

Maine Maritime Commencement
Sen. Susan M. Collins
May 6, 2017

Thank you, President Brennan. The friendship we forged serving together in Governor McKernan's cabinet some three decades ago has only grown stronger through the years, and I am grateful for your invitation to be part of this great celebration.

Chairman Somerville, trustees, faculty and staff, family and friends, what an honor it is to join you today! Graduates, congratulations! You did it.

Every time I visit this beautiful campus, I am reminded of what a truly special school this is. From your ranking as one of America's best public colleges to your extraordinary job placement rate, Maine Maritime Academy is recognized as a place of accomplishment and dedication, of deep connections and abiding friendships.

My own connection to MMA goes back 20 years. In 1997, my first year in the Senate, I had the pleasure of serving as the sponsor of the training ship *State of Maine*. Ten years later, in 2007, I was invited to deliver the commencement address and was presented with an honorary degree. And now, in 2017, here I am again.

I think I detect a pattern. So, while I don't have any definite plans yet for 2027, I'll keep a spot open on my calendar.

Training on the *State of Maine* is, I know, one of the most important parts of your curriculum at the Academy, and that the ship is getting older. Earlier this week, I had a great conversation with Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, who is keenly aware of the challenges facing state maritime academies regarding your training vessels. She has committed to working with me to develop a sensible plan for replacing the aging vessels so our merchant mariners have the necessary training to succeed in the industry.

From its founding 76 years ago, Maine Maritime Academy has attracted a special breed of student. From the urgent need for merchant mariners during World War II to the 21st Century challenges of national security, the global economy, science, technology, energy, and the environment, Academy graduates have always risen to the challenge.

This is a small campus with a worldwide impact. I meet Academy graduates all the time on my late-night flights back home to Maine from Washington. They have been in fascinating places doing challenging work – on oil rigs off the Gulf Coast, on cargo ships sailing the world, in engineering jobs everywhere – yet, after months away, Maine remains their anchor, their home.

In addition to covering a lot of geography, Academy graduates make enormous contributions in a wide range of fields:

- Ken Curtis, Class of 1952, served as Maine's Governor for eight years and later as president of Maine Maritime Academy.
- As Chairman of the American Bureau of Shipping, Bob Somerville, Class of 1965, brought great high-tech jobs to aid the redevelopment of the former naval air station at Brunswick.
- Fred Harris, Class of '67, became president of Bath Iron Works.
- Peter Vigue, '69, is chairman of our State's largest construction company.
- Captain Bob Peacock, '71, is one of the most innovative leaders I know in Washington County and has helped to revitalize Eastport and Lubec.

And we will never forget Captain Susan Clark, Class of 1985, the first female harbor pilot in Portland, who brought more than 1,000 ships into that busy harbor. The christening of the Academy's navigation training vessel in her memory four years ago was the highest tribute that could be made in memory of a great mariner.

Graduates, from the moment you decided to enroll at the Academy, you charted a challenging course. You knew that the Academy is a place of intellectual rigor, a place of character, a place of high expectations and stiff competition. Whether it's the *Bowdoin*, the *State of Maine*, or the athletic field, you knew that this isn't a place for the faint of heart.

You knew that you were not just enrolling in a college, but committing yourselves to upholding a heritage. It is a heritage that began here in Maine more than 400 years ago with the launching of the *Virginia*, the first sailing ship built in the New World, a heritage carried on by the Bath Iron Works employees who receive their associate degrees in ship production today.

In the centuries and generations since, Maine has established a worldwide reputation for the skill of our shipbuilders, our sea captains, and our sailors.

From windjammers and fishing fleets to the great cargo ships and the mightiest warships the world has ever seen, Maine continues to be at the forefront of maritime activities. Everything you do in your career will be scrutinized by thousands of experienced and critical eyes. You are taking on the awesome responsibility of both preserving a great heritage and building an even greater future.

To illustrate the scope of that responsibility, let me take you back to another year ending in seven. On November 1, 1967, a remarkable speech was given at the United Nations. The speaker was Arvid Pardo, the Maltese ambassador to the UN who is remembered today as the "Father of the Law of the Sea Conference."

Ambassador Pardo's landmark address inspired the world to view the oceans no longer as a cause of conflict among nations but rather as a shared resource.

The oceans are essential to human life today on so many levels. They are the avenues for global trade that bring people together and lift the disadvantaged out of poverty. They are an abundant source of food and an increasingly important source of energy. The very health of our planet is measured by, and regulated by, the health of our oceans.

Graduates, whether your Academy studies lead you to the military, commerce, the shipyard or the laboratory, you are now a guardian of not just Maine's maritime heritage, but of the common heritage of mankind. Regardless of your major, the Academy has helped to instill in you one quality that is essential to meet that great responsibility – the quality of leadership.

In 1941, with war and tyranny on the march, our State Legislature established Maine Maritime Academy to meet the challenge. Academy graduates have been meeting challenges ever since – securing peace, expanding prosperity, and protecting the world's most valuable resource.

Now, Class of 2017, it is your turn. All here today are proud of you. I know all join me in offering the traditional maritime blessing: may you always have fair winds and following seas. And no matter where your careers take you, I look forward to meeting you as we return home to our Great State of Maine.