

PICS High School
Commencement Keynote Address
June 9, 2009
His Excellency, Emanuel Mori
President of the Federated States of Micronesia

Kaselehlie, and good afternoon to you all. Let us all thank our heavenly Father for granting us this special day today and for the achievement of this very special PICS High School graduating class of 2009. Before I begin, may I offer my respect and recognition to the traditional leaders, Governor and Lieutenant Governor, Speaker, and members of the Pohnpei State Legislature, Mayor of Kolonia, church leaders, members of the diplomatic corps, parents and families of this year's graduating class.

Thank you for honoring me by selecting me to be your main speaker. It is a humbling feeling to stand before you today to congratulate your class of 2009 of over 300 students. Each and every one of you that will receive a diploma today should be very proud of your special achievement. I know that your graduation is a milestone, not only for each one of you, but also for each and every member of your family. Recognizing their pride, I stand here today with you to demonstrate our national pride and gratification in your accomplishments. You are all charting a course of excellence that will drive Pohnpei and the Federated States of Micronesia proudly towards a brighter future.

Through your graduation today, you also stand as a clear demonstration of the long and outstanding commitment of your parents, your families and your teachers. As you grow older and wiser, you will come to recognize that every achievement requires a sacrifice. Yes, you, your parents and your teachers have made 12 years of sacrifice. Your accomplishment here today has been achieved not only through your own hard work, but also through the love and sacrifices of your parents and your teachers and their commitment to your individual and our collective future.

Please join me in extending my special recognition and congratulations to your valedictorian Lance Edward and salutatorian Angie Joab. Congratulations to you both.

Graduates, Education is indeed the foundation upon which to build a nation. It is the cement and underpinning of a developing country such as ours. Ultimately, it is the mechanism by which we will distinguish ourselves in the domestic, regional and international arenas. And it is the heart of a strong economy that will ensure a vibrant quality of life for our people in the coming decades.

For this reason, you have selected an appropriate theme for your commencement and I applaud this fine message:

“Each of us has different talents, dreams and destinations; but we all have the same power to make a new tomorrow”.

Today, we are here not only to celebrate your accomplishments and to congratulate our teachers, our administrators and our leaders, but to recognize that your graduation marks not an end to your voyage, but rather the beginning. And we, as a people, as a nation, as a state and as family are with you in this journey, with all of our supports and prayers.

But be assured, even with our support, your journey will not be easy. As you take your unique talents and dreams towards your ultimate destination, it will be easy to become sidetracked from your original goal – Many decisions will be required to difficult questions. Often the answer will involve whether to take the easy or difficult path towards your future. But only through the making of these difficult decisions will your ultimate goals have substance and meaning. (Talk about college life – much different from High School life).

We recognize that not all of you have the financial resources to allow you to achieve all of your college education goals. We are therefore working to identify all possible funding sources for scholarships to assist you in your journey. In addition to the \$350,000 generously appropriated by our 15th FSM Congress to support state scholarship programs, I am requesting the Congress to work with me to identify an additional \$350,000 in the 2010 budget. We need that additional funding especially for those who are ahead of you, who are moving on to further their education in colleges and universities.

This funding is augmented through the “sin tax scholarship” which is earmarked under our tax laws for graduate scholarships. ([Explain sin tax](#)) We are also forever grateful to the government of Australia for committing \$1 million dollars in scholarship for our Micronesians students. We are equally grateful to the government of the People’s Republic of China for availing over 200 short-term and long-term training and scholarship programs at Chinese educational institutions. My administration is committed to working with Pohnpei and our other states to improve coordination and to identify the most appropriate scholarship options for you and for those who will be graduating in subsequent years.

In addition to improving scholarship opportunities, I have worked with the Department of Education to establish the Bridging Gaps School Partnership Program. This program is focused on helping students transition from high school to college and our elementary school students to transition to high school.

With programs such as these, we hope not only to assist today’s students to achieve their immediate educational goals, but to also begin a longer process of improving the performance of our schools in providing students of the future with enhanced educational tools.

Let us be frank. Our schools are simply not performing at the level that is necessary to provide you, our children, with these necessary tools to compete in the local and especially in the international market place. Currently 34% of our teachers (nation wide) still do not have degrees. Only 6% teachers do not have degrees from Pohnpei. Very good. Approximately 68% of our eighth graders passed exit exams to enter high schools. About 94% of Pohnpei’s High School students completed high school. And only 10% of the high school students who passed the COM entrance exam passed the placement test allowing them to move on to advanced courses at the COM national campus.

I can conclude therefore that the remaining 90% of them must go through remedial courses for period of 2 to 3 years. Finally, only 4% of our junior college students advanced to four year colleges. If the 4% is accurate, then my advice for you the graduates is to go to a 4-year college. The challenge for the COM and me, the leaders, is to transform COM from a 2-year

to a 4-year college. The public as well as the private sectors' needs now require 4-year college graduates. If these statistics for Pohnpei State are correct, I must congratulate Governor Ehsa and his Education people. On the other hand, if the nation-wide statistics are accurate, then I am not only worried but seriously concerned.

The statistics prove that our number one national priority must continue to be the improvement of our educational system from top to bottom at both the national and the state levels. To accomplish this, we must pay greater attention to the strengthening and refinement of our national and state educational and development targets.

This includes expanding our focus in identifying the real educational and training needs of our economy and directing our limited scholarships to those priority areas, such as law, accounting, banking, medicine, engineering, architecture and electronics, to name a few.

Only through a broad base approach will we reduce our dependency on foreign labor and bring our children back to our shores.

We must also provide real private sector incentives for our college and trade school graduates. The point is not only to keep our children in Micronesia and bring our children home from abroad, but to provide them with better economic opportunities for a better life for their families.

We must focus on partnerships at every level, to provide a broad skill base that cannot be managed through ordinary educational processes. Most importantly, we must improve the partnerships between our pre-school, primary, high school and our college educational systems. Equally important is the partnership between our three levels of governments, churches and communities including the private sector. We must coordinate our primary and high school curriculums and testing with our Community College.

Let it never be said that we failed to provide the opportunities for education and improvement that would make our nation great. Once again, congratulations to all of the PICS high school graduates who stand before us today. May you serve as a shining beacon for your younger brothers and sisters to follow. God bless all of you and good luck in making a new tomorrow.

Thank You.