-blowing this was for me in terms people from California could understand. Imagine visiting the Guggenheim Museum in New York and learning that Solomon Guggenheim was from Chico.

But there's more. As legend has it—and by legend, I mean Wikipedia—the Pepperdines were not very religious until George's parents, John and Mary, took the family to a church revival in Parsons. They were so moved by the preacher there that they converted to the Church of Christ and the family became devoted members. George Pepperdine's biographers trace the start of his spiritual life to this revival.

Here's what I'm saying to you. The reason we are here today at this marvelous university is because somebody from Parsons, Kansas said something so inspirational that it moved people to believe in something bigger than themselves and then spend their lives in service of that faith. So on behalf of the people of Parsons, I'd like to say: you're welcome.

I can't promise that my remarks today will prompt any of you to have a spiritual awakening. In fact, I can promise you that they won't. But hopefully, I can impart some helpful wisdom with the remainder of my time.

The easy place to start would be retelling the timeless lessons offered by my own law school commencement speaker, which helped me to get where I am today. Small problem: I have no memories at all of what my law school graduation speaker said. I don't even remember who it was. I reached out to a lot of my law school friends, and they didn't remember much either.

But that does bring me to my first bit of advice: stay in touch with your law school friends.

No offense to my friends from childhood, college, and work, but my law school friends are my best friends. And it makes sense. Law school is hard. Surviving the rule against perpetuities together is a bonding experience. And let's face it, a lot of the things lawyers like to talk about are deathly boring to non-lawyers. It's great to have friends you can talk to about work or anything else, and know that they're

genuinely interested and they've got your back. Plus, they won't judge you for using a word like "dispositive" in casual conversation.

Next up: one of the big challenges for you now is that, for the first time since any of you could remember, your next steps in life aren't mapped out for you. Now you can go in many directions. My recommendation would be to embrace the uncertainty.

When I say this, I'm speaking from experience. My career has taken me down a circuitous route: clerkship, Justice Department, Capitol Hill, in-house counsel, FCC, with some repeating stops along the way. Each has been rewarding, and most were unexpected. That's why you need to stay flexible and embrace opportunities as they arise. Yes, I will admit: When I was in law school, I did not chart a comprehensive strategy in which a hodgepodge of jobs would be combined with Donald Trump being elected President and picking me to lead the FCC.

As you exit law school, you're also entering a world in which there are no more grades. You're now going to have to come up with your own definition of success. I would urge you to set challenging goals for yourself, not based on what you think society's idea of what a successful lawyer is, but based on what you find personally fulfilling.

For all the jokes people make about lawyers, you're entering a profession that already has certain standards of excellence to guide you. Integrity, honesty, intelligence, civility. These are the hallmarks of a great lawyer and, more important, being a good person.

Speaking of, they say you can't buy moral character. But I think you may be in luck. I was looking online, and it appears that if you send a reasonable fee of \$551 to the California State Bar Association, they will happily sell you moral character.

One way of knowing if you've developed a strong set of core values is if you feel compelled to stand and fight for them when they are tested. I don't know how closely many of you follow the FCC, but I've made some decisions as FCC Chairman that were unpopular in many circles, including with some of my friends. But I stand by these decisions, partly because they're delivering positive results, but also because doing the right thing is always the right thing to do, even when—especially when—it's hard. And—wait, I'm getting a message here. Okay, an update: This paragraph of my remarks was just reversed by the Ninth Circuit.

Here's my last bit of advice. Don't forget where you came from. I mean this in two ways.

First, don't forget that you are coming from Pepperdine. In your time here, you learned about more than just the law. You learned about the power of faith and philosophy to help make sense of the world and to give life a deeper meaning. You also learned about the importance of community in ways that no one could have foreseen. Last fall, this community was stunned by the horrific news of a mass shooting at the Borderline in Thousand Oaks. Then, just hours later, you were forced to "shelter-in-

place” or flee campus by the historic Woolsey fire. The Pepperdine community rallied together to support your friends and neighbors. The Pepperdine Strong Fund attracted more than 1,700 donations from within the community to provide financial relief for victims. Two recent alumni of the law school formed a second fund specifically to provide relief for law students. Led by Professor Jeff Baker, you also hosted multiple free legal clinics to help fire victims with FEMA applications and appeals, insurance matters, and anything else people might need help with. In a time of tension and tumult, the lessons you learned at Pepperdine about faith and community will remind you what’s important and serve as a foundation for a happy, healthy, productive life.

And second, remember those made you who you are. Each of you is here because people in your life made sacrifices. If you’re lucky, they’re here today. Some are back home. Some are no longer with us. Just take a moment to think about those people. Think about the times when you were down, and they picked you back up. Think about the times you wanted to quit, and they gave you the nudge you needed to keep moving forward. To me, commencement ceremonies aren’t mainly about giving speeches to motivate young people to go out and conquer the world. They’re really about thanking the people who already did that job over the past many years.

So to all the parents and grandparents in the crowd today: thank you for a job well done.

To President Benton and the leaders of Pepperdine: thank you for the honor of being a part of this glorious ceremony.

And to the Pepperdine Law Class of 2019: Congratulations! You did it. Freely ye have received—now, freely give!