

Remarks by Councilmember Tim Burgess

**Seattle Jobs Initiative Graduation
South Seattle Community College, January 7, 2010, 6 p.m.**

Thank you for inviting me to share a few comments at such a meaningful and exciting event.

First, and most important, I want to congratulate today's graduates. Well done! My colleagues on the City Council and I wish you the best as you move from training and education to productive work lives.

I remember various graduation experiences in my life . . . high school was probably the most significant. I was a real nerd in high school; I spent most of my time on the AV Squad, which most of you don't have a clue about. We threaded projectors so classes could watch films. I know . . . ancient history! I graduated from the police academy; that's ancient history, too. Most of you were three or four years old. Even my election to the City Council was kind of like a graduation exercise. These experiences are very special, both for graduates and also our family and friends.

So, congratulations on your graduation.

The Seattle Jobs Initiative is a wonderful program designed to provide skills training, job placement, and wrap-around support services to help people like our graduates tonight . . . help them get the skills and understanding they need to launch new and productive careers.

The initiative helps nearly thirteen-hundred people each year.

Statistics can sometimes be boring and complicated, but I want you to listen carefully to some numbers. These are important numbers for you graduates, your family and friends who are here tonight, and for our city. These numbers prove to me—and every citizen of Seattle—that this program is working and is worthy of our support.

Eighty percent of the people served by this initiative are people of color. Thirty-five percent are either homeless or have unstable housing arrangements. Thirty-one percent are immigrants or refugees to the United States. Eighty-three percent have annual incomes of \$15,000 or less.

These numbers tell me that the Initiative is serving the right people – people that our structures and institutions often overlook. And the numbers from past graduating classes also tell me you will achieve excellent results. Most of you will find good jobs, keep those jobs, and earn a good wage.

Another truth about this Initiative is that many of those who participate in this training, and maybe some of you, have criminal histories. The city spends a lot of money and energy on trying to keep our neighborhoods safe, and rightly so. But we should be equally quick with our money and energy in efforts to welcome offenders back into the community and help them to start over.

I chair the City Council's public safety committee. I spend a lot of my time overseeing our police; I have great respect for the men and women who serve as our police officers. As we have seen in the past two months, they take great risk when they put on their uniforms. One of the best things we can do to help and support our police officers and keep our neighborhoods safe is to make sure those who have been in trouble have jobs, that they can equip themselves through training and education—like you all received here—to earn a living wage and that they can be productive and positive members of the community. The normal cycle of arrest, prosecution, jail, and release is really an incomplete response to crime by itself.

This Initiative is one of our most successful anti-crime programs . . . it's a people-first solution that is pro-family and pro-community. It is a perfect example of an effective public-private partnership making individual lives better, families better, and our city a much better place. That's the kind of community-building you and I can do together.

Former President Lyndon Johnson spoke of this type of community; I'm going to paraphrase what he said: *The American city should be a collection of*

communities where every member has a right to belong. It should be a place where every person feels safe on the streets and in the house of a friend. It should be a place where each individual's dignity and self-respect is strengthened by the respect and affection of neighbors. It should be a place where each of us can find the satisfaction and warmth that comes from being a member of the community.

This is the Seattle we all want; it's the city we can have, in part, because of what each of you has achieved here tonight. Your graduation is one step; helping us build a city like the one President Johnson described is the next.

Thank you.