**15447, Robert Burton - Graduation**

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to welcome all of our graduating officers today, as well as their family and friends, to this graduation ceremony. I also want to thank our fellow officers, faculty and staff for being here to support our new graduates. It is an honor to be invited to speak for your commencement today because twenty years ago I graduated from this police academy. So, you see graduates, it is possible to work your way up the ladder if you work hard and serve your community well.

This year we are graduating one full time female officer, Maeghan Smallwood. Our agency was proud to select her while working in another position, and sponsor her through the academy. We selected Maeghan for her fantastic work ethic, her willingness to help anyone, and her ability to represent all the values of the Paso Robles Police Department. Those values are Professionalism, Accountability, Courage, Integrity, Loyalty, Honor and Compassion. In addition to all of those Department values, all officers should display humility in serving on a daily basis.

All of you graduates are entering the police profession for the first time. Your family members will share in your pain, your struggles, and your successes as you enter this new career. Settle it in your hearts and minds right now that your new career will have both highs and lows, but I believe you will find it to be a rewarding career choice. I mentioned earlier that you could advance far if you serve your community well. That’s what a police officer is, a public servant. It is our honor and our privilege to put others before ourselves and show respect for every person they encounter, whether they are victims or suspects. Every person deserves equal treatment before the law, and our community needs to know they can depend upon their police force to take care of them at all times.

You have chosen one of the most important careers possible. Whatever you do each day on the job will impact the people of the community who you serve. Never forget why you chose this profession. You chose it to protect and defend your community if need be, but also to serve your community to keep the peace and make it a safer place for them to live and a safer place to raise their families.

Your very presence will help keep the community safer because criminals won’t seek to actively go against a very present police force. But, it’s more than your enforcement of the law that the community needs. They appreciate a police force that is there in time of need, such as a weather emergency or any type of community emergency. They depend on law enforcement to keep things running smoothly whether it’s a 4th of July parade or a totally unexpected riot. They look to us for guidance as well as protection. They need us to keep a cool head no matter what the circumstances.

I speak directly today the family members of our graduates. You need to understand the job is very demanding, especially in light of the criticism directed towards law enforcement today. You’ll need to be prepared for the hurdles these officers will need to face, and you will need to face those hurdles with your police officer.

There will be days when your officer comes home and doesn’t want to speak at all; they just want to collapse. Other days they’ll want to tell you everything that happened to them, good and bad. When you hear the good, you will be so proud of them you could bust. When you hear the bad, you may want to go find the bad guy yourselves and give them a piece of your mind for mistreating your officer. But, I caution you. Don’t ride the roller coaster of emotion. They can’t avoid it. They need for you, their family, to be the solid rock for them some days. They need you to not react when they share something horrific with you. They need you to not exalt their ego unrealistically when someone gives to them extravagantly. Those are the extremes. They really need their families to be the balance in the center so they don’t give way to the extremes.

Today is a very special day for each of you. You have completed some of the hardest training in the world, that of a police officer. We are not the military where you will be sent to some far away land and fight to protect people you’ll never see again. You are a civilian police officer who will serve in his or her own community to protect and serve the people you go to church with and the people you will see at the grocery store. These are the people you will help coach your children’s sports teams and share duties in school programs and one day you will all stand together as your own children graduate from high school.

Being a member of a local police force is a unique and privileged profession. This is not some impersonal job where you just go in, do your daily tasks, and then go home. No, for this job, you care what gets done and what does not. You care that the elderly are cared for and no scammed. You care that the young people can go to the park and not be afraid of something bad happening to them. You care that the teenagers learn to drive safely.

And it is because you care and you have that personal concern for your community that you will do an excellent job fulfilling your duties as a police officer in your community. Take today to celebrate. Then, tomorrow take that first step of your new season. Report on your first scheduled day of duty with pride for what you have accomplished and what you will accomplish. You have the skills and you have the desire. Now go out and serve your community.

Thank you