

Duckworth delivers commencement address to the George Washington University's Class of 2017

May 22 2017 8:51 AM



WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) delivered the commencement address to the Class on 2017 today at the George Washington University, where she graduated with a Master of Arts degree in international affairs in 1992. Drawing on her own life's story and the words of President Teddy Roosevelt, Duckworth urged graduates to never let challenges get in their way and to never let the fear of failure prevent them from pursuing their dreams or from getting involved.

Key excerpts:

“Teddy Roosevelt once said... ‘*there is no effort without error and shortcoming*’...It’s really just an eloquent way of saying don’t be afraid of failure. Don’t be afraid of being embarrassed or of being criticized. Just try. Just get in the arena. Successful people didn’t make it because they never failed, they made it because they never gave up.

“We can’t predict our successes or our failures – we can only control how we react to them...I’ve had plenty of moments when I thought of giving up – moments when I thought I had been defeated. November 12, 2004, is my ‘Alive Day’...I was flying high that day over Iraq in my Black Hawk with the best crew out there. Then, without warning, an RPG tore through the cockpit of my aircraft...I was quite literally in pieces.

“The days, weeks and months that followed were some of the hardest of my life. But in those most challenging moments, my life’s mission couldn’t have been more clear. I knew from that moment on I would spend every single day of the rest of my life trying to honor the courage and sacrifice of my buddies who saved me that day. So, with the help of my family, friends and fellow servicemembers at Walter Reed, I began my recovery. It was anything but easy. Tasks like picking up a pencil – or even just sitting up without passing out – were no longer simple.

“But after every time I couldn’t do something, after every day when I didn’t know how I’d make it to the next, I made the choice not to give up...I got back in the arena.

“There will be hard times, your journey won’t be without its challenges. The struggles you will face in life from here on out may be harder than any you faced on campus, but you will only get better at reacting to them. You will only get better at overcoming whatever is in your path. Remember President Roosevelt’s words...there will be moments when you feel discouraged. There will be times when you don’t get the job you thought you wanted, or moments when paying off that student debt feels impossible...Trust me, I get it – I’m still paying my student loans off.

“There will be hard times when you get hurt or lose someone close to you. But those challenges, those struggles, those are what make our successes possible. We are not successful in spite of our challenges, we are successful because of our will to overcome them...Congratulations, class of 2017. It's time to get in the arena.”