



From the office of Texas Workforce Commission

# Chairman Tom Pauken

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For Immediate Release

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## **Commencement Address of Tom Pauken to the Sealy High School Class of 2010**

Congratulations to the Sealy High School Class of 2010. This is a significant milestone in your life, and you should be proud of your achievements. Now, comes the hard part. But, more about that in a moment.

Thanks also go to your parents and family members who helped you along the way. During my teenage years, I didn't think my parents knew all that much. But, the older I got, the smarter they got. And, I suspect you will find that to be the case as well and appreciate even more the sacrifices your parents made for you years from now.

Thanks also to your principal and teachers who helped make it possible for you to be receiving your high school diploma tonight. I know how much I owe to the teachers who took an interest in me during my high school years when I wasn't all that interested in learning. I went off to high school more interested in playing baseball than in studying. I was convinced that I was going to play shortstop for the New York Yankees. It didn't take a teacher long to wake me up to the reality that I wasn't talented enough to play professional baseball and that I had better prepare myself for life as an adult. So, I began to apply myself and came to appreciate the value of a good education during my high school years.

You, the members of the graduating class of 2010, are about to embark on a whole new phase in your life. Some of you will go to work immediately. Others will join the military. Still, others will go to a community college or a four-year university. I suspect that you have learned by now that we all have different talents. The

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key is to use those God-given talents wisely. So often in my lifetime, I have seen people with enormous ability waste that talent, or use it for bad purposes. That's what I meant when I said earlier – “now, the hard part begins.”

The decisions you make going forward as an adult over the next few years will set you on a course that will influence the rest of your lives. And, using your talents wisely will make all the difference in giving you a sense of accomplishment and pride in your work. I think of my own father who was an engineer and died last year at the age of 93. Dad took great pride in his work as an engineer – in whatever assignments he undertook. He had a tougher time than most of his contemporaries in fulfilling his goals of becoming an engineer. His father had died when he was young, and Dad was on his own as a teenager. But, he worked his way all through high school and college; and he persisted in getting his engineering degree from Purdue University. He later joined the Army Air Corps and resumed his engineering career after the war. Many fine people helped him along the way.

That is something else you will learn as you go through life. There are many wonderful people out there who are willing to give you a hand up so long as they see your willingness to work hard to achieve your goals. Thanks to his hard work in developing the talents God gave him and thanks to the help of mentors during his formative years, my Dad became a very good engineer. And, quite frankly, we need more good engineers in our country today.

And, we also need more Americans who are skilled in the trades, including electricians, welders, auto mechanics, plumbers, nurses, and carpenters. The list goes on. Too often, certain elitists in our society look down on the so-called blue collar jobs. Yet, the skills required for these positions are impressive, and they allow young workers to make a good living and raise a family. Even in an economic downturn like what we are

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experiencing now, the demand for skilled workers remains strong because there is such a shortage. Moreover, mastering a skills trade makes one self-sufficient, and these are good jobs that can't be outsourced to China and India.

When I got back from military service in Vietnam, I was asked to serve on the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education. One of my fellow board members was Dr. Lawrence Davenport of Tuskegee Institute. Larry invited me to visit Tuskegee. What an amazing history that school has had with leaders like Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. The students built their institution brick by brick. Booker T. Washington, the President and founder of Tuskegee Institute, emphasized to his students the importance of skills training and a strong work ethic as he prepared young African-Americans to become self-sufficient during a time of racial segregation.

Tuskegee Institute was a great success story. The lessons its founders taught those young students are just as valid today as they were back then – the importance of hard work, skills training, and preparing young men and women to be self-sufficient.

For those of you entering the military, thanks for answering our country's call during these difficult times in our nation's history. May God be with you. And, to those of you going on to four-year universities, you will make a lot of new friends and there will be good times to be had. Don't lose sight of the importance of learning, developing wisdom, and always remembering the difference between right and wrong. If you want to be a good leader in the future, you first have to lead yourself in the right direction.

Our nation is desperately in need of good leaders. America faces a more serious set of challenges than any time in my life, including our most serious national recession since the Great Depression.

I want to touch briefly on the American economy. This is a time of high levels of unemployment and the

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hallowing out of our U.S. manufacturing base. (Even here in Texas, where we have lower unemployment than any other large labor market state in the nation, we too have been hard hit by this nasty national recession.) Your generation will be the most adversely affected if we don't put in place policies to get our economy moving again.

It is not inevitable that unemployment remains persistently high, or that our U.S. manufacturing base continues to deteriorate. Americans – and Texans, in particular – have always risen to the occasion whenever our nation faced serious challenges before; and we can do so again if we have the political will and civic courage to make bold decisions for the long term good of the country.

We can begin with an economic policy designed to put Americans back to work while rebuilding our manufacturing base. Let's quit exporting prosperity and bring good jobs back to America with a tax policy that rewards capital investment and savings in order to create private sector jobs here in the United States, particularly with small businesses where most new jobs are created.

“A rising tide lifts all boats” was the motto of the late Congressman Jack Kemp. Congressman Kemp was the architect of the Kemp-Roth Job Creation Act which was passed in 1981 during the first year of the Reagan Administration at another time of high unemployment, and it worked as our private sector bounced back from hard times and unemployment rates dropped. The principle of encouraging capital investment in order to grow the private sector and create jobs worked then and will work again to get us out of our current economic crisis.

In closing, I would be remiss if I did not mention the importance of “fixing our culture.” A free market system and our Constitutional system of government won't work – and will not last – without an ethical

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compass guiding our society.

Again, Texas values can help our nation find its way back. Listen to the words of a dying father to my good friend Skipper Dippel from Brenham, Texas – good advice from a father to his son:

“Remember to judge people on their merits and not by their possessions or their jobs. People should be judged by how they use their success rather than by how much they acquire...

There are many things you learn from the Bible. The parable of the talents teaches you that all of us are judged by what we do with our resources. The more ability you are given, the more is expected of you. God has given you a number of abilities. Please don't waste them.”

Profound words from a Texan to his son. Members of the Class of 2010 – use your talents wisely.

Congratulations to you on your achievement, and best to you as you move forward in your lives.

*Tom Pauken is the Chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission*

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*The Texas Workforce Commission is a state agency dedicated to helping Texas employers, workers and communities prosper economically. For details on TWC and the programs it offers in coordination with its network of local workforce development boards, call (512) 463-8556 or visit [www.texasworkforce.org](http://www.texasworkforce.org).*