

2013 Ohio State University Commencement Address by President Barack Obama.
Introduction by Dr. Gordon Gee.

Dr. Gee:

SO LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, YOU SEE HERE TODAY IN THESE GRADUATES, IN THIS FACULTY AND IN OUR STAFF THE REASON *THE* OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY IS SUCH A REMARKABLE INSTITUTION. WE ARE THE NATION'S MOST COMPREHENSIVE TEACHING AND RESEARCH UNIVERSITY AND WE ARE THE MOST VITAL AND INTELLECTUALLY VIBRANT UNIVERSITY ON THE GLOBE WITH 65,000 STUDENTS, 48,000 FACULTY AND STAFF, 16,000 ACRES, AND 900 BUILDINGS, WE ARE A CITY WITHIN A CITY.

A CITY THAT COMPRISES SIX CAMPUSES. WE ARE A CITY OF ARTISTS AND ENTREPRENEURS, OF SCIENTISTS AND PHILOSOPHERS AND ENGINEERS. WE ARE A CITY THAT IGNITES HUMAN INQUIRY, SPARKS ARTISTIC EXPRESSION, AND INVITES CIVIL DISCOURSE.

AND, LIKE ANY CITY IN THE YEAR 2013, WE ARE NOT IMMUNE FROM STARK MOMENTS OF REALITY. INDEED, RECENT EVENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY HAVE TESTED OUR COLLECTIVE CONFIDENCE. BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE. THIS AMERICAN UNIVERSITY, LIKE OUR GREAT AMERICAN CITIES, WILL STAND STRONG.

INDEED, PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN INEXTRICABLY TIED TO THE STRENGTH OF THIS NATION. BY THE FORCE OF THE MORRILL ACT THAT HE SIGNED INTO LAW, OHIO STATE IS MR. LINCOLN'S UNIVERSITY. AND THAT LIVING LEGACY REQUIRES MUCH OF US. IT IS INCUMBENT UPON US TO TAKE THE PEN FROM LINCOLN'S HAND AND TO MOVE THE LINE EVER-FORWARD. IT IS A MORAL BIRTHRIGHT, WHICH DEMANDS THAT WE STRIVE TO BE AS BOLD AND DARING AND VALIANT IN OUR TIME AS HE WAS IN HIS.

I AM CERTAIN THAT THESE GRADUATES BEFORE US WILL RISE TO THIS CHALLENGE. THEY WILL USE THEIR TIME AND TALENTS TO SOLVE CHALLENGES, TO MOVE US FORWARD INTO THE LONG HORIZON OF THE 21ST CENTURY. TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT, WHAT IS BOLD, WHAT IS VALIANT.

IN FACT, HERE ARE A FEW MESSAGES TO OUR PRESIDENT - TO PRESIDENT OBAMA FROM OUR GRADUATES THAT SPEAK VOLUMES.

FROM INTERNATIONAL STUDIES MAJOR, KATIE FERMAN, AND I QUOTE, ONE FRIEND IS GOING TO BRAZIL TO DO LEUKEMIA RESEARCH. ANOTHER TAUGHT HIMSELF SEVEN LANGUAGES. AS FAR AS FINDING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS, YOU CAN DO NO BETTER THAN OHIO STATE'S CLASS OF 2013.

FROM BIOCHEMISTRY MAJOR ZAK BITTINGER: I WOULD TELL PRESIDENT OBAMA TO BELIEVE IN MY GENERATION.

AND FROM SUZIE MCMULLEN, AGRISCIENCE EDUCATION, I WOULD TELL THE PRESIDENT TO BE READY. OUR GRADUATES ARE GOING TO FEED, POWER, TEACH, BUILD, AND LEAD THE NEXT GENERATION. AS I LOOK OUT ON THESE 10,000 GRADUATES DRESSED IN THEIR CAPS AND GOWNS, I HAVE ONE THING TO SAY: YOU LOOK ABSOLUTELY INCREDIBLE.

(laughter)

YOUR ASPIRATIONS, YOUR PASSIONS, YOUR COMMUNITY SERVICE RESEARCH, STUDY ABROAD, INTERNSHIPS, LANGUAGES LEARNED, NOVELS READ, FRIENDS MADE, CAREERS PLANNED -- *THIS* IS THE LIVING PROOF OF THE VALUE OF A COLLEGE DEGREE.

AND MORE IS YET TO COME.

LATER THIS AFTERNOON, YOU WILL BEGIN A WHOLLY NEW CHAPTER AS A GRADUATE OF THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY. YOU WILL JOIN AN ALUMNI FAMILY THAT NUMBERS A HALF-MILLION STRONG. YOU WILL BECOME A BUCKEYE FOR LIFE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, TAKE A LOOK AROUND YOU. THIS IS OHIO STATE, BUT THE WORLD IS HERE TODAY. IN THIS ONE CEREMONY, WE WELCOME FAMILIES AND GRADUATES FROM ACROSS OUR STATE, AROUND OUR COUNTRY, AND FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE GLOBE. THIS FABULOUS MOSAIC OF CULTURES AND PERSPECTIVES IS THE RESULT OF BRINGING TOGETHER UNLIKE PEOPLE FROM UNLIKE BACKGROUNDS IN SEARCH OF COMMON PURPOSE. IN THIS ONE CEREMONY, WE CELEBRATE ONE EXTRAORDINARY UNIVERSITY AND ONE OHIO STATE FAMILY, OF WHICH ALL OF YOU ARE NOW FULLY A PART.

WE WILL GET TOGETHER ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS, A REUNION, AN ART EXHIBIT, ANOTHER COMMENCEMENT FOR YOUR NEXT DEGREE. KNOW THAT WE WILL ALWAYS WELCOME YOU BACK.

WHEREVER YOU GO, WHATEVER YOU DO, OHIO STATE IS NOW PART OF YOU. SO TODAY, WE CAN TRULY SAY, TIME AND CHANGE WILL SURELY SHOW HOW FIRM THY FRIENDSHIP, O-HI-O.

AND NOW, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I HAVE THE SINGULAR HONOR OF INTRODUCING OUR SPEAKER. BEFORE I DO SO, I MIGHT SAY SO, PEOPLE WERE SHOUTING MR. PRESIDENT, BOTH OF US TURNED AROUND. THAT WAS A LITTLE DISCONCERTING.

(laughter)

AND I REALLY THOUGHT THAT PLAYING "HAIL TO THE CHIEF" WOULD HAVE BEEN COOL BUT, OH, NO, NOTHING LIKE THAT HAPPENED. BUT I LOVE THE FACT THAT I HAVE A PODIUM THAT SAYS PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES ON THE FRONT OF IT.

I'M GOING TO KEEP THIS ONE FOR A WHILE.

(laughter)

BUT A BIT OF BACKGROUND:

IN 2010, OUR ESTEEMED GUEST DELIVERED THE COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS AT A CERTAIN UNIVERSITY UP NORTH. BUT WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES.

(laughter)

AND AS TOSH.0 MIGHT SAY, THIS IS A MOMENT OF REDEMPTION. OF COURSE --

(applause)

OF COURSE, OUR SPEAKER IS BARACK OBAMA, THE CURRENT AND 44TH PRESIDENT OF *THE* UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. HE IS THE THIRD SITTING PRESIDENT IN UNIVERSITY HISTORY TO ADDRESS OUR GRADUATES AT COMMENCEMENT, A TREMENDOUS HONOR FOR US TODAY.

AT ITS CORE, PRESIDENT OBAMA'S STORY IS ONE INTIMATELY FAMILIAR TO US AT OHIO STATE; HEARTLAND VALUES, HARD WORK, EDUCATION, AND SERVICE TO OTHERS.

IN 2008, HE WAS ELECTED TO THE WHITE HOUSE AND SWORN IN AS THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

(applause)

DURING HIS TWO TERMS LEADING THIS NATION, PRESIDENT OBAMA HAS FOCUSED ON THE ECONOMY, HEALTHCARE, FINANCIAL SERVICES, CONSUMER PROTECTION AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS.

THE PRESIDENT HAS ALSO BEEN A STRONG PARTNER OF HIGHER EDUCATION. I KNOW THAT PERSONALLY.

IN 2010, HE CHALLENGED OUR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES TO IMPROVE AMERICAN COMPETITIVENESS BY EDUCATING MORE GRADUATES AND BY KEEPING COLLEGE AFFORDABLE FOR MORE FAMILIES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES.

IDEAS UPON WHICH EVERYONE IN THIS AUDIENCE CAN AGREE.

THE RECIPIENT OF MYRIAD RECOGNITIONS, PRESIDENT OBAMA WAS NAMED PERSON OF THE YEAR BY TIME MAGAZINE IN 2008, AND THEN AGAIN IN 2012.

AND IN 2009, HE WAS AWARDED THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE.

BECAUSE PRESIDENT OBAMA'S HISTORIC JOURNEY TO THE WHITE HOUSE IS WELL-KNOWN, I WILL NOT GO INTO EVERY DETAIL HERE. INSTEAD I WILL SHARE THE RESULTS OF AN UNSCIENTIFIC POLL I CONDUCTED OVER THE PAST MONTHS, WHEREIN I ASKED STUDENTS TO DESCRIBE OUR PRESIDENT IN THREE WORDS.

SOME OF THE DESCRIPTORS WERE AS FOLLOWS, MR. PRESIDENT: CHARISMATIC, VISIONARY AND "GQ."

(laughter)

SEVERAL STUDENTS ALSO SAID PRESIDENT OBAMA HAS THE VOICE OF AN ANGEL. INDEED, HE DOES A MEAN AL GREEN. AND IF WE ARE LUCKY, WE MAY HEAR THIS TALENT IN JUST A FEW MOMENTS.

(laughter)

TODAY PRESIDENT OBAMA BECOMES A PART OF OUR OHIO STATE FAMILY. THIS AFTERNOON WE PRESENT HIM WITH AN HONORARY DEGREE, DOCTOR OF LAWS.

ALTHOUGH HE'S BEEN SUCH A FREQUENT VISITOR TO COLUMBUS THAT HE ALREADY IS AN HONORARY BUCKEYE, WE ARE FORTUNATE THAT HE CHOSE TO RETURN TO US TODAY ONE OF ONLY THREE UNIVERSITIES WHOSE GRADUATES HE WILL ADDRESS THIS SPRING.

WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY, PLEASE JOIN ME IN WELCOMING THE CHARISMATIC, THE VISIONARY, THE TOTALLY GQ PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

(applause)

THANK YOU.
HELLO BUCKEYES!
O-H.

I-O.
O-H.
I-O.
O-H.
I-O.

WELL, THANK YOU SO MUCH.
EVERYBODY PLEASE BE SEATED.
THANK YOU, DR. GEE, FOR THE WONDERFUL INTRODUCTION.
I SUSPECT THE GOOD PRESIDENT MAY HAVE EDITED OUT SOME OTHER WORDS THAT WERE USED TO DESCRIBE ME. I APPRECIATE THAT.
BUT I'M GOING TO LET MICHELLE KNOW OF THE -- ALL OF THE GOOD COMMENTS.
TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, CONGRESSWOMAN BEATTY, MAYOR COLEMAN, AND ALL OF YOU THAT MAKE UP THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY FOR ALLOWING ME TO JOIN YOU.
IT IS AN INCREDIBLE HONOR.
AND MOST OF ALL,
CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2013.

(applause)

AND, OF COURSE, CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE PARENTS, FAMILY, AND FRIENDS AND FACULTY HERE IN THE HORSESHOE -- THIS IS YOUR DAY, AS WELL.

(applause)

I'VE BEEN TOLD TO ASK EVERYBODY, THOUGH, PLEASE BE CAREFUL WITH THE TURF.
COACH MEYER HAS BIG PLANS FOR THIS FALL.

NOW, I VERY MUCH APPRECIATE THE PRESIDENT'S INTRODUCTION.
I WILL NOT BE SINGING TODAY.
(LAUGHTER)

OH-HA-HA.
IT IS TRUE THAT I DID SPEAK AT THAT CERTAIN UNIVERSITY UP NORTH A FEW YEARS AGO, BUT TO BE FAIR, YOU DID LET PRESIDENT FORD SPEAK HERE ONCE, AND HE PLAYED FOOTBALL FOR MICHIGAN.
(LAUGHTER)
SO EVERYBODY CAN GET SOME REDEMPTION.

IN MY DEFENSE, THIS IS MY FIFTH VISIT TO CAMPUS IN THE PAST YEAR OR SO.
(applause)

ONE TIME I STOPPED AT SLOPPY'S TO GRAB SOME LUNCH.
MANY OF YOU - IT'S SLOOPY'S, I KNOW.
(LAUGHTER)

YOU KNOW, IT'S SUNDAY AND I'M COMING OFF A FOREIGN TRIP. ANYWAY, SO I'M AT SLOOPY'S, AND MANY OF YOU WERE STILL EATING BREAKFAST. AT 11:30. ON A TUESDAY. SO TO THE CLASS OF 2013, I WILL OFFER MY FIRST PIECE OF ADVICE: ENJOY IT WHILE YOU CAN. SOON, YOU WILL NOT GET TO WAKE UP AND HAVE BREAKFAST AT 11:30 ON TUESDAY. AND ONCE YOU HAVE CHILDREN, IT GETS EVEN EARLIER. BUT, CLASS OF 2013, YOUR PATH TO THIS MOMENT HAS WOUND YOU THROUGH YEARS OF BREATHTAKING CHANGE. YOU WERE BORN AS FREEDOM FORCED ITS WAY THROUGH A WALL IN BERLIN, TORE DOWN AN IRON CURTAIN ACROSS EUROPE. YOU WERE EDUCATED IN AN ERA OF INSTANT INFORMATION, TO PUT THE WORLD'S ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE AT YOUR FINGERTIPS. AND, YOU CAME OF AGE AS TERROR TOUCHED OUR SHORES, AND HISTORIC RECESSION SPREAD ACROSS THE NATION, AND A NEW GENERATION SIGNED UP TO GO TO WAR. SO YOU'VE BEEN TESTED AND YOU'VE BEEN TEMPERED BY EVENTS THAT YOUR PARENTS AND I NEVER IMAGINED WE'D SEE WHEN WE SAT WHERE YOU SIT. AND, YET, DESPITE ALL THIS -- OR PERHAPS BECAUSE OF IT - YOURS HAS BECOME A GENERATION POSSESSED WITH THAT MOST AMERICAN OF IDEAS, THAT PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEIR COUNTRY CAN CHANGE IT FOR THE BETTER. FOR ALL THE TURMOIL, FOR ALL THE TIMES YOU'VE BEEN LET DOWN OR FRUSTRATED AT THE HANDS THAT YOU'VE BEEN DEALT, WHAT I HAVE SEEN, WHAT WE HAVE WITNESSED FROM YOUR GENERATION, IS THAT PERENNIAL QUINTESSENTIALLY AMERICAN VALUE OF OPTIMISM, ALTRUISM, EMPATHY, TOLERANCE, A SENSE OF COMMUNITY, A SENSE OF SERVICE. ALL OF WHICH MAKES ME OPTIMISTIC FOR OUR FUTURE.

CONSIDER THAT TODAY, 50 R.O.T.C. CADETS IN YOUR GRADUATING CLASS WILL BECOME COMMISSIONED OFFICERS IN THE ARMY, NAVY, AIR FORCE, AND MARINES.

(applause)

130 OF YOUR FELLOW GRADUATES HAVE ALREADY SERVED, SOME IN COMBAT, SOME ON MULTIPLE DEPLOYMENTS.

(applause)

OF THE 98 VETERANS EARNING BACHELOR'S DEGREES TODAY, 20 ARE GRADUATING WITH HONORS, AND AT LEAST ONE KEPT SERVING

HIS FELLOW VETERANS WHEN HE CAME HOME BY STARTING UP A
CAMPUS ORGANIZATION CALLED VETS FOR VETS.
AND AS YOUR COMMANDER IN CHIEF I COULD NOT BE PROUDER OF ALL
OF YOU.

(applause)

CONSIDER THAT GRADUATES OF THIS UNIVERSITY SERVED THEIR
COUNTRY THROUGH THE PEACE CORPS, AND EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN
THROUGH ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS LIKE TEACH FOR AMERICA, AND
STARTUPS LIKE BLUE ENGINE.
OFTEN EARNING LOW PAY FOR MAKING THE BIGGEST IMPACT.
SOME OF YOU ARE ALREADY LAUNCHED STARTUP COMPANIES OF YOUR
OWN, AND I SUSPECT THAT THOSE OF YOU WHO PURSUE MORE
EDUCATION OR CLIMB THE CORPORATE LADDER OR ENTER THE ARTS,
SCIENCE, OR JOURNALISM, YOU WILL STILL CHOOSE A CAUSE THAT
YOU CARE ABOUT IN YOUR LIFE AND YOU WILL FIGHT LIKE HECK TO
REALIZE YOUR VISION.

AND THERE'S A WORD FOR THIS.
IT'S CITIZENSHIP.
AND WE DON'T ALWAYS TALK ABOUT THIS IDEA MUCH THESE DAYS,
CITIZENSHIP -- LET ALONE CELEBRATE IT.
SOMETIMES WE SEE IT AS A VIRTUE FROM ANOTHER TIME, A DISTANT
PAST.
ONE THAT'S SLIPPING AWAY FROM A SOCIETY THAT CELEBRATES
INDIVIDUAL AMBITION ABOVE ALL ELSE, A SOCIETY AWASH IN
INSTANT TECHNOLOGY THAT EMPOWERS US TO LEVERAGE OUR SKILLS
AND TALENTS LIKE NEVER BEFORE, BUT JUST AS EASILY ALLOWS US
TO RETREAT FROM THE WORLD.
AND THE RESULT IS THAT WE SOMETIMES FORGET THE LARGER BONDS
WE SHARE AS ONE AMERICAN FAMILY.
BUT IT'S STILL OUT THERE.
ALL THE TIME.
EVERY DAY.
ESPECIALLY WHEN WE NEED IT MOST.
JUST LOOK AT THE PAST YEAR.
WHEN A HURRICANE STRUCK OUR MIGHTIEST CITY, AND A FACTORY
EXPLODED IN A SMALL TOWN IN TEXAS, WE SAW CITIZENSHIP.
WHEN BOMBS WENT OFF IN BOSTON, AND WHEN A MALEVOLENT SPREE
OF GUN FIRE VISITED A MOVIE THEATER, A TEMPLE, AN OHIO HIGH
SCHOOL, A FIRST-GRADE CLASSROOM IN CONNECTICUT, WE SAW
CITIZENSHIP.
IN THE AFTERMATH OF DARKEST TRAGEDY, WE HAVE SEEN THE
AMERICAN SPIRIT AT ITS BRIGHTEST.
WE'VE SEEN THE PETTY DIVISIONS OF COLOR AND CLASS AND CREED
REPLACED BY A UNITED URGE TO HELP EACH OTHER.
WE'VE SEEN COURAGE AND COMPASSION.
A SENSE OF CIVIC DUTY, AND A RECOGNITION WE ARE NOT A
COLLECTION OF STRANGERS.
WE ARE BOUND TO ONE ANOTHER BY A SET OF IDEALS AND LAWS AND
COMMITMENTS AND A DEEP DEVOTION TO THIS COUNTRY THAT WE
LOVE.
AND THAT'S WHAT CITIZENSHIP IS.

IT'S AT THE HEART OF OUR FOUNDING, THAT AS AMERICANS, WE ARE BLESSED WITH GOD-GIVEN TALENTS AND INALIENABLE RIGHTS, BUT WITH THOSE RIGHTS COME RESPONSIBILITIES TO OURSELVES, AND TO ONE ANOTHER, AND TO FUTURE GENERATIONS.

(applause)

NOW, IF WE'RE BEING HONEST WITH EACH OURSELVES, AS YOU'VE STUDIED AND WORKED AND SERVED TO BECOME GOOD CITIZENS, THE FACT IS THAT ALL TOO OFTEN THE INSTITUTIONS THAT GIVE STRUCTURE TO OUR SOCIETY HAVE, AT TIMES, BETRAYED YOUR TRUST.

IN THE RUN-UP TO THE FINANCIAL CRISIS, TOO MANY ON WALL STREET FORGOT THAT THEIR OBLIGATIONS DON'T END WITH WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH THEIR SHARES.

IN ENTERTAINMENT AND IN THE MEDIA, THE RATINGS AND SHOCK VALUE OFTEN TRUMP NEWS AND STORYTELLING.

AND IN WASHINGTON, WELL, THIS IS A JOYOUS OCCASION, SO LET ME PUT IT CHARITABLY:

I THINK IT'S FAIR TO SAY OUR DEMOCRACY ISN'T WORKING AS WELL AS WE KNOW IT CAN. IT COULD DO BETTER.

(applause)

AND SO THOSE OF US FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO SERVE IN THESE INSTITUTIONS OWE IT TO YOU TO DO BETTER EVERY SINGLE DAY. AND I'VE BEEN THINKING A LOT LATELY ABOUT HOW WE CAN KEEP THIS IDEA OF CITIZENSHIP IN ITS FULLEST SENSE ALIVE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, NOT JUST ON ELECTION DAY, NOT JUST IN TIMES OF TRAGEDY, BUT ALL THE DAYS IN-BETWEEN.

AND PERHAPS BECAUSE I SPENT A LOT OF TIME IN WASHINGTON, I AM OBSESSED WITH THIS ISSUE -- BECAUSE THAT SENSE OF CITIZENSHIP IS SO SORELY NEEDED THERE.

AND I THINK OF WHAT YOUR GENERATION'S TRAITS, COMPASSION AND ENERGY AND A SENSE OF SELFLESSNESS, MIGHT MEAN FOR A DEMOCRACY THAT MUST ADAPT MORE QUICKLY TO KEEP UP WITH THE SPEED OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC AND WRENCHING ECONOMIC CHANGE.

I THINK ABOUT HOW WE MIGHT PERPETUATE THIS NOTION OF CITIZENSHIP IN A WAY THAT ANOTHER POLITICIAN FROM MY HOME STATE OF ILLINOIS, ADLAI STEVENSON ONCE DESCRIBED PATRIOTISM: NOT AS SHORT, FRENZIED OUTBURSTS OF EMOTION, BUT TRANQUIL DEDICATION OF A LIFETIME.

THAT'S WHAT PATRIOTISM IS.

THAT'S WHAT CITIZENSHIP IS.

(applause)

NOW, I DON'T PRETEND TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS. I'M NOT GOING TO OFFER SOME GRAND THEORY ON A BEAUTIFUL DAY LIKE THIS. YOU ALL HAVE CELEBRATING TO DO.

I'M NOT GOING TO GET PARTISAN, EITHER, BECAUSE THAT'S NOT WHAT CITIZENSHIP IS ABOUT.
IN FACT I'M ASKING THE SAME THING OF YOU THAT PRESIDENT BUSH DID WHEN HE SPOKE AT THIS COMMENCEMENT IN 2002: AMERICA NEEDS MORE THAN TAXPAYERS, SPECTATORS, AND OCCASIONAL VOTERS, HE SAID.
AMERICA NEEDS FULL-TIME CITIZENS.
AND AS GRADUATES FROM A UNIVERSITY...
(applause)

...AS GRADUATES FROM A UNIVERSITY WHOSE MOTTO IS "EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP," I KNOW ALL OF YOU GET THAT THIS IS WHAT YOU'VE SIGNED UP FOR.
IT'S WHAT YOUR COUNTRY EXPECTS OF YOU.
SO BRIEFLY I'LL ASK FOR TWO THINGS FROM THE CLASS OF 2013; TO PARTICIPATE, AND TO PERSEVERE.
AFTER ALL, YOUR DEMOCRACY DOES NOT FUNCTION WITHOUT YOUR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION.
AT A BARE MINIMUM, THAT MEANS VOTING EAGERLY, AND OFTEN. NOT HAVING SOMEBODY DRAG YOU TO IT, AT 11:30 WHEN YOU'RE HAVING BREAKFAST.
(laughter)

IT MEANS KNOWING WHO'S BEEN ELECTED TO MAKE DECISIONS ON YOUR BEHALF, AND WHAT THEY BELIEVE IN, AND WHETHER OR NOT THEY DELIVERED ON WHAT THEY SAID THEY WOULD.
AND IF THEY DON'T REPRESENT YOU THE WAY YOU WANT, OR CONDUCT THEMSELVES THE WAY YOU EXPECT, IF THEY PUT SPECIAL INTERESTS ABOVE YOUR OWN, YOU'VE GOT TO LET THEM KNOW THAT'S NOT OKAY.
AND IF THEY LET YOU DOWN OFTEN ENOUGH, THERE'S A BUILT-IN DAY IN NOVEMBER WHERE YOU CAN REALLY LET THEM KNOW THAT'S NOT OKAY.
(applause)

BUT PARTICIPATION -- YOUR CIVIC DUTY -- IS MORE THAN JUST VOTING.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO RUN FOR OFFICE YOURSELF, BUT I HOPE MANY OF YOU DO AT ALL LEVELS, BECAUSE OUR DEMOCRACY NEEDS YOU.
AND I PROMISE YOU IT WILL GIVE YOU A TOUGH SKIN.
I KNOW A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THIS.
PRESIDENT WILSON ONCE SAID, "IF YOU WANT TO MAKE ENEMIES, TRY TO CHANGE SOMETHING."
AND THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT THE FOUNDERS LEFT US, THE POWER, EACH OF US, TO ADAPT TO CHANGING TIMES.
THEY LEFT US THE KEYS TO A SYSTEM OF SELF GOVERNMENT.
THE TOOLS TO DO BIG THINGS AND IMPORTANT THINGS TOGETHER THAT WE COULD NOT POSSIBLY DO ALONE.
TO STRETCH RAILROADS AND ELECTRICITY AND A HIGHWAY SYSTEM ACROSS A SPRAWLING CONTINENT.
TO EDUCATE OUR PEOPLE WITH A SYSTEM OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND LAND GRANT COLLEGES, INCLUDING THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY.
TO CARE FOR THE SICK AND THE VULNERABLE, AND PROVIDE A BASIC LEVEL OF PROTECTION FROM FALLING INTO ABJECT POVERTY IN THE WEALTHIEST NATION ON EARTH.

(applause)

TO CONQUER FASCISM AND DISEASE, TO VISIT THE MOON AND MARS,
TO GRADUALLY SECURE OUR GOD-GIVEN RIGHTS FOR ALL OF OUR
CITIZENS, REGARDLESS OF WHO THEY ARE, OR WHAT THEY LOOK
LIKE, OR WHO THEY LOVE.

(applause)

WE, THE PEOPLE, CHOSE TO DO THESE THINGS TOGETHER, BECAUSE
WE KNOW THIS COUNTRY CANNOT ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS IF WE
PURSUE NOTHING GREATER THAN OUR OWN INDIVIDUAL AMBITION.
UNFORTUNATELY, YOU'VE GROWN UP HEARING VOICES THAT
INCESSANTLY WARN OF GOVERNMENT AS NOTHING MORE THAN SOME
SEPARATE SINISTER ENTITY THAT'S AT THE ROOT OF ALL OUR
PROBLEMS.

SOME OF THESE SAME VOICES DO THEIR BEST TO GUM UP THE WORKS.
THEY'LL WARN THAT TYRANNY'S ALWAYS LURKING JUST AROUND THE
CORNER.

YOU SHOULD REJECT THESE VOICES, BECAUSE WHAT THEY SUGGEST IS
THAT OUR BRAVE AND CREATIVE AND UNIQUE EXPERIMENT IN SELF-
RULE IS SOMEHOW JUST A SHAM, WITH WHICH WE CAN'T BE TRUSTED.
WE HAVE NEVER BEEN A PEOPLE WHO PLACE ALL OF OUR FAITH IN
GOVERNMENT TO SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS.

WE SHOULDN'T WANT TO.

BUT WE DON'T THINK THE GOVERNMENT IS THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR
PROBLEMS, EITHER, BECAUSE WE UNDERSTAND THAT THIS DEMOCRACY
IS OURS, AND AS CITIZENS, WE UNDERSTAND THAT IT'S NOT ABOUT
WHAT AMERICA CAN DO FOR US, IT'S WHAT CAN BE DONE BY US
TOGETHER, THROUGH THE HARD AND FRUSTRATING BUT ABSOLUTELY
NECESSARY WORK OF SELF GOVERNMENT.

AND CLASS OF 2013, YOU HAVE TO BE INVOLVED IN THAT PROCESS.

(applause)

THE FOUNDERS TRUSTED US WITH THIS AWESOME AUTHORITY.

WE SHOULD TRUST OURSELVES WITH IT, TOO.

BECAUSE WHEN WE DON'T, WHEN WE TURN AWAY AND GET DISCOURAGED
AND CYNICAL AND ABDICATE THAT AUTHORITY, WE GRANT OUR SILENT
CONSENT TO SOMEONE WHO WILL GLADLY CLAIM IT.

AND THAT'S HOW WE END UP WITH LOBBYISTS WHO SET THE AGENDA
AND POLICIES DETACHED FROM WHAT MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES FACE
EVERY DAY.

THE WELL CONNECTED WHO DEMAND THAT WASHINGTON STAY OUT OF
THEIR BUSINESS THEN WHISPER IN THE GOVERNMENT'S EAR FOR
SPECIAL TREATMENT THAT YOU DON'T GET.

THAT'S HOW A SMALL MINORITY OF LAWMAKERS GET COVER TO DEFEAT
SOMETHING THE VAST MAJORITY OF THEIR CONSTITUENTS WANT.

THAT'S HOW OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM GETS CONSUMED BY SMALL
THINGS, WHEN WE ARE A PEOPLE CALLED TO DO GREAT THINGS LIKE
REBUILD A MIDDLE CLASS AND REVERSE THE RISE OF INEQUALITY
AND REPAIR THE DETERIORATING CLIMATE THAT THREATENS
EVERYTHING WE PLAN TO LEAVE FOR OUR KIDS AND GRANDKIDS.

CLASS OF 2013, ONLY YOU CAN ULTIMATELY BREAK THAT CYCLE.

ONLY YOU CAN MAKE SURE THE DEMOCRACY YOU INHERIT IS AS GOOD AS WE KNOW IT CAN BE.
BUT IT REQUIRES YOUR EDUCATED AND INFORMED AND ENGAGED CITIZENSHIP.
AND THAT CITIZENSHIP IS A HARDER, HIGHER ROAD TO TAKE, BUT IT LEADS TO A BETTER PLACE.
IT'S HOW WE BUILT THIS COUNTRY, TOGETHER.
IT'S THE QUESTION THAT PRESIDENT KENNEDY POSED TO THE NATION AT HIS INAUGURATION.
IT'S THE DREAM THAT DR. KING EVOKED.
IT DOES NOT PROMISE IMMEDIATE SUCCESS AND PROGRESS, BUT IT HAS LED TO SUCCESS, AND IT HAS LED TO PROGRESS.
AND IT HAS TO CONTINUE WITH YOU.

WHICH BRINGS ME TO THE SECOND THING I ASK OF ALL OF YOU.
I ASK THAT YOU PERSEVERE.
WHETHER YOU START A BUSINESS OR RUN FOR OFFICE OR DEVOTE YOURSELF TO ALLEVIATING POVERTY OR HUNGER, PLEASE REMEMBER THAT NOTHING WORTH DOING HAPPENS OVERNIGHT.
A BRITISH INVENTER NAMED DYSON WENT THROUGH MORE THAN 5,000 PROTOTYPES BEFORE GETTING THAT FIRST REALLY FANCY VACUUM CLEANER JUST RIGHT.
WE REMEMBER MICHAEL JORDAN'S SIX CHAMPIONSHIPS.
WE DON'T REMEMBER HIS NEARLY 15,000 MISSED SHOTS.
AS FOR ME, I LOST MY FIRST RACE FOR CONGRESS, AND LOOK AT ME NOW -- I'M AN HONORARY GRADUATE OF THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY.

(laughter and applause)

THE POINT IS, IF YOU ARE LIVING YOUR LIFE TO THE FULLEST, YOU WILL FAIL, YOU WILL STUMBLE, YOU WILL SCREW UP, YOU WILL FALL DOWN, BUT IT WILL MAKE YOU STRONGER.
AND YOU'LL GET IT RIGHT THE NEXT TIME, OR THE TIME AFTER THAT, OR THE TIME AFTER THAT.
AND THAT IS NOT ONLY TRUE FOR YOUR PERSONAL PURSUITS BUT IT'S ALSO TRUE FOR THE BROADER CAUSES THAT YOU BELIEVE IN AS WELL.
SO YOU CAN'T GIVE UP YOUR PASSION IF THINGS DON'T WORK RIGHT AWAY.
YOU CAN'T LOSE HEART, OR GROW CYNICAL, IF THERE ARE TWISTS AND TURNS ON YOUR JOURNEY.
THE CYNICS MAY BE THE LOUDEST VOICES, BUT I PROMISE YOU THEY WILL ACCOMPLISH THE LEAST.
IT'S -- IT'S THOSE FOLKS WHO STAY AT IT.
THOSE WHO DO THE LONG, HARD, COMMITTED WORK OF CHANGE THAT GRADUALLY PUSH THIS COUNTRY IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND MAKE THE MOST LASTING DIFFERENCE.
SO WHENEVER YOU FEEL THAT CREEPING CYNICISM, WHENEVER YOU HEAR THOSE VOICES SAYING, "YOU CAN'T DO IT, YOU CAN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE"... WHENEVER YOU HEAR SOMEBODY TELLING YOU TO SET YOUR SIGHTS LOWER, THE TRAJECTORY OF THIS GREAT NATION SHOULD GIVE YOU HOPE.

WHAT GENERATIONS HAVE DONE BEFORE YOU SHOULD GIVE YOU HOPE, BECAUSE IT WAS YOUNG PEOPLE JUST LIKE YOU WHO MARCHED AND MOBILIZED AND STOOD UP AND SAT-IN TO SECURE WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND VOTING RIGHTS AND WORKERS RIGHTS AND GAY RIGHTS OFTEN AT INCREDIBLE ODDS, OFTEN AT GREAT DANGER, OFTEN OVER THE COURSE OF YEARS, SOMETIMES OVER THE TRANQUIL AND STEADY DEDICATION OF A LIFETIME AND THEY NEVER GOT ACKNOWLEDGED FOR IT, BUT THEY MADE A DIFFERENCE.

(applause)

AND EVEN IF THEIR RIGHTS WERE ALREADY SECURED, THERE WERE THOSE WHO FOUGHT TO SECURE THOSE SAME RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR OTHERS, AND THAT SHOULD GIVE YOU SOME HOPE.

WHERE WE'RE GOING SHOULD GIVE YOU HOPE.

BECAUSE WHILE THINGS ARE STILL HARD FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE, YOU HAVE EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE THAT YOUR FUTURE IS BRIGHT. YOU'RE GRADUATING INTO AN ECONOMY AND A JOB MARKET THAT IS STEADILY HEALING.

THE ONCE-DYING AMERICAN AUTO INDUSTRY IS ON PACE FOR ITS STRONGEST PERFORMANCE IN 20 YEARS; SOMETHING THAT MEANS EVERYTHING TO MANY COMMUNITIES IN OHIO AND ACROSS THE MIDWEST.

HUGE STRIDES IN DOMESTIC ENERGY, DRIVEN BY RESEARCH AT UNIVERSITIES LIKE THIS ONE, HAVE US ON TRACK TO SECURE OUR OWN ENERGY FUTURE.

INCREDIBLE ADVANCES IN INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY SPURRED LARGELY BY THE RISK-TAKERS OF YOUR GENERATION HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO CHANGE THE WAY WE DO ALMOST EVERYTHING.

THERE IS NOT ANOTHER COUNTRY ON EARTH THAT WOULD NOT GLADLY CHANGE PLACES WITH THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

AND THAT WILL BE TRUE FOR YOUR GENERATION JUST AS IT WAS TRUE FOR PREVIOUS GENERATIONS.

SO YOU'VE GOT A LOT TO LOOK FORWARD TO, BUT IF THERE'S ONE CERTAINTY ABOUT THE DECADE AHEAD, IT'S THAT THINGS WILL BE UNCERTAIN.

CHANGE WILL BE A CONSTANT, JUST AS IT HAS BEEN THROUGHOUT OUR HISTORY.

AND, YES, WE STILL FACE MANY IMPORTANT CHALLENGES.

SOME WILL REQUIRE TECHNOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGHS, OR NEW POLICY INSIGHTS -- BUT MORE THAN ANYTHING, WHAT WE WILL NEED IS POLITICAL WILL TO HARNESS THE INGENUITY OF YOUR GENERATION AND ENCOURAGE AND INSPIRE THE HARD WORK OF DEDICATED CITIZENS.

TO REPAIR THE MIDDLE CLASS, TO GIVE MORE FAMILIES A FAIR SHAKE, TO REJECT A COUNTRY IN WHICH ONLY A LUCKY FEW PROSPER, BECAUSE THAT'S ANTITHETICAL TO OUR IDEALS AND OUR DEMOCRACY.

ALL OF THIS IS GOING TO HAPPEN IF YOU ARE INVOLVED BECAUSE IT TAKES DOGGED DETERMINATION.

THE DOGGED DETERMINATION OF OUR CITIZENS.

TO EDUCATE MORE CHILDREN AT A YOUNGER AGE, AND TO REFORM OUR HIGH SCHOOLS FOR A NEW TIME, AND TO GIVE MORE YOUNG PEOPLE

THE CHANCE TO EARN THE KIND OF EDUCATION THAT YOU DID AT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, AND TO MAKE IT MORE AFFORDABLE SO THAT YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T LEAVE WITH A MOUNTAIN OF DEBT -- THAT WILL TAKE THE CARE AND CONCERN OF CITIZENS LIKE YOU.

(applause)

TO BUILD BETTER ROADS AND AIRPORTS, AND FASTER INTERNET AND TO ADVANCE THE KINDS OF BASIC RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY THAT'S ALWAYS KEPT AMERICA AHEAD OF EVERYBODY ELSE -- THAT WILL TAKE THE GRIT AND FORTITUDE OF CITIZENS. TO CONFRONT THE THREAT OF CLIMATE CHANGE BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE, THAT REQUIRES THE IDEALISM AND INITIATIVE OF CITIZENS. TO PROTECT MORE OF OUR KIDS FROM THE HORRORS OF GUN VIOLENCE, THAT REQUIRES THE UNWAVERING PASSION, THE UNTIRING RESOLVE OF CITIZENS. IT WILL REQUIRE YOU --
(applause)

50 YEARS AGO, PRESIDENT KENNEDY TOLD THE CLASS OF 1963 THAT OUR PROBLEMS ARE MAN-MADE, THEREFORE, THEY CAN BE SOLVED BY MAN. AND MAN CAN BE AS BIG AS HE WANTS. WE'RE BLESSED TO LIVE IN THE GREATEST NATION ON EARTH, BUT WE CAN ALWAYS BE GREATER. WE CAN ALWAYS ASPIRE TO SOMETHING MORE. IT DOESN'T DEPEND ON WHO YOU ELECT TO OFFICE, IT DEPENDS ON YOU AS CITIZENS, HOW BIG YOU WANT US TO BE. HOW BADLY YOU WANT TO SEE THESE CHANGES FOR THE BETTER. AND LOOK AT ALL THAT AMERICA'S ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED. LOOK HOW BIG WE'VE BEEN. I DARE YOU, CLASS OF 2013, TO DO BETTER. I DARE YOU TO DREAM BIGGER. AND FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN OF YOUR GENERATION, I'M CONFIDENT THAT YOU WILL. AND SO, I WISH YOU COURAGE AND COMPASSION AND ALL THE STRENGTH THAT YOU WILL NEED FOR THAT TRANQUIL AND STEADY DEDICATION OF A LIFETIME. THANK YOU, AND GOD BLESS YOU. AND GOD BLESS THESE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

(applause)

(applause)

DR. GEE:

THANK YOU. THANK YOU, MR. PRESIDENT. PLEASE BE SEATED.

YOUR MESSAGE GOES TO THE HEART -- LET ME JUST ASSURE YOU, MR. PRESIDENT, THAT YOUNG PEOPLE AND NOT SO YOUNG THAT YOU SEE OUT IN FRONT OF YOU WILL HEAL THE WORLD. THAT I AM CERTAIN.