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Newsroom

RWU Law Celebrates Commencement 2016

RWU Law honors 86 graduates in a ceremony keynoted by U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez; also recognizing noted jurists and founding dean.



BRISTOL, R.I., May 13, 2016 – A cool, partly sunny day on Mt. Hope Bay provided the perfect backdrop as **United States Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez** delivered a rousing address to the 86 graduates of the Class of 2016 during Commencement exercises here Friday.

Perez, former attorney general for civil rights at the U.S. Department of Justice and director of the Office of Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has pioneered efforts to create a living wage for workers and protect workers' retirement savings. He has been mentioned as a possible vice-presidential candidate if Hillary Clinton is the Democratic presidential nominee.



"Civil rights remain the unfinished business of America," Secretary Perez told the assembled graduates, noting that a law degree confers the "tools" needed for "the most important journey that lawyers are a part of – the unending, timeless journey to form a more perfect union."

"You have a remarkable opportunity here to make sure you are relevant in dealing with the defining issues of our time," he added. "For too many, opportunity remains elusive, and you can be part of the expansion of that opportunity" – advocating for the less fortunate "with the fierce urgency of now."

During Commencement, the School of Law also presented honorary degrees to the **Honorable Haiganush R. Bedrosian**, retired Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Family Court and first woman to serve in that role; and the **Honorable Michael A. Silverstein**, Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Superior Court and member of the Commission on Judicial Tenure and Discipline.

An honorary degree was presented to **RWU Professor of Law Anthony J. Santoro** as well. The founding dean of Roger Williams University School of Law (and several other law schools prior) and a former President of Roger Williams University, he was recognized for his "foundational" role in establishing RWU Law, and received an emotional standing ovation.



Chosen by the graduating class, **Professor John Chung** was honored as Best Full-Time Professor, and **David Coombs**, Chief Justice Weisberger Visiting Professor of Law, as Best Adjunct Professor. For this year's Best Staff Member award, the class selected Clinical Programs' Legal Administrator and Paralegal **Margie Caranci**.

Dean Michael J. Yelnosky paid warm tribute to **Michael P. McNulty**, a member of the Class of 2016 who passed away unexpectedly last August, and whose family attended Commencement. "I think I can say, without fear of contradiction, that Mike McNulty was the happiest law student ever," Dean Yelnosky said in describing the good-natured and well-liked Pennsylvania native, to the appreciative laughter of his classmates.

Judah H. Rome (second from left in photo above), in delivering his valedictory address, said he had expected law school to be "cut-throat and competitive, and maybe it is on other campuses"; but that he had been "taken aback by the overwhelming sense of community at our school, and especially among our class. We came together and moved through the last three years as one."