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CHALLENGE
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MAY 20, 2017
WELCOME TO THE CLASS OF 2017.

Graduates, we are extraordinarily proud of you and honored to share this memorable occasion with your families.

Since its inception, George Mason University School of Law has delivered a distinctive and creative approach to legal education and scholarship. This commitment has resulted in our law school being ranked in the top-tier of American law schools for seventeen consecutive years.

We appreciate all the hard work of today’s graduates, including your effort and commitment to our core tenet of “LEARN. CHALLENGE. LEAD,” by learning the law from some of the best scholars in America (LEARN), interacting and engaging with intellectual vigor (CHALLENGE), and taking leading roles (LEAD) as your careers move forward. You are well prepared to have a fulfilling and successful career.

Graduates, no matter where your legal career takes you, I hope you will stay connected with Mason’s Scalia Law. Please become engaged with our strong and active alumni network. Most importantly, please give back by mentoring and hiring our students! Your support is vital as we continue on our mission to move “Onward and Upward.”

Congratulations to you and your families on this tremendous achievement.

Best wishes,

Henry N. Butler
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William H. (Chip) Mellor serves as chairman and founding general counsel of the Institute for Justice, which he co-founded in 1991. He was IJ’s president and general counsel from 1991 to 2015. He has litigated cutting-edge constitutional cases nationwide protecting economic liberty, property rights, school choice and the First Amendment, notably achieving the first federal appellate court victory for economic liberty under the 14th Amendment.

Under Mellor’s leadership, IJ pioneered a new approach to strategic public interest litigation that combines courtroom advocacy with award-winning media relations, activism and strategic research to secure constitutional protection for individual rights. He grew IJ from a five-person startup into the National Law Firm for Liberty with a staff of nearly 100, including over 40 attorneys, and an annual budget of $20 million. IJ is headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, and has offices in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Minnesota, Texas and Washington state.


Mellor was awarded the Bradley Prize in 2012, was recognized by the American Bar Association as a Legal Rebel—an individual who remakes their corner of the legal profession—and was profiled in the Wall Street Journal Weekend Interview.
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The academic robes worn at American ceremonies today go back to the Middle Ages. In Medieval Europe, men and women typically wore gowns or robes that evolved to include different colors that signified various professions, trades, and religious orders. The oldest universities of northern Europe, such as Oxford or Paris, grew out of church schools, and both faculty and student were regarded in the Middle Ages as part of the clergy. Hence they wore clerical garb, largely borrowed from the monastic dress of the day, not merely on special occasions, but as their regular clothing. In the United States today, the American Council on Education Administration administers the Academic Costume Code, which provides guidelines for the wearing of academic robes.

In the Middle Ages, the level of elaborate decorations on their gowns could distinguish undergraduates, bachelors, and masters. The wide velvet borders extending down the front of the doctoral gown, as well as the velvet bars on the sleeves, are either black velvet, or are colored according to the scholarly field of the wearer.

The hood of the academic robe was originally designed as a utilitarian head cover worn in bad weather and otherwise drooped to the shoulders. Students and faculty alike initially wore the hood; but in the early sixteenth century, the hood was restricted to graduates, becoming the mark of a degree holder. Each college of study has a distinctive, color-lined hood by which graduates may be recognized in the academic procession. The length of the hood worn for the master’s degree must be three and one-half feet, and for the doctor’s degree, four feet. The hoods are lined with the official color or colors of the college or university conferring.

In today’s ceremony, you will see Juris Doctor and Master of Laws graduates wearing the doctoral robe with velvet cap and tassel. Each of the graduates will be wearing a purple hood lined with green, signifying education in the area of law at George Mason.