



JAMES PETRO BIOGRAPHY

Service to the public and the higher education system has been a cornerstone of James Petro's life.

His March 14 appointment to Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents capped nearly three decades of service to the state of Ohio, during which he was the first Ohio Attorney General to argue a case in front of the United States Supreme Court in more than 30 years.

As Chancellor, Petro leads the University System of Ohio, which is one of the largest comprehensive systems of public higher education in the nation. The University System of Ohio bears primary responsibility for raising the educational attainment of Ohioans.

A native of Brooklyn, Ohio, Petro previously served as Ohio Auditor from 1995 to 2002, providing financial and performance oversight to Ohio's universities and other state agencies, and as Ohio Attorney General from 2003 to 2006, when he served as the chief legal officer to the state's universities.

Petro spent 28 years as an elected official, serving as a state representative, Cuyahoga County Commissioner, and Rocky River City Councilman and Director of the city.

In the fall of 2002, Petro successfully defended an Ohio law banning late-term abortions in front of the U.S. Supreme Court by a vote of 9-0.

In 2006, Petro ran for the Republican nomination for Governor of the state of Ohio. He was defeated by then-Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell.

In 2010, Petro and his wife, Nancy Petro, coauthored the book "Fatal Justice," which addresses eight myths that lead to wrongful convictions in the American criminal

justice system. “False Justice” follows true stories while defining legislative reforms to a system that, Petro believes, places innocent people in prison.

Petro’s achievements include appointment to the Ohio Public Defender Commission by the Supreme Court of Ohio in 2010; selection as an “Ohio Super Lawyer” by Law & Politics magazine and Cincinnati Magazine in 2006; recipient of a Legacy Award and Visionary Leadership Award from the Ohio Chief of Police in 2005 and 2006; recipient of a March Fong Eu National Achievement Award from the National Rotary Association in 2005, as well as several notable awards from previous years.

Petro earned a law degree from Case Western Reserve University and a bachelor’s degree in history from Denison University. He also received an honorary doctorate from The University of Toledo in 2000.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO SPRING COMMENCEMENT

Address from Jim Petro,

Ohio Board of Regents Chancellor

Toledo (Savage Arena) – Sunday, May 8, 2011 – 2:00 p.m.

Thank you. It is really a pleasure to be here. I thank Dr. Jacobs, the trustees and other people on stage today.

Before I get into my speech, a couple of points. About my raspy voice. It doesn't hurt. I can play the Godfather!

About today, it's Mother's Day. To all of you, I know you celebrate your mothers. My best wishes and congratulations to all mothers today.

Standing here, it would be an error not to congratulate the UT Women's Basketball Team, who last month, won the WNIT championship on this floor. Go Rockets!

I do want to thank most of all, the most important people – all of you who are graduating. This is about you and what you have achieved. That's why all these

dignitaries are here. Also, your loved ones who beam with pride. We salute this significant day of your lives. A little advice to married students, don't say that to your spouse.

It's never easy to get this far. Savor the moment. That's an important part of today. You know students who fell along the wayside. You faced the same challenges and overcame them.

You pushed for the studies. You put in those late nights at Club Carlson. That really is a club. Is it a library? It sounds like a more welcomed spot of respite.

Since you're now all college graduates, you know you could not have done it alone. Parents and siblings helped with bills, cooking dinner, babysitting, carpooling, all so that you could make it to this day.

As one who works in public higher education, it wasn't only the people you know who helped make this day possible. Millions of Ohioans paid taxes to make this possible.

We wish we could do more. State support of this University is still indispensable.

Ever wonder why the taxpayers care if you get a degree? Why are they so willing to pay? As attractive as you are, it wasn't your good looks. The truth is they support higher education for selfish reasons. The diploma determines how much you learn. But the level of education determines the level of prosperity of our state, the number of businesses. To succeed in this economy, workers have to have the latest skills and training. They look for states with high numbers of college graduates.

Ohio hasn't been doing so well lately. We're not too far from the bottom. 24.6 percent of the adult work force has a BA. But for every one percent increase, Ohio has one and a half billion dollars in economic growth.

We have to encourage more to be like you, college graduates. There are states in our union that have fifty percent more, and they are the wealthy states.

If Ohio is going to succeed, we need more and more of you. If you had to boil my job description down, that's it. Figuring out how to get more degrees into the hands of

Ohioans. That's what the people expect me to do. And that's what I am determined to achieve.

So I'm looking at 900 new graduates. This is a very big deal. No need to concern yourselves with the big picture, at least not today. This is a celebration. I'm grateful to have been invited here to share.

Most of you know how important higher education can be. It's about the only pathway to the American middle class.

I don't have to belabor that point. You are all aware of a study last year that found that an astounding 60 percent of young people in the Toledo area are enrolled in college. The highest in the nation's metropolitan areas.

UT has a high graduation rate for a school with open enrollment. It's sinking in here in Toledo.

A college education is about more than economic advancement. Your degree will enrich your soul.

When I got my law degree, I remember my wife asking me what I was going to do. I was in law school when we got married. My response was I wanted to try to do something different every four years. I got away with that! It should have terrified her at the time. But with satisfaction, it's the way my career has gone.

I've been in the private sector, into public service. I've litigated, written legislation. I was a state auditor. And now I seek to advance our causes of economic growth.

Little of this I have done ... doors open and I step through. I'm always excited by a new challenge. I have very few regrets.

None of those doors would have opened, had I not gotten an education. I'm not suggesting you change your career every four years. But you never know what you can reach out for.

This brings me to this advice based on my years of experience and limited wisdom. Don't worry, I had to sit through a few of these speeches, too.

I want leave you with three thoughts:

Don't let this be the end of it all. Education goes on for your entire life. It doesn't end with this degree. Learning must continue. Certainly, even when you don't have to take tests. The thing the faculty here taught you was how to think.

Secondly, never forget your degree imposes obligations on you. Much more is expected of you. Your ranks will provide the leaders. Give back. Volunteer. Maybe go into public service. It's up to you. But you can serve in many ways. All of these require your service and you'll find the right one. Be there for us. We'll need your help.

Finally, I hope you will encourage a return to civility in public discourse. I always value an open marketplace of ideas. I'm dismayed when I hear discussions in which people are shouting rather than being engaged in debate. I hate rhetoric that drowns out discussions. Some people use vicious attacks. This incivility has become too pervasive, part of the background noise of our lives on the TVs, radios, and on the Internet.

John F Kennedy said civility is not a sign of weakness. In fact, it is just the opposite. You feel comfortable with your views. You feel strong with your facts and your position. State it calmly and reasonably. Don't challenge people in the wrong way.

As you graduate, and you take this big step to the outside world, I hope you will reject the meanness of public discourse that you might see out there. Demand facts, not name calling.

Hey, enough advice from this old guy.

The time has come for you to make your mark. I'll get out of the way so you can get started.

You arrive at this moment fully prepared. You're trained. Now it's up to you. Make the most of this opportunity and enjoy the ride.

Thanks.

