

Sen. Susan M. Collins
Eastern Maine Community College
May 13, 2016

President Larson, trustees, faculty, parents, family, and friends, I am delighted to join you on this very special day. Members of the Class of 2016: Congratulations, you did it!

And to the entire EMCC community: Happy 50th birthday! It is a pleasure to welcome President Larson to Maine and to thank President Cassidy for his service in both Washington County and here in Bangor.

The focus on invigorating our state's workforce, growing our economy, and enhancing Maine's quality of life is evident throughout the Maine Community College System. EMCC combines the qualities of excellence and affordability to fully earn its motto: "Great College, Smart Choice."

Today's ceremony has already provided inspiring examples of the qualities that define this school. Student of the Year Jessica Dorman answered the challenges she faced. Cancer survivor and co-author with her mother of the inspiring *Unshakable Faith* series of historical novels, Jessica is a person of unshakable courage, determination, and compassion. Faculty emeriti Thom Amnotte and Ron Turner have served their students, this school, and our state with dedication, energy, and wisdom. Each of you, by believing in yourselves, by making the commitment to achieve your goals, has demonstrated those same qualities.

From the beginning a half-century ago, this school has opened the doors of opportunity, from 60 students that first year to more than 2,700 today. Through the years, it has remained a place where innovation combined with a tradition of preparing students for rewarding careers and involved, committed citizenship.

Some of you came here directly from high school; others came here from the workforce or the military. You might be the first in your families to earn degrees; perhaps you are going on to a four-year college. Whatever your personal situation, you are here today because you have demonstrated the determination to shape your own future.

A great example are the employees who enrolled in fine woodworking after losing their jobs when the Bucksport mill closed. They could have brooded over how unfair the mill closing was since they had done their jobs well and with pride, and the closure was so unexpected and unfair. Instead, they picked themselves up and started a new chapter in their lives by using federal assistance to enroll at EMCC. And today, they use their new skills on their new jobs.

It has been said that the only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary. The diplomas you receive today are proof of your ability to work hard, to set

clear goals, and to achieve those goals. The path to success is never straight and smooth, but your determination has set you in the right direction.

These are challenging times. The global economy is evolving rapidly, and the jobs of yesterday are no longer the guaranteed careers of tomorrow. From the newest advances in information technology and health care to that fine woodworking program I visited last spring, you have acquired the skills and education that Maine needs to compete in the 21st Century. Together, you are a powerful force that will help drive Maine's economic future.

You have reached a great moment in your lives but, of course, you did not get here by yourselves. The faculty, staff, and administration have created a close-knit learning community that is dedicated to your success. EMCC's terrific Student Success Center may have made the difference that helped you through difficult times and got you here today. The support from businesses and industry throughout the state, not to mention Maine taxpayers, has helped to provide the resources for career-oriented education.

And those people here in the audience beaming with pride -- your parents, your family, and your friends -- had a lot to do with it, too. Their support and encouragement helped you meet this challenge, and they will be there for the challenges to come. Let everything you do from this day forward honor their sacrifices and belief in you.

And while you're giving thanks to those who helped you get here, look to your fellow graduates. I know that one of the special qualities of EMCC is the bond that develops among students. Sharing workforce and life experiences, helping each other meet the challenges of holding down a job, raising a family, studying, and working together on community service projects have brought you together and given you encouragement.

Here's my prediction for you. Your EMCC education will deliver real value for you your entire life. It is a gift you have given yourselves by taking on the challenge of higher education. It also is a gift from all those here today who supported you in meeting that challenge. It will be the gift the keeps on giving.

Now for some advice -- actually more of a heartfelt request. Graduates, the diplomas you receive today represent a great deal of hard work on your part, but they also represent a great debt you owe those who made it possible. There are many ways you can repay this debt. Your talent, energy, and enthusiasm are valuable commodities everywhere -- I urge you to use them right here in Maine. Maine needs the entrepreneurs, the innovators, the risk-takers who will create the businesses and jobs of the future.

Here's a final piece of advice: Serve your community.

The great physician Albert Schweitzer, who devoted his life to healing the sick in Africa's poorest regions, put it this way: "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one

thing I do know: the ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”

Whether it’s joining the volunteer fire department or ambulance crew, helping out at your local school or hospital, serving on your town council or planning board, or participating in a service club or food bank, your community needs you to volunteer, to get involved.

Maine is a wonderful place to live because our people work together, with understanding and civility, to move our state forward.

The values of Maine -- determination, respect, hard work, community -- are the values of Eastern Maine Community College. They are the values of the Class of 2016, and the values that will inspire you to meet the challenges that lie ahead and to create new opportunities for yourselves and for others. Again, graduates, congratulations and good luck.