

Suffolk University Sawyer Business School Commencement
Sunday, May 22, 2022
Leader Bank Pavilion
Gibson Laborde, graduate student speaker

Thank you, Dean. Good morning.

I am humbled to stand before you today on behalf of Suffolk graduate students. Class of 2022, you are now officially alumni. Every one of you should be proud, as are the administration, Board of Trustees, family, faculty, and friends. But as Tim Ryan mentioned earlier, we wouldn't be here today without the support, encouragement, and sacrifice of the administration, our professors, and our loved ones. Please join me one more time and one last time in a gesture of appreciation to all of them.

When Tim mentioned earlier the age of the oldest MBA student, I feared that he would give me away. So thank you to the 60-year-old graduate out there for allowing my age to remain private for a moment. Because I can think of only one reason why I was afforded the honor of saying a few words today. I suspect that I set a record here at Suffolk for managing to take nearly ten years to finish a two-year degree.

As illustrated by the speakers before me, Suffolk students hail from vastly different backgrounds, one of many reasons that make this school so unique. I was raised in a household where higher education *was* emphasized. I received my undergrad degree in business in 2007, law degree in 2010, and joined a law firm shortly thereafter. And now that you know that I'm a lawyer, if your first thought to yourself was, "there is no way these remarks will be brief," well, you're right. And if you are a graduate who thought that, you already have great business instincts. Keep trusting them.

Early in my career, my goal was to be an attorney that truly understood business. I thought an MBA would help. So in 2012, I started looking for the right fit. At the time, I was married, with a newborn, working full time, and needing online evening classes. Well, not only did Suffolk offer a program which fit that criterion, it had one specifically designed for and marketed to attorneys, the only one of its kind that I found in the country. I was admitted and embarked upon what I planned to be a two-year journey.

But what we plan for ourselves is not always what life has in store for us. A year later, halfway through my MBA program, I elected to put my studies here on hold. I quit my job and moved to Washington, DC, to obtain a Master of Law, an extensive endeavor that did not exactly put my

wife—who's sitting in the audience—at ease as we raised our first child, and were pregnant with our second. And by the way, I want to promise to my family right now that I am officially done as of today with higher education. For at least three years.

The start of my MBA here, combined with that later educational stepping stone, led to a job at one of the world's leading energy companies, where I am a passionate supporter of the company's mission. Well, one year ago—eight years after first starting my MBA program, now married with three kids, and busy with work, but of the belief that one should never stop learning—I came knocking on Suffolk's door to finish what I started, and they opened it. I'm now grateful for to have successfully concluded it with all of you.

I would not be here had Suffolk not been an early adopter of online education. Virtual classes became a necessity during the pandemic. And all of us had to change and adapt our methods of teaching and learning. We survived this challenge together. But Suffolk invested in online learning well before the pandemic—well before workplace flexibility became table stakes in global business. Suffolk had online programs when I first looked for a program in 2012, offering me and many others an education that we otherwise would not have pursued. Suffolk deserves accolades for how the administration has positioned the school to succeed. And it has been noted. This year, Suffolk's MBA was ranked Tier One for the sixth year in a row by *CEO Magazine*. Graduates from this school on Tremont Street hail from more than 80 countries, and all 50 states in the US. This is indeed a global institution.

Winston Churchill once remarked, success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts. Today represents momentous success for graduates, the culmination of years of hard work. In one's lifetime, jobs can be taken away, property can be lost. But your educational accomplishments will remain yours forever. Yet even today's success should not be final. We should not retire tomorrow and let our degrees exclusively define us. Life is fraught with failure. But we have not allowed our failures to dictate or define our future endeavors.

What counts is what we do from here. What matters is that we keep chasing, keep learning, and keep persevering. When opportunity knocks, open the door. When opportunity doesn't knock, check the door anyway. Multiple times. Even if closed at first, you may find it open later. And when it comes to education, don't be afraid to take risks. Even if it involves a significant investment or putting life as you know it on hold. Education opens doors. And what better place to obtain it than right here in Boston in a state filled with world-class higher education institutions.

We graduate today amidst unprecedented times: A geopolitical crisis in Ukraine, key legislative issues, burgeoning US debt, inflation, and interest rates, and countless other circumstances have metastasized into nearly all aspects of business and society, stimulating change. We are all now well-equipped to assume key roles in any change. And we are all blessed to have had access to higher education. I am especially feeling that way, considering I made a pledge to give it up today. (For now.)

To my fellow graduates: Never stop applying yourself. Put your considerable talents to use. And have the courage to continue. Good luck, and again, to all of you, my heartfelt congratulations. Thank you.