

Remarks of Dean Weich

5/27/26 Commencement

Class of 2026, I will be the first of many speakers today to congratulate you. You've worked hard to reach this milestone and you deserve to feel pride in your accomplishment. Well done!

Speaking of pride, many of you are accompanied by proud parents, spouses, siblings and friends. I'm sure they played a key role in your law school success. Graduates, please join me in thanking your supporters for the sustenance and love they provided to you over these past three or four years.

This year we are marking two significant birthdays. First, we celebrate the 75th anniversary of Seton Hall Law School. This school admitted its first class – your predecessors – in 1951. That class was almost all male, but they enrolled in a school whose dean was Miriam T. Rooney. That was new – Dean Rooney was the first female dean of any ABA-accredited law school in the United States.

At a time when society often confined women's roles to the domestic sphere, a pioneering woman led Seton Hall Law for its first formative decade. I'm proud to follow in Dean Rooney's footsteps and to carry forward the mission she established: preparing the next generation of lawyers to serve their clients and their communities with integrity and purpose.

At the heart of that mission are the professors seated behind me. They are triple threats: dedicated classroom teachers, nationally renowned scholars in their respective fields and world-class mentors to their students. I ask the faculty to stand to accept the appreciation of the Class of 2026.

And let's not forget the hard-working administrators and staff members who toil, often behind the scenes, to keep Seton Hall Law strong and to support your law school experience. Thank you colleagues.

The other birthday we celebrate this year is the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Some call it the birthday of the United States, but that's not quite right. The colonial rebellion to overthrow

British rule was already underway before July 4, 1776. And the Revolutionary War, key battles of which were fought right here in New Jersey, did not end until 1781.

But the signing of the Declaration was a turning point in American history. I submit it is especially significant to you soon-to-be lawyers.

After all, the Declaration of Independence reads like a legal pleading. The list of grievances against King George are essentially counts of an indictment, or causes of action in a civil complaint. And the relief that the colonial Congress sought was a new independent nation in which “all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, among [them] Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Of course there was a glaring irony in the Declaration, because many of the signers, including the principal author Thomas Jefferson, were themselves enslavers. It took a Civil War to end that immoral practice, and it took constitutional amendments in the 19th century and a civil rights movement in the 20th century to move closer to that ideal. In my view, the work remains unfinished today.

So what do these two birthdays – the 75th anniversary of Seton Hall Law and the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, have to do with each other?

For three-quarters of a century this school has provided thousands of men and women like you with a first-class legal education. As lawyer leaders in your community, whether in private practice or public service, you will have an opportunity to participate effectively in the great debates of our day, including current struggles over the meaning of equality and how to achieve it.

In your Constitutional Law class you explored the infrastructure of our democracy, of which the Declaration of Independence is an important pillar. I encourage you to use your legal education to defend our democratic institutions, but at the same time work to improve them. Specifically, help to make real the promise of equal rights set forth in the Declaration.

Martin Luther King Jr. said that “when the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Declaration, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.”

Help make that inheritance meaningful.

And with founding dean Miriam T. Rooney in mind, don't hesitate to update Thomas Jefferson's declaration to say that all men and women are created equal, and all people are entitled to life liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In carrying out your work, abide by this law school's values:

Respect each other, respect your adversaries and respect the rule of law.

Maintain your integrity. Remember what we taught you in Professional Responsibility.

Use your law license to serve others. As Mother Theresa said, "Not all of us do great things, but we can all do small things with great love."

Class of 2026, it has been my privilege to serve as your dean for the past two years. In those years I have come to know many of you, and in the years ahead I hope you will remain involved as alumni of the law school so I can get to know all of you better.

Stay close to your classmates in the years ahead.
Nurture the Seton Hall Law community in the wider
world. Continue to make us proud.

Congratulations!