**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JAMES STRAIT**

Hello everyone!! Thank you so much for joining us today at this commencement ceremony for the graduating class of 2018 for the Ramey Unit School. I want to extend a warm welcome to all of the parents, friends, teachers, administrators, students, and distinguished guests present today, and of course, I am thrilled and proud to honor this year’s graduates. You.... and **WE**... have all been through **A LOT** this year and we’ve made it through. In times of challenge, we truly learn who we are and what we are made of, and everyone in this room today has admirably demonstrated an incredible amount of determination, adaptability, and perseverance. **All** of you inspire me.

The French author, Victor Hugo said, “Perseverance, the secret of all triumphs.” (**If you want, for a little bit of sarcasm and a small laugh, you can say**) Some other “unknown” wise person also said, “**Talk is cheap**.” (**Wait for the laugh?**) Over the course of the past several months, each one of us, and especially **YOU**, graduates, have learned some very difficult life lessons. We learned that running water, having decent means of transportation, and safe homes to live in are not a “given.” We learned that there’s such a thing as “force majeure” and it’s not just language in insurance policies. It means an unexpected force of nature that occurs.... and has capability to change lives.... not necessarily for the better. We all now know that we cannot take **ANYTHING** for granted... not our running water.... not our safety... not our ability to receive an education.

Seven months ago, technically, we lost power... but graduates, you **REALLY** showed what determination and perseverance looks like. We witnessed **YOUR** power. Although there may be an underlying punchline somewhere that kids don’t like school, that was **NOT** the case with **ANY** of you, and in the midst of some very daunting challenges, all of us, and especially you students, really stepped up and demonstrated just how much you value your education, and for **THAT**, I am so proud, as are, I am sure, your parents, friends, and everyone else in this room.

I’d like to remind you what Thomas Carlyle said. “Permanence, perseverance, and persistence in spite of all obstacles, discouragement, and impossibilities; it is this, that in all things distinguishes the strong souls from the weak.” Through your sheer determination, hard work, focus, and sense of community, you’ve completed your requirements and have acquitted yourselves beyond expectation. You have taught **US** what sheer grit looks like, and you did it with enthusiasm.... even when you didn’t know how that might even be possible. As your school administrator, I am so proud of you, but I want to clarify that my praise is also **NOT** biased. The numbers prove that you, this class of 2018, have made a collective statement and have left your mark when it comes to productivity and accomplishment.... **IN SPITE OF** the exceptional odds you faced.... **SEVEN MONTHS of DISASTER RELIEF**??? **COUNTLESS HOURS** of no simple living conveniences, no electricity, and very few comforts???? Like **THAT** was going to STOP **YOU**??? **I DON’T THINK SO**!!! You triumphed!!! You prevailed!!! In terms of ball park figures, this graduating class has earned **OVER** **$4 million** in scholarships! Some of you are going to Ivy League schools... some have made West Point, the Air Force Academy, and other fine colleges and universities. (**If some are not going on to college, you can also say**) For those of you that have chosen to enter the work force or have other plans after this graduation, never forget the strength and resilience you have inside you that will serve you wherever you may choose to participate in life. You all showed **US** and yourselves what you’re made of, and we cannot be prouder.

Living, working, and learning in this environment is unique. As sons and daughters of those who serve our country, you had and have a rare vantage point when it comes to how you’ve grown up, what you’ve seen, and where the path of opportunity may lead you. You’ve observed your parents and relatives endure challenges and rise to special circumstances. You’ve probably had the gift of seeing more of this world than most, although at times it might not have seemed like a gift.... but all that you’ve experienced, all that you have witnessed, will work in your favor as you inherit your place in this world. You’re leaving Ramey with far more than a diploma and a ticket to your next adventure. You’re moving on to college, or training, or the workforce knowing that you are **SURVIVORS**.... in the most positive sense. You’ve learned to be resourceful... to really think on your feet... to prioritize... and to access your inner strength, determination, and confidence. Some people don’t learn those rough life lessons until they’re much older... if at all, but you now have a reference point... a bellwether... to remind you of what is important in life, and thankfully, achieving your goals, especially with regard to acquiring an education, is at the top of the list. I am sure there’s so much more that you’ve learned and I want to encourage all of you to share your experience, support one another, find your mentors, **BE** a mentor, and know that you are part of the Ramey culture and history. May you be as proud of that as we are of you and your accomplishments!! Congratulations and thank you all!!