U.S. Representative and Xavier Graduate John Boehner's Commencement Speech at Xavier University, May 2006

Thank you for that kind introduction. I also want to thank Father Graham, the distinguished members of the faculty, the Board of Trustees, all the Xavier family and especially to all of the graduates of this year's class of 2006. Its an honor, 29 years ago I received my first degree from XU - 29 years ago today sitting out there - and at the time it was the highest achievement I could have ever imagined. You've all come here from different backgrounds, different places, different times, different ideas, hopes and dreams. But today, you're here gathered as one and I'm proud to be standing here with you as a fellow member of the class of 2006. I'm deeply honored and humbled to be here again after nearly 3 decades receiving this honorary degree and from the bottom of my heart to the Xavier family, let me say thank you.

Now I am the most unlikely person to ever stand here and receive an honorary degree from Xavier University. You see, as Joe mentioned, I am the majority leader in the United States House of Representatives today. But it wasn't always quite that way; I tended bar, I mopped floors, I was a roofer, a truck driver – I had every rotten job that you could ever imagine and was very happy to have every one of them. I grew up just up the street, up in Reading. I have 11 brothers and sisters. My dad and his 2 brothers owned a bar up in Curthidge. I went to Moeller high school and after high school wanted to go to college but really, couldn't really figure out how to do it. But I scraped enough money and went to the University of Cincinnati for one quarter. It didn't go to well, so I dropped out of school. I went back to driving a truck, driving bulldozers and loaders. And along the way, after I was out of high school I became a football and basketball official. Refereeing basketball games, football games and got reacquainted with someone that I had met when I was in grade school and had known through high school, a man named Bill Smith. Some of you may remember Bill Smith, accounting professor here. And this year Bill is celebrating his 50th year teaching accounting here at Xavier and he's sitting in the president's box today. Bill, I'm glad that you're here.

But it wasn't just that I had met Bill Smith along the way. After I had been out of school for several years, Bill and I were officiating together, out in Timbuktu somewhere and in January of 1971 we were having dinner after the game at the Kenwood Tavern. Bill Smith leaned over to me and said, "John you ought to think about getting yourself back to school." I said, "Bill, I know I need to go back to school." He said, "You need to come to Xavier." I said, "Bill, I always wanted to go to Xavier. I've had this warm spot in my heart for Xavier from the time that I was at Moeller and came to the Xavier football games, Xavier basketball games but Bill, I could never afford this." Bill said, "How much money do you have?" I said, "I don't know. I've probably have got about $400." He says, "for $450 you can get 9 credit hours and we start on Tuesday." So this is a Saturday night, so on Monday I run around, grab my transcript from high school, my transcript from the University of Cincinnati and I come to meet Father Bushman, the Admissions Officer. And Father Bushman is wondering, "what are you doing here?" but I think Bill Smith had paved the way. And so Father Bushman looked at my high school transcript, looked at my grades from Cincinnati and said, "why are you here?" I said, "Father I know it doesn't look real good. But if you give me a chance I'll prove to you that I'm up to this." And so he said, "Okay."

And so I took 3 classes; Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning from 9-12, worked every part time job known to man and still officiated football and basketball games with Bill Smith. At the end of the semester I had an A and two Bs. And Father Bushman said, "Alright, you can come back." So, you know, I spent the next year here at Xavier, full – time. A commuter student, driving back and forth trying to earn enough money to stay here but it didn't work. I couldn't earn enough money to go here full time and so I dropped out. And spent the next 5 years finishing my career here at Xavier at night – working full time and coming to night school. So for you commuter students out that are out there, those of you that spent most of your career at night, I feel your pain, and I can tell you that 29 years ago today I was a very, very proud member of the class of 1977.

Now I tell you this story for three reasons. First, we live in America; a land of hope, opportunity and freedom and you can be whatever you want to be. Now I mean literally, you can be whatever you want to be. My second point: hard work, perseverance will take you as long, as far as you want to

go. Xavier has prepared all of you, very well. I remember when I was out of Xavier, about ten years ago, I realized what I learned here. And that was: how to use my brain, how to think rationally, and how to use my heart and my conscience to guide me in my work. And so, if you're willing to work hard, if you're willing to persevere, here in America, you can be all that you want to be. And my last point is this: no one who succeeds in life does it alone. There are people along the way - your family, your friends, and yes, there may be a Bill Smith in your life who gave you a break, who gave you a chance, who gave you an idea, who inspired you to be more than you ever thought you could be. God bless you and congratulations.