

# Congressman urges graduates to become involved in community

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Spring graduates of Louisiana Tech University were told that "we are all politicians," and they were challenged to take an active part in activities that affect their lives.

"You want to know why I would be talking about politics on the day of graduation?" U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander asked graduates and guests at Thomas Assembly Center on Tech's campus Saturday.

He answered: "When you leave here, you are going to find out that a political decision made by someone will affect almost everything that you do in the course of your life."

Alexander told the 781 graduates that everyone in the community is a politician, and he added, "We should be."

The Quitman resident said, "Some people consider politics a four-letter word." But it is not, he advised. "A politician is defined in Webster's (dictionary) as one who takes an active role in community affairs.

"You don't have to hold a public office to be a politician," he said. "If you see something that needs changing, change it."

Alexander said he began to understand the need for community involvement while working on his father's campaign for an elective office in 1956. "My brothers, sisters and I were sitting around a table stuffing campaign literature into envelopes," he recalled, wondering why his daddy was so involved in community affairs. "My dad won that election.

"He was a mountain of a man who

worked hard to provide for this family, but he also worked hard to get things done for his community," Alexander said, emphasizing his speech's underlying theme of involvement.

"He knew that as good as life was for him, it could be better for us," the 5th District congressman said. "I know that as good as life has been for me, it could be a little bit better for my children and grandchildren. I care.

"There are excuses for not knowing, but there are no excuses for not caring," he said, urging the graduates to be informed and to care about what is going on in today's world.

He began his speech by paraphrasing a quote from the late President John F. Kennedy that the torch has been passed to a new generation. "You are that generation," he said.

Alexander told the graduates that the quality of instruction at Tech had prepared them well to take on the tasks of being involved.

One triple-proud father agreed with Alexander about the graduates' academic preparation and the quality of the teachers.

"The teachers at Tech are real concerned about their students," said Bobby Marler, who had three children to march in Saturday's commencement.

"All three of the kids developed good relationships with their professors," said Marler, a 1973 computer science graduate.

The Alexandria businessman said he and his wife are "excited that we have kids coming out of college at the same time."

Marler said it wasn't planned that his two sons and daughter would follow in his footsteps by coming to Tech. It was

the school and the quality of the programs that determined which university they would attend, he said.

His sons Robert and David, who are twins, graduated with honors, and his daughter Laura received a doctorate in business administration. David's major was mechanical engineering, and he will be moving to Longview, Texas, to work for a chemical company.

Robert, who also majored in mechanical engineering, will be attending Mississippi State University for a master of business administration degree. Laura also will also be going to Mississippi State to teach.

The three are proud of each other and agreed that attending school at the same time was beneficial. "It has kind of allowed us to go through the same stages of school together," said David. "We've relied on each other throughout school."

Said Robert: "The support that my brother and sister have given has really helped me in being able to complete my mechanical engineering degree. I had a lot more support than a lot of other people."

Laura said they had never gone to school together previously because she was older by six years.

She said the experience helped them to get closer and become better friends. As a big sister she added, "I sometimes gave a little advice."

David said it was rare that two brothers and a sister would graduate at the same time, but it is his sister who makes their situation even more special:

"That fact that one is a doctoral student makes it even more uncommon."