Hello and again, welcome. My name is Alex Wetzig. On behalf of the Class of 2019, I’d like to thank all of you that have travelled here today, the joyous throngs of support, for filling this space with your encouragement on a day that means so much to us. To stand before you now, with the opportunity to address my classmates, to convey a message, I am truly grateful. Before I begin, there are a few people that I have the pleasure of acknowledging. Thank you to our esteemed guest, Dr. Rita Charon who will soon bless our commencement with her sage wisdom. Thank you to President Colasurdo, and Dean Stoll for their direction and leadership of McGovern Medical School. Thank you to the many offices, faculty, and staff members that have supported us throughout our medical school careers. Furthermore, I can’t thank enough my close friends and partners in the Student Senate: Bernice Yau, Matt Bell, & Lindsey Jackson for making this job some of the most fun I’ve ever had.

Keep in mind also those unique and special people in your lives that have never wavered in their support of our dreams. Those exceptional people that uplift you in all aspects of your life, not just academic. Include them in your festivities and celebrations but let’s all agree not to all go to the same place for dinner after this.

In addition, there’s another ally to the class of 2019 that bears acknowledgment. He has been a role model to me and to many. Whether you’ve known him personally or only in passing, it’s clear that he possesses, in otherworldly abundance, the values of courage, honor, and integrity. And this would be his speech to give if not for the choice to pursue his passion for global health and humanitarianism. Faiez Sayed is the original president of our class and his dedication to our school is remarkable. Because I know he’s watching from home, please give Faiez a round of applause.

As the focus returns to and remains on my dear friends in the Class of 2019, the feelings of pride and admiration for these incredible men and women is undeniable. The collection of sheer strength and courage you sense in these graduates is staggering. That imposing force that precedes them as they entered this room is exactly that; a prevailing force for good in this world.

Walking into this building today, the George R. Brown, I can’t help but recall a very powerful memory. On August 25th, 2017, Hurricane Harvey struck Houston, TX and caused catastrophic damage across Southeast Texas. Most of today’s graduates were 3rd year medical students at the time, only a couple of months of clinical rotations under their belt.

Once the rains cleared and the waters began to subside, without a moment’s hesitation, these young doctors led a charge to aid those affected by the natural disaster. Each utilizing their own talents, they found a way to lend a hand to someone in need. All over Houston and the surrounding areas, they were fundraising, collecting food, clean water, & dry clothing. Some even opening their own homes to shelter fellow students. All heroes in their own right. All volunteering their time and sacrificing a piece of themselves so that they might be a light to those in the darkness. This very building operated as a shelter for thousands of people displaced by the damage. For days on end, you could find many of the Class of 2019 right here, unblinking in the face of fear, helping in any way they could.

It’s a sight that I’ll always remember, and I believe this is only one example that illustrates perfectly the spirit of the Class of 2019. In each student, there is generosity, selflessness, compassion and devotion to your fellow man that radiates brilliantly. And it is by these venerable traits that you are qualified for the landmark achievement of Medical Doctorate and it is by these strengths of your character that you are fit to carry the name of physician.

However, like any worthy pursuit, certainly, the path has not been free of fault or blunder.

Hear the words of 26th United States President, Theodore Roosevelt. It’s an excerpt from his 1910 speech titled “Citizenship In a Republic”. Over a century later, I appreciate these words for the way they celebrate the bravery found in embracing risk and untethering yourself from what’s safe or comfortable so that you might become something special.

"It is not the critic who counts; not the one who points out how a strong person stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends themselves in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if they fail, at least fails while daring greatly, so that their place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

My friends, do not dread the anxiety of risk nor the pain of failure, as these are born out of great effort. These perfectly human emotions are only ever temporary. Instead, your greatest adversary shall always be the comfort of never having tried.

To go places you’ve never been, you must do things you’ve never done. If your biggest dream in life was to become a doctor, you should quickly replace your sense of accomplishment with replenished vigor. Because of today, your dream is no longer big enough.

For all of you, there was a time when you lied awake wondering what today’s experience might bring you. Ask yourselves, what will be the next thing you lie awake in hunger for?

Fret not, for it is in your nature to continue to capture new dreams.

And as you go, pioneering your own path, conquering new victories, go in truth. Be true to your patients, true to your heart, true to who you are.

Thank you.