Thank you.

To President Drake, thank you for your incredible leadership and for inviting me to deliver today’s commencement address.

To the Board of Trustees, distinguished Deans, Faculty and Staff, proud parents, guests and—most of all—graduates, welcome and congratulations!

Commencement comments are a special challenge, they are expected to charge graduates with plausible words of wisdom. So, graduates have no fear, I am well aware that on a day of such high excitement, what you require first and foremost of any speaker is brevity.

I shall not fail you in this respect. There are exactly 197 lines and 43 paragraphs in my speech, four of which you have just heard. But I must tell you, such economy of words is not easy for me to arrange as a politician, wife of an attorney, and a public speaker—who enjoys talking.

Good afternoon, graduates! I once read, “Education is like a boat heading upstream against the river’s current. If it is not moving forward, it will be left drifting behind.”

The Ohio State University has trained you in that respect to move forward as critical thinkers, compassionate human beings and powerful leaders invigorated and inspired to realize your dreams. As you move forward, remember and recognize that it is not just the education that is valuable, it is how you utilize that education to benefit yourselves and others, and to give you the foundation to one day accomplish things that others thought impossible.

Many of you came to The Ohio State University not entirely sure what to expect. I’m sure those first few weeks and months were full of anxious calls back home, self-doubt and certainly plenty of surprises. Yet, here you are today.

I want you to think back to your freshman year and just how far you have come since then. Each of you has grown in these last four or more years—not just physically but also psychologically and emotionally. That’s because Ohio State instilled in you the
confidence to stand on your own two feet, and equipped you with the tools and skills to be successful in-and-outside the classroom.

As you move forward it is not necessary to know the entire route your life will take, because for most people, the trail is illuminated only a few steps at a time. You may be concerned if you don't have a job yet, but know you must at least have a vision to be somewhere on the path.

On your path you will enjoy many freedoms bought by the sacrifices of those before you and countless fights on battlefields around the world. So, stand up for something and travel your path sure footed with responsibility, integrity, honesty and respect.

I've been standing up for and mentoring students just like you—because it’s important to have mentors. A mentor who has been where you are, who has fought the battles before, and who will tell you not what you want to hear but what you need to hear—just like the people on this stage and many of those seated in the audience today.

Mentors like my family and one of my teachers who encouraged me to attend college. One day, that teacher actually showed up at my home! Now, I don’t know about you, but when your teacher shows up at your house, you’re not thinking that they are there to talk to you about going to college. But, if it weren’t in part for that teacher knocking on my door reinforcing my ambitions, I might not be standing here today.

Yet, here I am standing before you as the first female Democratic House Leader in Ohio’s history, the first female to serve as a Senior Vice President right here at Ohio State, and currently one of 20 African-American women to serve in the United States Congress, where 83 of the 435 House members are women.

I serve in Congress with lawyers, business tycoons, former governors and state senators, physicians, farmers, educators—and even a CIA operative who ran spy missions, a member who played a key role in the capture of Saddam Hussein, an Iraq war veteran pilot who lost both of her legs in combat, and the grandson of Bobby Kennedy.

Together, we are fighting to make education more affordable and attainable; and, parents, to prevent student loan interest rates from doubling and to fully fund Pell Grants—which have benefited hundreds of thousands of students, including some of you in the audience today.
We need more of you to pursue higher education to ensure your generation, the next, and generations yet unborn benefit from a quality education, and with it more opportunities at the American Dream.

I will continue to fight for access to college for all, because our history has brought us too far to allow assaults on forward-thinking universities and businesses with programs of inclusion and diversity. Let us not deny African-Americans, other minorities and women opportunities at the American Dream.

That dream is different now than it was when I was your age. And it couldn’t be more illustrated than by today’s graduating class.

Overall, 50 percent of degree recipients are women in this Summer 2017 graduating class, 47 percent of undergrads receiving degrees are women, and 54 percent of graduate and professional degrees will be awarded to women. Congratulations, because “When Women Succeed... America Succeeds.” That’s because families and all of America benefits.

This reminds me of one of my greatest moments in Washington when I was asked to join a select group of congressional leaders to review the first State of the Union Address during President Barack Obama’s second term.

Can you imagine being handed the draft speech for the President of the United States? Well, with pen in a nervous hand and an excited critical eye, I began my review of the address but quickly noticed others had finished flipping their pages and were sliding the document back across the table with a nod.

Still reviewing my copy and somewhat perplexed, I decided to not slide my copy across the table, and in the seconds before the words actually traveled from my brain to my mouth it was like I was hearing the words of legends like Margaret Mead, who said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

And Eleanor Roosevelt who said, “A woman is like a tea bag; you never know how strong she is until she’s in hot water.”

And then it was like I heard, President John F. Kennedy who told us, “Things do not happen, things are made to happen.” And there it was—I could make something happen. So, I said, “I think the president should stand up for women and in his address say, “When Women Succeed... America Succeeds. And then there was silence—so
what did I do—I said it again a little louder and with attitude, adding “Maybe someone should write this down?”

The copies were then collected and the meeting was over.

Twenty four hours later as I am sitting on the United States House Floor waiting for President Obama to deliver the State of the Union Address, there it was on the top of page seven, “When Women Succeed… America Succeeds.” The chamber roared when he said it, media across the country quoted it, and I had made it happen.

So, never lose sight of who you are and what you can make happen. Change may not come over night, but never doubt the power of one voice. Never doubt that your voice can spark a movement—it simply takes the “Power of One.”

Each one of you is graduating at a time of great change in our nation. Our country is undergoing a profound structural transformation that is shaking the very foundation of the old industrial and occupational order, refining the rules of entrepreneurship and competition, and creating an increasingly global marketplace of innovation and technology.

In short, a new economy has emerged while still preserving the American Dream. Restoring the hopes of the forgotten middle class; recognizing that higher education and job creation are inextricably linked to the growth of our communities; reclaiming the future for our children; and standing up for better wages, better jobs and for a better future.

Your future will be faced with the competitiveness of smart technology, STEM, a global economy and the expectation of having a role in helping reform traditions that have been in place long before your arrival on Earth, such as Medicare & Medicaid, SNAP and CHIP for our children, and to develop a cure for cancer and juvenile diabetes—just as we did for polio. And you will be faced with finding a way to bring about world peace.

Throughout history, circumstances change, technology changes, and time changes as well... but the basic, human emotions and experiences of your generation are not so different from mine and others.

For example, for past generations it was transistor radios, CB Handles, boom boxes, 8tracks, cassette tapes, living room floor model TVs, home extension phones, rotary phones, and car installed mobile phones the size of your entire console to flip phones.
Your generation went from CDs, IPods, Sirius radio, Blackberries, laptops, IPads, Wi-Fi, IPhones to no home phones, smart TVs—that can all email, text, tweet, messenger, Linked-in—and all of it stored in a Cloud.

Yes, your graduating class represents the new generation—a generation committed to the ideals of the past, but inspired by an unshakable confidence in your future. You stand at a magnificent moment, with the ability to unleash an amazing amount of imagination, courage, talent and Buckeye Spirit.

Our country needs you. We need graduates like you to stand up for issues like equal pay, family leave and childcare; to stand up for the environment and scientific research; to stand up for the arts, the humanities and education; to ensure No Child is Left Behind and to ensure all Americans—no matter what they look like or their zip code—are treated fairly and with dignity.

I believe that not since the Great Depression and World War II, have so many problems confronted the United States. Economically, the divide between rich and poor is greater than at any time in US history except before the Stock Market Crash of 1929. We are faced with terrorist and cyber security threats, the potential of being at war, tax and immigration reform, proposed cuts and a readiness to eliminate education and healthcare benefits, 140 character tweets, and a White House like never before. We need you!

So, as you leave here today, I leave you with this story of a famous trapeze artist who was teaching his students how to perform on the trapeze bar.

He finished his explanations and his instructions, and then told the students to prove themselves. One student was suddenly filled with fear. He looked up at the tiny perch… envisioned himself falling to the ground… and absolutely froze. He couldn't move a muscle.

"I can't do it," he gasped… “I have not enough courage.” The instructor put his arm around the student’s shoulder and said, "Son, you can do it, and I will tell you how."

The next statement is one of the wisest remarks I have ever heard. The teacher said, "Throw your heart over the bar and your body will follow."

Graduates, you will soon be handed a degree but no one can ever hand you courage.

So move forward with courage, and to borrow some of the words from Carmen Ohio, “Remember how you have grown in the college halls, because these jolly days of
priceless worth will soon pass—and years will roll—and time and change will surely show how…” great it is to be an Ohio State University graduate.

I am Congresswoman Joyce Beatty and I approve this message.

God bless you and God bless America!