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## President Bush Delivers Commencement Address at Ohio State University

Remarks by the President at Ohio State University  
Commencement  
Columbus, Ohio



**VIDEO** Multimedia

President's Remarks

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10:17 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. I appreciate that very warm welcome. President Kirwan, thank you for inviting me. Governor Taft, Chairman Patterson, distinguished members of the Ohio State faculty, trustees, family members, distinguished guests and, most importantly, members of the mighty class of 2002. (Applause.) Congratulations. You have earned a degree at a great American institution, and you have every right to be proud. (Applause.)

I want to congratulate your parents. (Applause.) Many of you have written your last tuition check. (Laughter.) That must be nice -- I'm still writing them. (Laughter.) You've given so much encouragement and support to your children, and their gratitude will only increase over the years. I also commend Ohio State's fine faculty, which has done so much to shape the minds and hopes of the graduating class.

One more word of congratulations is in order. Today I had the honor of meeting Coach Jim Tressel. (Applause.) Most polite of him to share with me the really fine experience that the Buckeyes had up in Ann Arbor this year. (Applause.)

And I appreciate so very much the honorary degree you're conferring upon me today. I'm delighted that George Steinbrenner is receiving one as well. I guess we're both being honored as legends of baseball -- (laughter) -- legends, at least, in our own minds. (Laughter.)

I am now the only person standing between you and your diploma. The tradition of commencement addresses is to be brief -- and forgotten. I assure you that this speech will be shorter than it seems.

Your senior year was special in your life -- and the months since last September have been extraordinary in our country's history. On a Tuesday morning, America went from a feeling of security to one of vulnerability, from peace to war, from a time of calm to a great and noble cause. We are called to defend liberty against tyranny and terror. We've answered that call. We will bring security to our people and justice to our enemies. (Applause.)

In the last nine months, we've seen the true character of our country. We learned of firefighters who wrote their Social Security numbers on their arms with felt tip pens -- to mark and identify their bodies -- and then rushed into burning buildings. We learned of the desperate courage of passengers on Flight 93 -- average citizens who led the first counter-attack in the war on terror. (Applause.) We watched the searchers, month after month, fulfill their grim duty -- and New Yorkers line the streets to cheer them on their way to work each morning. And in these events, we relearned something large and important: the achievements that last and count in life come through sacrifice and compassion and service.



Some believe this lesson in service is fading as distance grows from the shock of September the 11th, that the good we have witnessed is shallow and temporary.

Your generation will respond to these skeptics -- one way or another. You will determine whether our new ethic of responsibility is the break of a wave, or the rise of a tide. You will determine whether we become a culture of selfishness and look inward -- or whether we will embrace a culture of service and look outward. Because this decision is in your hands, I'm confident of the outcome. Your class and your generation understand the need for personal responsibility -- so you will make a culture of service a permanent part of American life.

After all, nearly 70 percent of your class volunteers in some form -- from Habitat for Humanity to Big Brothers and Big Sisters, to OhioReads. Ohio State has been a leading source of Peace Corps volunteers since 1961. (Applause.) I honor the 29 ROTC members in today's graduating class for their spirit of service and idealism.

I hope each of you -- I hope each of you will help build this culture of service, for three important reasons: service is important to your neighbors; service is important to your character; and service is important to your country. (Applause.)

First, your idealism is needed in America. In the shadow of our nation's prosperity, too many children grow up without love and guidance, too many women are abandoned and abused, too many men are addicted and illiterate, and too many elderly Americans live in loneliness.

These Americans are not strangers, they are fellow citizens; not problems, but priorities. They are as much a part of the American community as you and I, and they deserve better from this country. (Applause.)

Government has essential responsibilities: fighting wars and fighting crime; protecting the homeland and enforcing civil rights laws; educating the young and providing for the old; giving people tools to improve their own lives; helping the disabled and those in need.

But you have responsibilities, as well. Some government needs -- some needs government cannot fulfill: the need for kindness, and for understanding, and for love. A person in crisis often needs more than a program or a check; he needs a friend -- and that friend can be you. We are commanded by God and called by our conscience to love others as we want to be loved ourselves. Let us answer that call with every day we are given. (Applause.)

Second, service is important in your own life, in your own character. No one can tell you how to live or what cause to serve. But everyone needs some cause larger than his or her own profit. Apathy has no adventures. Cynicism leaves no monuments. And a person who is not responsible for others is a person who is truly alone.

By sharing the pain of a friend, or bearing the hopes of a child, or defending the liberty of your fellow citizens, you will gain satisfaction that cannot be gained in any other way. Service is not a chain or a chore -- it gives direction to your gifts, and purpose to your freedom.

Lyndsey Holben is an OSU sophomore majoring in business. When she was in high school, Lyndsey had a friend and a classmate who died from an illness -- and Lyndsey decided she wanted to work with children who suffer from life-threatening diseases. Today, Lyndsey is a leader among volunteers for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Here's what she had to say: "It's hard enough to put a smile on someone's face, but especially someone who is hurting. Even if that's all you can do, that is something -- and there is no better feeling in the world." Lyndsey, and others here today have learned that every life of service is a life of significance.



Third, we serve others because we're Americans, and we want to do something for the country we love. Our nation is the greatest force for good in history -- and we show our gratitude by doing our duty. (Applause.)

Patriotism is expressed by flying the flag, but it is more. Patriotism means we share a single country. In all our diversity, each of us has a bond with every other American. Patriotism is proven in our concern for others -- a willingness to sacrifice for people we may never have met or seen. Patriotism is our obligation to those who have gone before us, to those who will follow us, and to those who have died for us.

In March of this year, Army Ranger Marc Anderson died in Afghanistan, trying to rescue a Navy SEAL. Marc and five others gave their lives in fulfilling the Ranger creed: "I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy."

Marc, from Westerville, Ohio, was a remarkable man. Instead of pursuing a career that might have made him wealthy, Marc decided to be a math teacher in a high school in a tough neighborhood. He was a mentor, a tutor, and the best teacher many students ever had.

After September the 11th, Marc joined the fight against terrorism. "I'm trained and I'm ready," he wrote to his friends. Before Marc left for Afghanistan, he arranged for part of his life insurance to pay for one of his former students to attend college. Today, that student -- Jennifer Massing -- plans to go to the University of Florida to study architecture.

Marc Anderson considered this country great enough to die for. Surely it is great enough to live for. And we live for America by serving others. (Applause.) And as we serve others, this challenge can only be answered in individual hearts. Service in America is not a matter of coercion; it is a matter of conscience. So today I'm making an appeal to your conscience, for the sake of our country.

America needs more than taxpayers, spectators, and occasional voters. America needs full-time citizens. (Applause.) America needs men and women who respond to the call of duty, who stand up for the weak, who speak up for their beliefs, who sacrifice for a greater good. America needs your energy, and your leadership, and your ambition. And through the gathering momentum of millions of acts of kindness and decency, we will change America one soul at a time -- and we will build a culture of service. (Applause.)

I have asked all Americans to commit at least two years -- 4,000 hours over a lifetime -- to the service of our neighbors and our nation. My administration created what we call the USA Freedom Corps to help Americans find service opportunities at home and abroad. We're doubling the size of the Peace Corps. We'll increase AmeriCorps by 50 percent. We've created Citizen Corps to help protect the homeland.

And today I'm announcing an historic partnership. We are bringing together the broadest group of service organizations ever assembled to create the USA Freedom Corps Network. The USA Freedom Corps Network includes America's Promise, the Points of Light Foundation, The United Way, Volunteer Match, ServeNet and many other organizations; will be the most comprehensive clearinghouse of volunteer opportunities ever assembled. This network will enable you to find volunteer opportunities within your neighborhoods and communities, and in countries around the globe.

One of the main reasons people give for not volunteering is that no one has asked them to do so. Another reason, they don't know where to start. Well, today I'm asking each of you to serve your country -- and, through the USA Freedom Corps Network, you've got a place to start. (Applause.) All that remains is for you to answer the call to service. I hope you do -- and I believe you will.

A life of service isn't always easy. It involves sacrifices, and I understand many other things will lay claim to your time and to your attention. In serving, however, you will give help and hope to others. You will -- your own life will gain greater purpose and deeper meaning. You will show your love and allegiance to the United States, which remains what it has always been: the citadel of freedom, a land of mercy, the last, best hope of man on Earth. (Applause.)

And so to the graduates of Ohio State University: Congratulations on your achievement. I want to thank you for this honorary degree. I leave here a proud member of the class of 2002. (Applause.) I leave here confident that you will serve our country, and a cause greater than self. May God bless you your families, and may God bless America.

END 10:35 A.M. EDT

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