

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL COMMENCEMENT
Bryce Jordan Center
Pennsylvania State University
May 10, 1996

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for that very warm welcome. Thank you, President Spanier. Thank you, Mr. Arnelle, Dr. Brighton, Dr. Erickson, Mr. Hollander. I thank the University Brass for playing so well for me. It made me want to take them back to the White House.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be here for many very personal reasons, many of which are obvious. I'm very honored to receive the University Scholars Medal and to be the first non-Penn State alumnus to receive it.

As it was said earlier, my family has a long history with this state and with this great University. Hillary's family is from Scranton and both my father-in-law and brother-in-law attended Penn State and both played football here. Back in the '30s, according to my father-in-law, he had to play offense and defense. That's sort of what I do, so I understand that.

I have had some other good personal associations with this University, and for all those I am very grateful. I am grateful for the establishment of a scholarship at the College of Education in my late father-in-law's name. It means a great deal to my wife and to me and to our daughter. And I am grateful to be here because of what Penn State represents.

This school was made a land grant school in the darkest hours of our nation's history, because President Lincoln and his contemporaries knew even then that our nation's future depended upon the widest possible dispersion of knowledge. Though faced with the possibility of the very union of our states breaking up, our leaders were still thinking about the future. And to all the graduates here with advanced degrees, I say, a great nation must always be thinking about tomorrow. Therefore, even as you relish this day, I ask you to join me just for a few moments in thinking about tomorrow, for you will live a great deal of your lives in the 21st century, the most remarkable age of possibility in human history.

I have been told that today every student at Penn State is given an e-mail account and that more than one million e-mail messages are sent every day. That is just a taste of the world to come -- a dazzling, new global economy, giving more and more

people a chance to work with their minds instead of their backs throughout a career, many of you in jobs that you have not even invented yet. You will have incredible choices in where you live and how you work. You will be able to raise your children in greater peace and freedom and in the most diverse and vibrant democracy history has ever known. At least that's what I want our country to be like as we move into the 21st century.

Almost five years ago at my alma mater, Georgetown, I gave three speeches about my vision of America's future in the 21st century and a strategy for how I thought we ought to achieve that future. I said then and I'd like to repeat now that my vision is pretty simple and straightforward: I want an America in which all Americans, without regard to their race or their gender or their station in life, who are willing to work hard have a chance to live out their dreams. I want an America that remains the world's strongest force for peace and freedom and prosperity. And I want an America that is no longer being driven apart by our differences, but instead is coming together around our shared values and respect for our diversity.

As my wife says in her book, I really believe it takes a village of all of our people working together to make the most of our lives. To build that kind of America, we have to be able to honestly meet our challenges and protect our values. We have to find ways to create these opportunities for all Americans. We have to find ways to build strong communities and we have got to find ways to get more personal responsibility from all of our citizens. Opportunity, responsibility, community -- these are values that have made our country strong, that have built great institutions like Penn State, that guide my actions as President. I believe they must guide our nation as we prepare for the tomorrows of the 21st century.

What I want to do here and in the other commencement addresses I will be making is to talk about what has occurred in the last four years and, even more importantly, what must still occur if we are going to realize this vision -- to give opportunities to everybody willing to work for them, to keep our country the strongest force for peace and freedom, and to rebuild our sense of unity and community around a shared ethic of responsibility.

Compared to four years ago, there is clearly more opportunity, a much lower deficit, increased access to education, a renewed commitment to a clean environment and safer streets, 8.5 million new jobs, low inflation, record numbers of new exports in businesses. But we all know there are also a lot of problems in this new economy, a lot of uncertainty, and much more to do to give all our people a chance to succeed.

Compared to four years ago the world is more peaceful and safer. The nuclear threat has diminished. Peace and freedom are taking hold from Haiti to South Africa to Northern Ireland to Bosnia to the Middle East. But there is a lot more to do to make the American people safe from the 21st century threats of terrorism, organized crime and drug-running, weapons proliferation and global environmental threats.

In future speeches I'll discuss both these things at greater length. Today I'd like to ask you to kind of travel along with me as we look at America's present and its future in terms of that third objective -- inspiring a stronger, more united American community, rooted in a greater commitment to personal responsibility and community service.

What you have done here today is in and of itself an act of responsibility. By getting this advanced degree you have honored yourselves and your families, and you have helped America. We need more people -- many, many more people -- with much higher levels of education and, even more importantly, with the developed ability to learn for a lifetime. We need this kind of personal responsibility from all of our citizens, doing the best to make the most of their own lives. And we must apply the lessons of your success as individuals to our common work as a nation.

I believe we are living through a period of most profound change in the way we work, the way we live, the way we relate to each other and the rest of the world in 100 years -- since we moved from the agricultural into the industrial age. At the turn of the century about 100 years ago, people who for generations had lived their lives by the rising and the setting of the sun moved from the country to the city, where they woke to the din of the streetcar and went home to the sound of the factory whistle. That time presented enormous opportunities, but also great challenges. A hundred years ago many people's lives were uprooted, but not improved. And for many, not only their livelihoods but the values by which they lived were threatened by the changes of the day.

In response to the challenges of that time, a gifted generation of reformers, led first by Theodore Roosevelt and then by Woodrow Wilson, worked to harness the power of our nation's government so that it could extend the benefits of the industrial era to all Americans, curb the excesses of the era, and enable our people to preserve their family and community values. They launched what we now call the Progressive Era. They brought us the antitrust laws, the earliest environment protection laws.

They were all designed to harness the positive forces of the new age to give everyone a fair chance to protect the values of the American people.

Think what has happened in the 100 years since. The progressives built the foundation of what became known as the American Century -- a century in which America won two world wars and the Cold War, overcame the Great Depression, achieved decades of sustained economic growth, scientific breakthroughs, more opportunities for women and minorities, a cleaner environment, remarkable security and good health for senior citizens, and the largest and most prosperous middle class in human history. It all began in the Progressive Era.

Today we're living through another time of profound change. Like the dawn of the Industrial Age, the Information Age offers vast new opportunities. Today technology and information are dominating every form of work including agriculture, as I'm sure anyone in the College of Agriculture here can attest to.

But this time also presents great challenges -- people whose lives are uprooted, but not improved; and cherished values strained by the pace and the scope of change. I'd like to talk about that a little today.

When I was growing up, Americans could pretty much walk the streets of any city without fear of being hurt by violent crime. Having children out of wedlock was rare and a source of shame. Welfare was a temporary weigh station for widows and their orphans. It was far from a perfect time, the '40s and '50s and early '60s. Women and minorities didn't have the opportunities they have today. But in neighborhoods all across America, people knew it when you were born, cared about you while you lived, and missed you when you died.

For too many young people growing up today, that world exists only in black and white reruns on television. In our toughest neighborhoods and our meanest streets, we've seen a stunning and simultaneous breakdown of community, family and work -- the heart and soul of a civilized society. We've seen a buildup of crime and gangs and drugs, as young people turn to things that will destroy them, ultimately, in part because they are raising themselves without enough to say yes to.

We've seen so much of this now we've almost become numb to it. A lot of us may even be resigned to it. But I want to ask you to think today about what you want America to look like in the 21st century, and I want you to say to yourself, I refuse to

accept this as a normal and unavoidable and irreversible condition. I believe we can mend our social fabric. We've done it before, and we have to do it today.

If we're moving into an era in which we will be judged and our success will be determined by how well we use our minds, we must first be able to function as orderly, law-abiding, decent human beings. We have to, in short, not only meet the changes of the day, but reaffirm our enduring values.

In this, to be sure, our government still has a role to play. But it's not the same role that government had to play in the beginning of the 20th century because the problems are different. The world of today has moved away from big, centralized bureaucracies and top-down solutions. So has your federal government. Indeed, there are 240,000 fewer people working for the United States government today than there were the day I became President of this great country.

But we still need a government that is strong enough to give people the tools they need to make the most of their own lives, to enable them to seize opportunities when they are responsible. That's why I have fought so hard for things like the student loan programs, the Pell Grant programs, the scholarship programs, the research programs, because we cannot, on the one hand, tell the American people, go out and be responsible, and on the other hand, jerk the rug out from under them. We have to give people the tools they need to make the most of their own lives.

And whenever we fight for a strong economy, or a clean environment, or safe streets, or investment in research and technology, or give a child a chance with the Head Start program, we are doing nothing more or less than giving people an environment in which they still have to make the most of their own lives.

And so what I ask you today is to think about that. What is the role of the individual citizen in making the America of our dreams in the 21st century? What is the role of the individual citizen in making sure that we will move into this global society, with everyone having the chance to live up to his or her dreams? It is clear to me that government alone cannot solve this problem.

If you look at any society's most fundamental requirements -- strong families and safe streets -- and you ask yourselves, what are all the causes for the stresses on those things in our country, you may come up with a whole laundry list

of things that government can do about them. I know I have. But in your heart of hearts you know that many, many of the things from which we suffer are caused by the lack of personal responsibility on the part of millions of American citizens.

The teen mother who leaves school for a life on welfare, a father who walks away from or abuses a family, a criminal who preys upon the rest of us, the neighbors who turn their backs on the children in need -- I say to you we cannot tolerate this anymore if you really want your vision of the 21st century to become real. We have to be willing to give people a chance to escape lives that are destructive for them and costly for the rest of us. That is our responsibility. But we must also insist that people help themselves and assume responsibility for making their own lives and the life of this great nation better.

If you just take the welfare system, for example, you can see the point I'm trying to make. I took office believing that a lot of people on welfare were dying to get off it and were trapped in it. I still believe that. It's a system that is too weighted toward a lifetime of dependency instead of demanding responsibility; too willing to let fathers bring children into the world, turn their backs and walk away and load all the burden onto the young mothers who are left behind; too willing to give the young mothers a check to move out on their own if they have a child instead of staying at home, staying in school and strengthening the family.

For 15 years, going back to my service as governor, I have sat in welfare offices, talked to people on welfare, asked them what it would take to turn their lives around, asked them what had happened. I have worked to reform and change welfare from a system that encourages dependency to one that encourages independence, from one that does not encourage work to one that insists upon work, but also supports responsible parenting.

If you look at all these people here with their advanced degrees, why are we so proud of them? Because we believe they will be able to succeed not only in the world of work, but they will be good role models for the American society. Their children will be able to succeed. They will be able to look at their children and their children will be able to look at them, and they will be able to do great things together. That is what we should want for people on welfare -- the simple ability to succeed at work and to succeed at home, to be able to contribute their portion of the American Dream.

Now, in the past three years, by executive actions, we've been working on what The New York Times called "a quiet revolution on welfare." We've cut red tape for 37 states and now let 75 percent of the people in this country on welfare be a part of welfare reform experiments with little fanfare and no new legislation. We've done things like impose time limits and require work, and we've worked much harder to enforce the national government's role in child support enforcement across national lines.

And you know what? The welfare rolls have dropped by more than a million. The food stamp rolls are down by a million and a half. Child support collections are up 40 percent to \$11 billion a year. And the teen pregnancy rate has even started to go down a bit.

What does all this have to do with you? They are part of your country. If their children wind up in your prisons, you will pay for them instead of investing more money in scientific laboratories at Penn State, or giving children a chance to work in a program to earn a scholarship, or otherwise building our future. When others regularly and systematically violate the values we all say we share, it weakens America and it weakens the future of your vision and your dreams.

We still have a lot to do. Nearly a third of our babies today are born out of wedlock; a whole lot of them end up on welfare. A few days ago, we took an action which should force more responsibility. Every state will have to require teen mothers to stay in school and to sign a personal responsibility contract and to stay at home unless the environment is abusive, so that they must work to turn their lives around if they want to keep those benefits.

I'm still working with members of Congress in both parties to pass legislation to overhaul the entire welfare system. And I hope we can do it even though this is an election year. There's really no call for a work stoppage, and by the time November comes around you'll have more politics than you can stand. Meanwhile, you ought to be working to give those people what we want for ourselves -- independence, work and responsible parenting.

But what I want to say to all of you -- you say, well, what's that got to do with me? I'll never be on welfare, I've got a Ph.D. today. They are your fellow Americans. Those children are your future. And what I want to say is, it doesn't matter what laws we pass or what programs we put in place, we

cannot reverse decades and patterns of behavior unless more of our citizens are willing to take some responsibility for other people's kids in the near-term.

We have to inspire our communities to support programs and adults to participate in programs that we know now will dramatically reduce teen pregnancy. They're out there, they're just not in every community. The hard truth is, too many of our young people don't have the kind of discipline or love, guidance or support that it takes to grow up into responsible adults. Church groups and neighbors and parents all need to send a clear message to all children, not just their own: We care about you, but you have to take care of yourself. Don't get pregnant or father a child until you're ready to take responsibility. But if you do, we'll help you as long as you are responsible. And you can't walk away from that responsibility. If you do, we'll make you assume it.

Let me say that, in addition to welfare, I have the same view of the crime problem, and it's remarkably similar. Only if we take responsibility for our own communities can we really achieve our objective in crime. We'll never thoroughly transform human nature, but even if you have a Ph.D., you don't want to be a victim of a crime; you don't want your children to be unsafe going to and from school; you don't want to have to worry your heart out if your kids drive to a city to see a play; you don't want to have any kind of country other than one in which crime is an exception.

Someone said to me the other day, Mr. President, you talk about all this all the time, but you will never eliminate crime. I said, that's not my goal. My goal is to create an America so that when people turn on the evening news and they see a report of a serious crime, they are surprised and shocked, instead of yawning about it.

Now, there are things that government can do. There are things that government can do. In 1994, we passed a crime bill and a Brady Bill. The Brady Bill has already stopped 60,000 felons and fugitives with criminal records from getting handguns -- 60,000. We took 19 deadly assault weapons off the street and not a single hunter in Pennsylvania or in my native state of Arkansas missed a deer season or a duck season or had to have a different weapon. They didn't lose anything.

We said to repeat violent criminals, three strikes and you're out. We said if you kill law enforcement officials, the death penalty is there. But we also said what every police

officer in America knows, the best way to fight crime is to reach young people before they turn to crime in the first place.

Now, you all clap for that, but if you believe it, what it means is that you cannot leave the work of making our streets safe to the police alone. Citizens have the responsibility. Citizens have a responsibility. You can take advantage of opportunities provided in our education bills to keep schools open late so teens have someplace to go besides the streets; or to launch community drug courts to give nonviolent offenders a chance to get off drugs before they end up in jail; or to make community policing work, something that's making the rounds in Pennsylvania today.

Our crime bill fulfilled a commitment I made to the American people to put 100,000 new police officers on the street in community policing. It's an old-fashioned idea, really. It means put the police back on the street, in the neighborhood, working with neighbors to spot criminals, shutting down crack houses, stopping crime before it happens, getting to know children on the street and encouraging them to stay away from crime. But community policing only works by definition when there is a community for the police to work with.

Now, whenever this happens crime comes down. Violent crimes have dropped in this country for three years in a row now because we're finally getting enough police out there on the street and because people are working with them. In Lancaster County, a two-hour drive from here, our community police program put 12 new officers into the downtown area -- listen to this -- they patrolled on foot, bicycle and horseback, they worked with the community, the crime dropped by 67 percent. Pretty soon they'll be surprised when they hear a report of crime.

This can be done. But I have to tell you, there's a big hurdle up the road and it can't be solved without more citizen help. Because in spite of the fact that the crime rate had dropped for three years in a row, the violent crime rate by people under 18 is still going up. And any of you who are in education know that there is a huge group of young people under 18, now coming into grade school, coming up through our system of education -- a higher percentage of them than any previous generation, born out of wedlock, born without the guidance of two parents, born into difficult family situations, out there having to raise themselves.

So even if you have a Ph.D., you've got to care about these kids. They're your kids; they're coming home to your roost and

they will affect your country and your children's future and what kind of America we live in. And we cannot solve the problem of rising crime among young people -- even with our antidrug strategy, even with our antigang strategy, even with 100,000 more police -- unless there are citizens who are willing to step into the gap in those children's lives to teach them right from wrong, to give them a good future to look forward to, to give them the character and values to walk into that future, to make it possible for them to imagine that one day they might get a degree from a place like Penn State. You have to be willing to do that wherever you live.

I will just give you one simple example. There are 20,000 neighborhood crime watch groups in America -- 20,000. If 50 people join each one of these groups we would have a citizen force of a million new community activists to work with those 100,000 police officers -- not just to catch criminals, but to keep kids away from crime. Fifty people in every group, a million Americans reaching out to children, stopping crimes, catching criminals. If that happened -- and no government program can make it happen -- if that happened in community after community after community in the United States, people would be surprised when they heard at night a news report of a serious crime. And America would be a better place. We'd be a lot closer to our shared vision of America in the 21st century.

And that brings me to the last point I wish to make. We have a lot of challenges as a people to rebuild the strength of our communities and our national community. We're still too divided over racial matters. We're still too divided over religious disputes. We still have other problems that are simply unmet that can't be met by government. Helping children on welfare to move off of welfare, helping communities to reduce the crime rate -- these are not the only areas in which we desperately need more citizen involvement to make America the place it ought to be.

Those of you have college degrees, those of you who may earn a great deal of money will still find that in too many ways where you live the bonds of community have been weakened. There are too many places where people are working harder, moving more often, spending less time with each other and more time exhausted in front of the television. Even prosperous, happy neighborhoods often find that not everybody knows their neighbors.

So I say to you: With this wonderful, precious commodity of a fine education, I hope you will go out into your community and find some way to give back some of what your country has given to

you. No matter what you do or how busy you are, there is always a way to serve a larger community. The story of your generation should be the story of we restore broken lives and shattered promises through citizen service.

We're going to balance this budget over the next six years. We're going to have a big fight about how to do it, as you know. But don't let that obscure the fact -- this deficit is less than half of what it was four years ago. And it's coming down. Don't obscure the real fact. And that's very important because as we move to balance the budget, we can keep interest rates down and we can keep investment and create jobs for the American people -- and get incomes rising again, which has been the source of constant anxiety in places like Pennsylvania where people lost really good jobs and couldn't get other jobs paying at the same or better wages. It's an important thing to do.

I will do my best to protect our investments in education, in the environment, in the quality and character of the Medicare and Medicaid programs. But make no mistake about it: As we shrink government, until we balance the budget, there will be even more reliance on citizen servants to meet the needs of the American people because we can't shrink from our challenges on the grounds that we're shrinking the deficit.

There's an emerging consensus in Washington, believe it or not, across party lines that we ought to do more to help charities and religious institutions and families and individuals to step in where government can't anymore or where it shouldn't. I'll give you just a few examples. Leaders in both parties, from Senator Joe Lieberman, a Democrat of Connecticut, to Senator Dan Coats, a Republican from Indiana, have proposed reforms to encourage private citizens to assume responsibilities that are not and cannot be fulfilled by government agencies alone. For example, making sure every child has a loving home is a national priority. But government doesn't raise children, only good parents can do that. That's why earlier this week -- earlier this week I urged Congress to enact one of these bipartisan proposals, a \$5,000 tax credit to help families, working families, adopt children.

And just a few hours ago, that proposal passed with an almost unanimous vote in the House of Representatives. It is going to become the law of the land.

We created AmeriCorps, the national service program, in 1993, so we could give our young people a chance to earn their way through college by giving something back to their community

and their country. Since that time AmeriCorps has given more than 40,000 young people all across this country a chance to serve, to work with troubled teenagers, immunize children, help seniors who don't have enough support, clean up the environment, do countless other things. I have met so many of these young people around the country who tell me that the experience literally changed their lives, and they'll never spend another year of their life without taking some time to rebuild their community. That is the kind of spurt we need to create in all of America.

I want to thank your former Senator, Harris Wofford, for agreeing to head the AmeriCorps program and for ensuring its continuation.

I want to thank our constructive critics, like Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa, the Republican Senator from Iowa, who worked with Senator Wofford to strengthen the AmeriCorps program and to preserve it.

Let me just suggest three other things that we could do to get more young people involved. First, I've asked Congress to increase funding for work-study programs for students so that we can have a million students earning their way through college by the year 2000. Today I'd like to ask Penn State and every other institution of higher education in the country to consider using more of this money to promote service -- to put thousands of college students to work in community service. If it's good for students to earn money by putting books back in library shelves or working in the Dean's Office, surely it makes sense for them to earn money helping teen mothers handle their responsibilities, helping older people get around, helping young people to look to a brighter future.

Second, I challenge every high school in America to make service a part of its basic ethic. Every high school student who can do so should do some community service. There are some schools, both public and private, that require community service as a part of their curriculum. I say, good for them. Commitment to community should be an ethic we learn as possible so we carry it throughout our lives.

And third, I challenge every community to help those high school students answer the call of service. Today I'm prepared to make an offer and challenge any school district or civic organization in the country to match it: If you will raise \$500 to reward a high school student who has done significant work to help your community, the federal government will match your \$500

and help that student go on to college. That would cost us, by the way, about \$10 million if every high school in the country did it. It would be the best \$10 million we ever spent. We would get hundreds of millions of dollars -- of improved quality of life and service to people as a result of it.

This fall I'll announce the winners of a nationwide competition to identify schools that have done the best job in encouraging this kind of service. Students at those schools will become National Service Scholars. A year from now I want it to be even bigger. I want every principal in America to be able to stand up before a graduating class and announce the name of a National Service Scholar. We should make service to the community a part of every high school in America and a part of life of every dedicated citizen in the United States.

So, my fellow Americans, in spite of all we have to do to create more opportunity, we also must find a way to urge, cajole, plead, generate, demand more responsibility for ourselves, our families, our communities and our country.

This summer in Atlanta we will celebrate the centennial of the Modern Olympics. It's a great honor to host those Olympics in the United States. But I ask you to think when you see these young people come out about more than medals and who will win and lose. The real meaning of the Olympics is what miracles happen to people when they make a deep and profound commitment to take personal responsibility for just becoming the best that they can be, and when they're willing to work with teammates to make their common endeavors even greater. That is the great strength of America.

You know, the president mentioned earlier that -- or maybe it was the chairman of your board -- about Pennsylvania's role in starting this country. And I want you to think about this as I close. Our founding fathers, who did so much of their work right here in Pennsylvania, would not be surprised that in this new era, with all of its possibilities, there are still a lot of tough problems. They were very smart. They knew there would never be a perfect problem-free time. They wouldn't be surprised at all. But they would be very surprised and bitterly disappointed if we were to give into pessimism about these problems, deny their existence and walk away from them. They knew -- you can read it in the Federalist Papers, you can read it in the founding documents -- they knew that freedom requires responsibility and service for personal prosperity and for the common good.

You graduates have been blessed with the richest educational experience the world can offer. As Americans, you've been blessed to inherit the greatest country on Earth. Now you have to honor that debt by asking yourselves, what do I want my country to be like in the 21st century and what am I prepared to do to make it a reality?

I will do all I can to give you the opportunities to make the most of your lives, but you must do all you can to assume responsibility for yourselves, your families and your communities. If you do that, I believe your life will be a lot happier and richer, and you will surely make the 21st century America's greatest days.

Thank you. God bless you, and God bless America.