

Suffolk University  
College of Arts & Sciences  
Commencement 2026

Honorary Degree Speaker  
Congressman Ro Khanna

President Kelly, Chairman Lamb, faculty, family, distinguished guests, and most importantly, to the Class of 2026 graduates, congratulations. [APPLAUSE] I am so honored to be here.

After hearing President Kelly [speak], I think she just called a Silicon Valley congressman to assure you all will still have jobs in an AI world. I will say it's a beautiful day for a graduation in Boston, and so even if my short remarks don't land, I did bring the California weather for all of you.

I was talking to Chairman Lamb, and he said to me that when he received his acceptance to Suffolk University, his parents, born and raised in the Depression, blue collar, felt that his family had finally achieved the American Dream. And as I look out today at the pride, at the joy of so many family members here, I can tell you that you have that same feeling that Chairman Lamb's parents had. Let's give the friends and family members here a round of applause. [APPLAUSE]

And those who are sitting here, you know, they make all this fuss about the honorary degrees, but this is really your day. Please know that your achievement is monumental. Let's give the Class of 2026 a round of applause for their graduation. [APPLAUSE]

But there is a reality, and that reality is that the American Dream for many of you is not what it was when Robert Lamb got his acceptance. It simply wouldn't be honest if I used the commencement address to recycle tired platitudes or empty niceties. It wouldn't ring true to the experience that you all have.

For the past year I've been traveling around the country, having frank conversations about jobs, about the cost of getting a home, about healthcare and childcare, and now about a war. And the young people I talk to, including some of the young folks here, express fear for the future and a sense of powerlessness about changing the course of our country. They understand that the problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is wealth inequality and elite control.

These problems can seem so overwhelming. There's an understandable temptation to give in to cynicism and nihilism, withdraw from politics altogether that is dominated by big money and bitter divisions, and simply focus on your private careers. You see structural problems everywhere: The Congress being the prime example, unlimited money in politics, filibusters, gerrymandering, political polarization, divisive algorithms, an out-of-touch Supreme Court that rolled back Black political rights [faster than anytime] since [President] Hayes ended the Reconstruction. [APPLAUSE] Brash tech billionaires and corporate lobbyists—it can feel like too much to overcome.

I remember when I was 22, and probably you feel it more. You ask yourself, what chance do I, a new Suffolk graduate, have to make my dent in such a cruel and broken political world?

You're not the first generation to confront this question, whether the unjust concentration of power is permanent, or whether citizens still possess the capacity to reshape institutions, to make our nation fairer and prosperity more widely shared.

And I'm not speaking only of those who fought in the Revolutionary War, which started just outside Boston, or the Civil War, or those who stormed the cliffs of Normandy, or risked their lives in the Civil Rights Movement. Few generations are asked to die for our country. Our task is different: whether we are willing to live for our country.

Americans have done it before, even under very steep odds. After the Gilded Age and after the financial speculation and corruptions of the 1920s, there were those who chose to live for our country in those eras, building reform movements and bold governing agendas. The progressive era and the New Deal took on entrenched power to make our nation more just.

That is the legacy you will inherit, that we inherit, and it is the task before us now, to build a reform agenda for our time in a moment when the system again is horribly stacked against ordinary people, and our institutions cater to a Jeffery Epstein class. [APPLAUSE] You may have heard of some of the stuff Massie and I have been doing to take on that Epstein class. [APPLAUSE]

It will not be enough to tinker around the edges or offer incrementalism. What is required is a new vision and deep structural change.

Let me just give a sketch forward, a brief sketch that hopefully you all will build on.

First, we must tax the billionaires in my district. [APPLAUSE] We are in a new Gilded Age: 19 billionaires—think about this—19 billionaires hold \$3.4 trillion of our economy, 12% of the entire economy, more than three times the concentration of the first Gilded Age. They could pay a 5% annual tax on their wealth. [APPLAUSE]

We could, and what would we do with that money? Well, we could use these trillions to guarantee basic security for your generation and all Americans. Start with Medicare for all, so healthcare is not tied to your job and created as a human right. [APPLAUSE] How about a housing guarantee so that if you work hard, by the age of 35, the federal government will make sure that you can actually buy a home. [APPLAUSE] A living wage, and workers having company ownership, free public college and expansion of Pell Grants, forgiving your student loans. [APPLAUSE] And childcare at \$10 a day for families under \$250,000, so you could actually think of starting a family of your own. [APPLAUSE]

We must take on the corruption of our politics, call for a Constitutional Convention to overturn Citizens United and ban billionaires from buying our politicians. [APPLAUSE] Impose term limits on Supreme Court justices and expand this court from nine to 13 so we can actually safeguard voting rights in America. [APPLAUSE] We must end the wars in the Middle East, beginning with this conflict in Iran. [APPLAUSE] Now I know why they invited me here. You

guys, you seem to agree. [LAUGHTER] [We must] cut the bloated defense budget [APPLAUSE] and stop providing billions of your money to support foreign governments that violate human rights. [APPLAUSE]

Instead, we need the most ambitious jobs agenda of our time, an industrial investment bank to give money to steel, ship, and battery factories in communities like in Massachusetts that were hollowed out, 1,000 new trade schools, tech institutes so you can get the jobs in AI and digital technology, and a federal jobs program that hires young people who have talent and ambition to rebuild their communities and to rebuild the social fabric of America. Franklin Roosevelt did this for eight million people with the Works Progress Administration, when Chairman Lamb's parents were in the Depression. We could begin by hiring a million Americans to rejuvenate government websites, to create new parts, to go visit communities where they didn't grow up, to use technology to cut through red tape, to work on renewable energy or biotech projects, and to rebuild their community.

And as AI transforms our economy, we must ensure it serves workers, not billionaires. [APPLAUSE] That means taxing agentic AI more than we tax human workers. [APPLAUSE] And that means stopping data centers from extracting resources from our community. [APPLAUSE] It means making sure we invest in AI not simply as chatbots, but an AI that can actually cure cancer, map RNA, and improve worker safety. [APPLAUSE]

I'm about to end. If I knew you would like the speech this much, I would have gone on longer. [LAUGHTER]

I call this agenda, A New Economic Patriotism. It's time for a second New Deal for our time. But here's the truth. There's been a failed generation of political leadership in this country. It's going to take your generation. It's really going to take you standing up to reform a system that has been captured by too few.

There are a lot of people graduating from different universities. But I was talking to President Kelly, and here's what's different about you. I was talking to a young man who's already going

to work for a Boston City Council member. At Suffolk, you're not just focused on your title or your pay. A lot of people are focused on that. You can get fancy degrees, and you can get fancy positions. But this country needs something deeper. You have as your mission civic engagement.

Our country needs you, your fresh ideas, your energy, your decency.

If you don't step up, who will? [APPLAUSE]

So I hope you will still decide that this country is worth building, still worth fighting for, still worth living for. If we provide economic hope for all Americans, we can be a cohesive, multiracial democracy and once again be a moral force for the world.

Congratulations Class of 2026. And good luck. [APPLAUSE]