

The George Washington University 2018 Commencement

Transcript – Remarks as Delivered

FORREST MALTZMAN, University Provost: Friends, family, honored guests, good morning and welcome! I am Forrest Maltzman, Provost of the George Washington University. Please rise and join me in welcoming the graduating class of the George Washington University!

[Cheers and Applause]

MALTZMAN: Friends, family, honored guests! Please welcome the faculty of the George Washington University!

[Cheers and Applause]

MALTZMAN: Friends, family, honored guests, please welcome the George Washington University Board of Trustees, Chair Nelson A. Carbonell, Jr., President Thomas LeBlanc, members of the administration, and our very special awardees and honorees escorted by the GW Police Department Honor Guard.

[Cheers and Applause]

MALTZMAN: On behalf of my colleagues on stage and my colleagues throughout the university, I am delighted to welcome all of you to our annual Commencement in the 197th year of the George Washington University! [Cheers and Applause]

We will continue our ceremony with the Presentation of the Colors by the George Washington University Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps' Ceremonial Color Guard, and the National Anthem sung by Millicent Scarlett, a professor in the Department of Music.

Would those who are able, please stand and remove your hats.

We will remain standing for the Retiring of the Colors, followed by the invocation from Lindsay Marsh Warren of Grace Covenant Church.

SCARLETT: Oh, say, can you see,
By the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed
At the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars,
Thro' the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched
Were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare,
The bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there.
O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

[Cheers and Applause]

WARREN: Good morning, family and friends, I'm Dr. Lindsay Marsh Warren, and I'm also a DW grad as well as doing my department training as the anesthesiology training, so I've been in the department for over 20 years, and I'm just excited to be with you all this morning. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we honor and acknowledge you in this moment. You are so great, God, and we are so grateful for life, health, and strength and that you've allowed us to see this day, Commencement 2018 for the George Washington University.

This is truly the day that you have made. In this moment, I seek a blessing over this nation. This Nation's Capital. This commencement ceremony. The University, the leadership, the faculty and staff, the graduates, and all of the families and ethnicities represented. Lord, let your will be done and have it your way. Lord, we are so grateful for each graduate even though there are so many sitting here together, you know and see each one of them individually.

There were, of course, difficult moments. But by your goodness and your Amazing Grace, these graduates have overcome every obstacle. Lord, we invite you into this moment. Holy Spirit have your way in this moment as we honor and celebrate the additional and the dedication of the class of 2018. Their labor has not been in vain vein and today they cross the finish line only to embark in a new journey.

Lord, I ask bless the work of their hands. Make those crooked places straight in their lives and give them discernment to make wise decisions in the days that lay ahead. God, I ask give each graduate and even each one of us attending and even under the sound of my voice the desire and the discipline to use our gifts, talents, incident intellects, and influence demonstrate love and challenge and justice in our world.

And, Lord, I ask even as we depart from this place after degrees have been conferred and tassels have been turned, I pray that we will all remember the blessing of our educational experience at GW for to whom much is given, much is also required. Lord, I pray these things in your precious name, the name above every name. Amen.

MALTZMAN: Please be seated.

Class of 2018, I am delighted to open this ceremony in this one-of-a-kind setting, the National Mall.

To gather here between the Washington Monument, dedicated to our university's namesake, and the United States Capitol Building is a fitting tribute to your achievement in completing your studies at the George Washington University.

In addition to congratulating the members of the Class of 2018, I want to give a special recognition to the all the family members who join us today and have been important pillars of support to our students.

[Cheers and Applause]

I also want to acknowledge the numerous alumni and friends whose generosity funded the scholarships that I know were critical to so many of you being able to attend.

[Applause]

I am now pleased to invite the president of the university to join me at the podium. Dr. Thomas LeBlanc is concluding his first year as president of the George Washington University.

President LeBlanc leads a community of faculty, students, and staff that numbers more than 34,000 people.

As we approach our bicentennial, president has been continually emphasizing the contribution that this university makes through the students it graduates and the research it conducts.

Please join me in welcoming the George Washington University's 17th president, Thomas LeBlanc!

[Applause]

LEBLANC: Chair Carbonell; University Trustees; Honorary Degree recipients; University Leaders; Distinguished Faculty; Family and Friends: Good morning!

Graduates, let me begin by congratulating you on your outstanding achievements. Today in the national mall in the bright sunshine, there are 25,000 graduates, family, faculty, friends to celebrate you. This is truly only a GW moment. So much so that I feel compelled to take a picture.

[Laughter as he takes a picture from stage]

And one more.

[Laughter as he turns around and takes a selfie from stage]

If you would like a copy, just text me.

[Laughter]

I would like to thank our host, the National Park Service, for its gracious and generous help preparing this incredible setting for today's ceremony.

[Cheers and Applause]

But now I would like to continue an important commencement tradition. Will the parents, the families and the friends of the Class of 2018 please rise to accept our congratulations and our thanks.

[Cheers and Applause]

It is now my pleasure to recognize the special guests who today will receive the university's highest honor.

Can our honorary degree recipients please stand when called upon?

Please join me in welcoming: President Emeritus of the George Washington University and University Professor of English, Dr. Steven Knapp;

Three-time Olympic medalist and George Washington University double alumna, Elana Meyers Taylor;

[Applause]

And President of the National Academy of Sciences and renowned geophysicist, Marcia McNutt.

[Applause]

I now have the honor of introducing Nelson A. Carbonell, Jr., chair of the university's Board of Trustees and an alumnus of this university.

Mr. Carbonell.

[Applause]

CARBONELL: Thank you, President LeBlanc.

And before I begin my remarks, some of you may wonder what does the board chair do at commencement? Well, the first thing I do is arrange the weather, so you're welcome.

[Laughter]

It's going to rain tonight, I believe.

I am honored as Chair of the Board of Trustees to join President LeBlanc and my fellow trustees — many of whom are also alumni and parents, relatives, and friends of GW students — in welcoming all of you on this very significant occasion, as we celebrate the Class of 2018 and their many achievements and accomplishments.

First, may I ask the trustees who have joined us this morning to please rise and be recognized by the audience.

[Applause]

Trustees, thank you for your leadership and service to GW. We are all grateful for your commitment.

I want to add to the President's recognition of our distinguished guests and offer an additional welcome to our honorary degree recipients: President Emeritus Steven Knapp, Olympian Elana Meyers Taylor, and our Commencement speaker, Dr. Marcia McNutt.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, we appreciate all of you being here on this momentous occasion.

It is a special homecoming for President Emeritus Knapp.

Our sixteenth president has returned to the institution that he led for ten years.

During that time, he oversaw the construction of the Science and Engineering Hall, made GW a force in urban sustainability, and completed the \$1 billion "Making History" Campaign.

Welcome back, President Emeritus Knapp, and congratulations on your honorary degree.

[Applause]

Today's commencement ceremony marks a number of important milestones.

It is President LeBlanc's first commencement on the National Mall as President of the George Washington University.

Pretty cool, Huh?

For our faculty who you have invested in your students. For the family and friends joining us, today is a celebration of the love and care that you provided to help our graduates through their journey at GW. Finally, for you our graduates, today represents the culmination of years of hard work and knowledge. The degree means you have shown yourself as leaders. These are important that you will carry with yourself into the world. Remember, your experiences at the George Washington University have shaped who you are.

At President LeBlanc's inauguration ceremony, I called on you to consider the words of another famous Nelson, Nelson Mandela, who said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. We can change the world and make it a better place.

It is in your hands to make a difference." Today, the tumultuous world in which we live needs more leaders like you.

We need your hope, optimism, and knowledge to be the change in the world to make it a better place.

As you become alumni of the George Washington University, it is in your hands to make a difference.

Thirty-three years ago, I graduated from GW with a Bachelor's Degree in Science and Engineering.

[A handful of applause]

That's all you got?

[Laughter]

From my own experience, I can tell you that the time I spent here, the education I received, and the friends I made, have stayed with me and continue to enrich life. GW prepared me well for opportunities and challenges that I faced throughout my life. I will forever be grateful and loyal to the university.

Becoming an alumnus of the George Washington University remains one of my greatest honors today.

I am excited to welcome all of you as graduates of one of the most respected and admired universities in the world.

We are proud of you, and I know you will always be proud to say: I am a graduate of the George Washington University.

Congratulations to all of you and Raise High!

[Cheers and Applause]

It is now my pleasure to turn the program back over to Provost Maltzman.

MALTZMAN: I would now like to recognize this year's recipients of the George Washington Awards.

This award is conferred for extraordinary contributions to the GW community.

The students, staff, and faculty who receive the GW Award have each, in their own way, shaped our university, making it the outstanding institution it is today.

It gives me great pleasure to announce this year's honorees.

As I call your name, please rise and remain standing.

Fjollë Caka is a candidate today for a Master of Professional Studies degree in Sustainable Urban Planning from the GW College of Professional Studies. She has distinguished herself as a student leader on sustainability issues, bringing awareness and education on this critical topic to the GW community. She has also promoted human rights and reconciliation in Kosovo. We thank her for her contributions.

[Cheers and Applause]

J. Andrew Carlander.

[Cheers and Applause]

A candidate today for a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from the GW School of Business.

He has taken on many leadership roles in the business school to the benefit of his peers.

His work has included launching a professional conference, starting a mentorship program, and co-authoring an undergraduate oath of honor for the business school. He most recently served on the search committee for the new business school dean and we are grateful for his efforts.

[Cheers and Applause]

Liesl Riddle is Associate Professor of International Business and International Affairs. She serves as a mentor to the university's inaugural class of Posse scholars, working with them on their academic and professional progress at the university. She also organizes the Posse Plus Retreat, an annual event that brings almost 100 students, staff and faculty together to discuss issues that confront our campus and the nation.

Liesl doesn't expect accolades for this work, in fact she takes on the extra hours and then says thank you to us for letting her work with these wonderful students. I'm honored to have her as a colleague and a friend.

[Applause]

Linda Neely Brown is the associate director of Colonial Central at GW. Though she could not be present today, we hope she is watching online as we celebrate her work. Linda is a mentor to staff, drawing upon her encyclopedic knowledge of the university, which she has amassed over the course of 37 years of service to GW. She also served as part of the group that brought the Yellow Ribbon Program to the university. Perhaps most importantly, she always serves students and families of the GW community with deep care and empathy.

Thank you, Linda.

[Applause]

Now, please join me in congratulating the winners of the GW Awards!

[Applause]

And thank you for your service to this university.

Let me now introduce Venessa Marie Perry, president of the GW Alumni Associations.

[Applause]

PERRY: Good morning class of 2018! My name is Venessa Marie Perry, MPH class of '99, and I am here to officially welcome you to the George Washington University Alumni Association.

We are thrilled to have to you and we can't wait to see what you will accomplish.

With the capitol behind us and the monument in front of us I am reminded of the historic legacy of GW. An institution that stands for the highest values of intellectual pursuit and academic rigor.

Last week you were students and today you are graduates and alumni of one of the greatest institutions on the planet. You have much to be proud of. And I want you to remember your only at GW moments as ones that set you apart from the rest of your peers. From meeting heads of state, entertainers, political punned, Olympic winning athletes, and prize-winning authors, remember, GW did that.

Whether it's when I'm here in DC, working in New York, or traveling the world, I am always finding myself surrounded by GW alumni.

Let me acknowledge the GW alumni among us today and show you that from now on – you, too, will be surrounded by your GW alumni family.

Can all of us who earned a GW degree prior to today please stand and be recognized.

[Applause]

I'd like to also acknowledge our alumni emeriti, those who graduated from GW 50 or more years ago, seated in the front in gold caps and gowns.

Please join me in giving them a round of Applause.

[Applause]

One thing I know about our GW alumni is that we help each other out.

GW grads support each other in career, in friendship, and in other ways big and small. The good news is that, because of you, there are now more than 290,000 GW alumni living in more than 150 countries.

Around the world. There is strength in numbers.

That's 290,000 networking opportunities. 2,980,000 people ready to help you out.

But it isn't a one-way street.
It's up to all of us to give back to our university.
It's up to all of us to open doors for our GW family.
It's up to all of us to help each other out.

And the options to help each other out are endless. You can hire an intern, donate a scholarship fund, or attend a career event for students. You can speak at your favorite professor's class, cheer the loudest at a basketball game, or organize a group of friends to attend a GW reunion.

Our university is stronger, our future is brighter, and our alumni are better off when we support each other.

I look forward to helping you all out and I congratulate you on this monumental day.

[Applause]

It is now my great pleasure to introduce your student commencement speaker – Meenu Mathews.

[Cheers and Applause]

Meenu is graduating today with her BA in international affairs from GW's Elliott School.

[Cheers and Applause]

Meenu has truly made the most of her time at GW and in Washington, DC and I can't wait to hear more from this inspiring young woman.

Please welcome Meenu Mathews.

[Cheers and Applause]

MATHEWS: Good morning. President LeBlanc, Members of the Board of Trustees, students, parents, and faculty: Thank you for having me here today.

As I look out onto the National Mall, I can't help but think of my first time here. At ten years old, on a family trip to DC, I stared wide-eyed through the fence onto the White House lawn. And announced very loudly to my parents a phrase that I am sure many in the audience have already heard.

"Mom and Dad, I want to be President of the United States."

[Applause]

Exactly ten years later, During my time at GW, I, a first generation American.

[Applause]

A woman of color.

[Applause]

And now an intern in the Obama White House walked my parents through the same fence and watched as they walked through the West Wing of the White House for the first

time. In that moment, I remember thinking about how far I had come and how life had truly become full circle. Just a few years ago, I was staring out onto the same lawn that I was now standing on.

My parents, like so many others before them, gave up everything to come to this Country from India with dreams for a better future for their children. That day I was reminded how powerful their American dream that they paved for me and my baby sister really is.

[Cheers and Applause]

If there's one thing that I've learned during my time at GW, it is that each of us has the power to cross those fences, walk across lawns, and open doors that we never even dreamed we could. Because the classes, the experiences, and the opportunities that GW has given us these past few years have equipped us with the courage and the knowledge to change the world. No matter who we are or where we come from.

Looking around at our graduating class, I see the future of America. I see soldiers who will fight for our freedoms overseas. Doctors who will find a cure to cancer. Future ambassadors and cabinet members who will change course of history. And educators who will shape the lives of generations to come. I see leaders and adventurers who will make a difference not just in Washington but in the world.

But most importantly, I see classmates turned to friends, professors turned to mentors, and people who turned that once seemed so big into a home. In a few minutes, we'll toss our hats and say goodbye to a GW experience, but I know there is so much left for each and every one of us to do. But I hope that as we stand here in reflection, we take a moment to thank those who were on this road alongside us. Thank you to those who have helped us reach as high as we have. God, our friends, our mentors, thank you to our professors who have taught us more than any textbook ever could – to be leaders and global citizens.

Thank you to the staff who work tirelessly in support of the students' experience. To our administrators who keep our campus safe and clean.

[Applause]

And of course, most importantly, thank you to our families. You have been there every step of this journey. And for that reason, this accomplishment is as much yours as it is ours. Thank you because each of you, like my own family, would give up anything for this dream. And to us, to the class of 2018, we did it. And this chapter comes to a close, I am so excited to see all the things that we will continue to do and all the barriers that we will continue to break together. Thank you.

[Cheers and Applause]

MALTZMAN: Thank you very much, Meenu. Your journey inspires us all.

President LeBlanc will now confer the honorary degrees.

The recipient of the first honorary degree this morning will be introduced by Kathryn Chevalier, a candidate today for a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences.

Originally from Los Angeles, California, Kathryn is a political science major with a minor in theater.

Following graduation, she hopes to continue studying political science and civil rights law in an effort to dedicate her life to social justice and equality.

CHEVALIER: President LeBlanc, I am honored to present to you Steven Knapp, Doctor of Letters, honoris causa.

LEBLANC: Steven Knapp served as the 16th president of the George Washington University.

Dr. Knapp joined George Washington in 2007 from the Johns Hopkins University, where he served as Dean of Arts and Sciences and later Provost after more than 15 years as a distinguished faculty member at the University of California, Berkeley.

A specialist in Romanticism, literary theory and relation of literature to philosophy, he earned a bachelor's degree from Yale University and a master's degree and a doctorate from Cornell University.

In 10 years of leadership at GW, Dr. Knapp spearheaded the university's growth as a world-class research institution, including overseeing the planning for Science and Engineering Hall and fostering interdisciplinary initiatives that have the potential to revolutionize our understanding of disease and treatment.

Dr. Knapp championed public and community service, launching Freshman Day of Service, now a hallmark of the undergraduate student experience.

He led the university to meet a challenge from then-First Lady Michelle Obama to increase service hours and established a dedicated center for civic engagement and public service.

Dr. Knapp worked to expand access to a George Washington University education to students from all backgrounds and to ensure the success of enrolled students through adoption of a test-optional policy and expansion of resources and partnerships.

Through Dr. Knapp's leadership and vision, the university has become a hub for the arts in Washington, D.C., with the addition of both the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design and the George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum.

He also set the university on a course to be a model of urban sustainability through efforts such as the Capital Partnership Solar Project, an innovative renewable energy initiative to harness solar power.

Dr. Knapp launched the university's most ambitious fundraising campaign, Making History, which raised more than \$1 billion to support students, enhance academics and break new ground.

Steven Knapp in recognition of all the foregoing, and by virtue of the authority granted by the Congress of the United States of America, vested in the Board of Trustees of the George Washington University, I hereby confer.

On you the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, and declare you fully entitled to all its rights, honors, privileges and responsibilities.

[Applause]

KNAPP: Thanks so much.

Chair Carbonell; President LeBlanc; Provost Maltzman; distinguished colleagues; friends and family members; class of 2018!

I'm deeply grateful to the faculty and the Board of Trustees for this very special honor. This is the 11th time I've been on stage for a GW Commencement, but the very first that I've been on the receiving rather than the giving end of the ceremony.

I have to say, it's a very humbling experience!

When I traveled over the course of a decade across the country and around the world meeting alumni, parents, and friends of the university, the question I was asked more often than any other was what had most surprised and impressed me about GW? Was it the location? Well, what other institution in the world can beat this location for commencement?

Was it the front-row seat in the theater of history that we, more than any other American university, could offer our students – the opportunity, for instance, to hear directly from the President of France on his first state visit?

Was it the breadth and complexity of a university with a student body approaching 30,000?

My answer was always the same, and it still is.

What impressed more than anything else was our students. We've heard a little bit about that from you, and you will understand what I mean.

I know my wife Diane, who is here today along with my daughter Sarah, her husband Efrain, and their three young daughters, would agree!

In my previous job as the provost of another institution, I spent most of my time with faculty. And enjoyable as that can be, distinguished colleagues.

[Applause]

It can't quite match the energy and inspiration that a president inevitably draws from the students who come year after year to this great university in the heart of the greatest capital city in the world, and who come because they care about this nation and the many other nations from which we draw them, and because they want to learn how to change the world.

Just last week, I had an opportunity to meet with four students, all women as it happens, who had just finished or were just beginning projects applying what they learned in the classroom to solving real world problems and making a difference in the lives of others.

One was a junior who had developed a program for addressing food waste in Washington's schools and using that opportunity to expose public school students to the deep connections between social, environmental, and food justice.

Another, who graduates today with a master's in public health, had just returned from India, where she worked in a program to persuade young boys to support Education of their sisters and female cousins.

A third is studying the resiliency of international students across the Potomac in face the challenge of learning English and making their way in a new culture. And the fourth is developing a data base, mapping project, and mobile application to help Native American families and tribal leaders address the tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women in the US and Canada.

I was no longer surprised to encounter such students, but I was as moved and inspired as always.

I earnestly hope that all you who are graduating today, whether or not you undertook individual projects of that kind during your time at GW, will carry the spirit of service into whatever you do next.

As I said ten years ago and meant every time, "Graduates, you are our future. You really are!"

Thank you.

[Applause]

LEBLANC: Our second honorary degree recipient will be introduced by Lauren Bell. Lauren is a candidate today for her Bachelor of Arts degree from the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences.

She is a double major, studying psychology and organizational sciences.

She has been a leader in our campus community, involving herself in roles dedicated to service and mentorship.

And she says that to her parent's delight, she graduates having accepted a full-time job as a digital strategist beginning in June.

BELL: President LeBlanc, I am honored to present to you Elana Meyers Taylor, Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa.

[Cheers and Applause]

LEBLANC: A native of Georgia, Elana Meyers Taylor grew up a talented athlete, the daughter of one of the greatest running backs in U.S. Naval Academy history. She decided she wanted to be an Olympian at age 11 when the Summer Games came to her hometown of Atlanta.

In 2003, Ms. Meyers Taylor arrived at the George Washington University as an undergraduate student and the university's first softball recruit.

She was an exceptional student-athlete, finishing her collegiate softball career as the all-time GW leader in nearly every offensive category.

She was twice named Atlantic 10 Student-Athlete of the Year for softball and honored as an Academic All-American.

Ms. Meyers Taylor is a two-time GW alumna, earning first a bachelor's degree in 2006 and then a master's degree in tourism administration in 2011.

She was the first softball alumna inducted into the GW Athletics Hall of Fame, and her number, 24, has been retired.

Ms. Meyers Taylor turned to bobsled in 2007 at her parents' suggestion after softball was cut as an Olympic sport. She auditioned for the national bobsled team and were invited to join.

In the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver Ms. Meyers Taylor earned her first Olympic medal—a bronze. Four years later, in 2014 she was on the Olympic podium again, winning silver in Sochi. Earlier this year, Ms. Meyers Taylor became the first American woman to win three Olympic bobsled medals, earning another silver in PyeongChang.

In addition to the Olympic medals, she has also won four world championships in bobsled. Ms. Meyers Taylor has been an inspiration to our student-athletes who greatly appreciate visits to her alma mater and the opportunity to learn from her.

Her competitive spirit and persistence embody the Olympic and the Colonial spirit.

Elana Meyers Taylor in recognition of all the foregoing, and by virtue of the authority granted by the Congress of the United States of America, vested in the Board of Trustees of the George Washington University, I hereby confer on you the degree of Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa, and declare you fully entitled to all its rights, honors, privileges and responsibilities. Congratulations!

[Cheers and Applause]

MEYERS TAYLOR: What a gorgeous day, everyone. Couldn't ask for better weather. Well, it's an absolute honor to be here. Thank you. Thank you, everyone. I never would've thought I would be standing in front of all of you. So, students, look to your left. Look to your right. You never know who will be in my shoes next. Might make for a long ceremony, though. I can honestly say I never thought I would be up here. It is a huge honor to be here looking at graduates from the School of Public Health.

[Applause]

And the School of Business.

[Cheers and Applause]

It's an honor to share this day with you all. I don't have a lot of time up here today, but I wanted to share a quick story with you. And, unfortunately, or fortunately as you'll find out, it's about a very bad day.

In July of 2004, I had the opportunity of a lifetime. It was the combination of the SATs, the ACTs, the LSATs and the bar exam for the Olympics.

I had the opportunity to try out for the U.S. Olympic softball team. The tryout was held in Oregon, so I drove up to Oregon with my father to prepare for the tryout. As nervous as I was, I knew this was going to be my shot. I was trying out for the 2008 Olympic team, and this was the last time softball would be offered into the Olympics. So, I knew this was my opportunity. I had dreamed of being an Olympian my entire life, so I wanted to take full advantage of it.

But I was nervous. And as nervous as I was, I went into that tryout and tried to give it all I had. Moments before the tryout, my father looked at me, and he said simple and he said "I

know you're nervous, but you're a better athlete than I ever was. Just do this. Believe in yourself and go out there and play well with others.

Unfortunately, as good as I was, I did not play well with others. Ball after ball passed my bat. Ball after ball, I swung and missed. I struck out time and time again. And as devastated as I was, I thought my Olympic dreams were over. I walked away from that tryout with tears in my eyes. I thought my Olympic dream had ended. As I sat in the car that evening, tears streaming down my face, myself sobbing uncontrollably, I thought it was over. And my father looked at me and said, "Everything happens for a reason. You don't know why this is happening right now, but it happened for a reason, and you will come out of this. You will bounce back even stronger."

So as devastated as I was, I had a choice to make. What would I do with this devastation?

Oddly enough, it was my mother who came up with the next brilliant idea. My mother was sitting down one day and watching television. And on television, she saw a young woman competing in the sport of bobsled. She looked at the TV and said "Yeah, this is something my baby could do." And she put that idea in my head that my Olympic dream was not over, and it wasn't.

So, on her advice, I Googled bobsled. Thank goodness for Google and found the coach's e-mail address and quickly sent him a response. And a few short days after that, I was headed to New York where I would find that my Olympic dream wasn't over. It was a lot of hard work, determination, and, yes, some bad days, I was able to live the dream of a lifetime. Now, I don't have time to share all the details, but I got very good at pushing heavily things very fast and running on ice. I have since then gone around the world and lived my dreams. I have met some amazing people, including my husband.

[Applause]

And I have been blessed to wear the team USA uniform proudly on my back and win a couple Olympic medals.

[Cheers and Applause]

I have often been asked what it feels like to stand on a Olympic podium. And I can tell you it feels a lot like this. I am extremely honored to be here today to share this moment with all of you.

But, if I can leave you with one piece of advice, it's this: As you sit here today, we're really not all that different. I've sat in chairs just like you, I've dreamed just like you have. I don't know what your dream is, and I don't know what comes next for you, but I know that all of you should continue to dream.

One of the most valuable lessons I've learned since I graduated is that of perspective. It's a lesson that I continued to learn to this day. And, if you've got parents in the audience, they have tons of it. And if you're fortunate enough to have grandparents in the audience, they have stockpiles of it.

So, I'll close with question. Take a second to think about your dream, whatever it may be. What are you going to do when your bad day arrives? It will. What will you do when your bad day arrives? I'll offer you two suggestions. First, listen to your mom. And, number two; keep in mind that sometimes a very bad day can be the best thing to ever happen to you.

Congratulations to the class of 2018. Thank you.

[Applause]

LEBLANC: Our final honorary degree recipient will be introduced by Michael Ramirez.

[Cheers and Applause]

Michael is originally from Crofton, Maryland. He is a candidate today for a Bachelor of Accountancy degree with a minor in Applied Ethics from the GW School of Business.

After interning at the Department of Homeland Security, Michael will be going to work there full-time and plans to also attend GW for graduate school in the fall.

RAMIREZ: President LeBlanc, I am honored to present to you Marcia McNutt, Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa.

LEBLANC: Marcia McNutt grew up in Minnesota in a family that valued education for girls and women.

Encouraged by her parents, she excelled academically and graduated as valedictorian of her high school class. Dr. McNutt studied physics at Colorado College and then earned a doctorate in Earth sciences and geophysics from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, where she pursued her interest in plate tectonics and how the Earth behaves under stress.

She began her academic career with a professorship at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology.

During her 15-year tenure at MIT, she held the position of the E.A. Griswold Professor of Geophysics and directed the Joint Program in Oceanography/Applied Ocean Science & Engineering, a partnership between the university and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

Dr. McNutt left MIT in 2000 to lead the Monterey Bay Aquarium Institute. Under her direction, the institute became a leader in developing biological and chemical sensors for remote ocean deployment, installed the first deep-sea cable observatory in U.S. waters and advanced the integration of artificial intelligence into autonomous underwater vehicles.

In 2005, in recognition of her scholarship, she was elected to the National Academy of Sciences.

In 2009, then-President Obama appointed Dr. McNutt to head the U.S. Geological Survey.

In four years as director, she oversaw the agency's responses to major disasters, including devastating earthquakes in Haiti and Japan and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Dr. McNutt was awarded the U.S. Coast Guard's Meritorious Service Medal for her efforts. After three years as editor-in-chief of the prestigious Science family of journals, she was elected the president of the National Academy of Sciences in 2015.

The following year, she became the first woman to head one of the national academics. Dr. McNutt's many honors include membership in the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

She also served as president of the American Geophysical Union and is a fellow of the American Geophysical Union, the Geological Society of America, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the International Association of Geodesy.

Dr. McNutt has dedicated herself throughout her career to furthering inquiry and scientific discovery.

She is a role model for all aspiring researchers.

Marcia McNutt in recognition of all the foregoing, and by virtue of the authority granted by the Congress of the United States of America, vested in the Board of Trustees of the George Washington University, I hereby confer on you the degree of Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa, and declare you fully entitled to all its rights, honors, privileges and responsibilities.

[Cheers and Applause]

Please join me in giving a warm GW welcome to our commencement speaker.

MCNUTT: Good morning, graduates, parents, family, friends, faculty, and honored guests!

Certainly, I am the one most honored here today, given the special privilege of being your commencement speaker.

I was actually so thrilled to be asked to speak to you all here today that the first thing I did was I immediately told my three daughters about this. And here was their response if you can show it up on the JumboTron. And I know it's pretty bright out there, and you probably can't see what they said.

But they said, "We want a Michelle encore. So, I tried not to be too disappointed in my daughter's reaction. After all, we all adore the former first lady.

[Cheers and Applause]

I mean, you know, of course. So, I turned to my faithful and trusted canine buddies, and confided in them my excitement.

Here was their response: Now, for those of you who can't read what they said, it was, "We want Ruffles."

I thought "Even you?" But you know, I don't know adorable little ruffles very well, and I'm sure he's probably a very sweet little guy. But my own dogs who live on our ranch in California don't always display the best judgment. Especially when it comes to personal hygiene. They spend their days jumping into stinky pig manure, so I really questioned what kind of advice they would pass onto you, so I decided it was best to go with the original plan to personally deliver this address, rather than offer my spot to Ruffles.

Now, back to first lady Michelle Obama, nearly everyone's choice to give this encore today. Before she addressed GW's graduating class of 2010, she challenged that class to an amazing 100,000 hours of community service. Which they delivered. Yeah. Yay, class of 2010!

Now, I also have a challenge for you, class of 2018. I challenge you to become beacons of hope. I challenge you to become beacons of hope in your careers and your families and

your communities and in the world. And I want you to become beacons of hope at a time when many in the U.S. and the rest of the world are losing home.

William Barclay, who was a 20th century Scottish professor said that there are two great days in a person's life. The day we are born and the day we discover why. The diploma that you will be given today from this great university is a powerful tool for you to discover your why. I want you to find it and use it to bring hope back into this world. So why am I here enlisting you in an army of hope? In late 2016, something unusual and almost unprecedented happened in the United States.

Life expectancy of Americans, after decades of gains, began to decline.

The main culprit: Opioids.

According to statistics from the Department of Health and Human Services, every day 116 people die from opioid overdoses, many being middle-aged Americans otherwise in the prime of their lives.

The opioid epidemic defies easy answers. But, experts agree drug abuse is on the rise. So, what lies at the root. Professor of Psychology at Harvard and popular author included a chapter on progressive phobia or fear of progress in his recent book entitled enlightenment now. Argues that a consequence of progressive phobia is the belief that we need to return to glory days of the past. Losing sight of the fact that America and the rest of the world are and continue to be getting better when viewed by historical standards. At a macro level, tinker is right. Has been decreasing throughout the world. Most diseases have been brought under control through vaccines. Thanks, public health.

[Cheers and Applause]

Yeah, you. Widespread availability of antibiotics. Globally today more people die from overeating than from starvation. We each have the knowledge of the world available at our fingertips from our cell phones. Thanks, School of Engineering.

[Cheers and Applause]

People have the prospects of being able to live longer, healthier, and more productively than any previous time in human history. 100 years ago, farmers were 30 percent of the American workforce. Today, it's less than 2 percent. Advances in agricultural science and technology have resulted in a migration from rural America to city bringing up more citizens to be bobsledders or artists or astronauts or poets or whatever they want to be.

But, how do we inspire young people to see those doors that are opening ahead, rather than the doors that are closing behind? Especially if they are embedded in a community that is suffering from an epidemic of disrepair.

So, I'm arguing today that hope is the best antidote to that epidemic of disrepair. That in order to give hope, we first have to acknowledge that the concerns about progress and those being left behind are real. Data shows that inequality in America has been growing steadily for the last 35 years. Far too many individuals believe that the American dream is dying and that they see that hard work and perseverance is not enough to rise up from disadvantaged beginnings.

Let me tell you about a woman that I was pleased to meet at the national academy named Freda Polly who is the CEO of a startup. At a time when too many experts in AI and newer

science are using their skills to try to get people to click on an ad, she is instead providing hope for those who aspire to the American dream.

She applies newer neuroscience gaming and artificial intelligence to make hiring decisions. The beauty of it is that it eliminates the bias inherent in hiring based on the standard résumé.

And, the result is that her clients find that her approach leads to a high-performing workforce.

And, most important, a workforce that naturally mirrors the diversity of America.

As an example, one of her clients hired into a top-paying job, a new employee whose only prior experience had been as a stock boy. And yet that stock boy performed well or better on the neuroscience gaining as the company's top performers. The firm actually needed to alter their reimbursing policy to compensate that new hire up front for moving expenses. Because on a stock boy's salary, he couldn't afford the airfare to take the job.

So, this is hope for anyone when all they're asking for is an even break. But it's not just here in the U.S. that we need to provide an antidote to despair. Enterprising people are finalized to bring hope directly to those struggling abroad and their home nations.

The success of a pioneer in microlending is now the stuff of legend. Founded by Jessica and Matt who heard a business school lecture on microfinance and knew right away it was the answer to improving the lives of many hard-working entrepreneurs they had met while traveling in Africa and India.

These people didn't need donations. They needed loans. Very small loans. Just tens of dollars to grow their businesses. Jessica and Matt answered the call to action and now have provided hope in the form of more than \$1 billion to nearly 3 million borrowers and 85 countries around the globe. All financed through crowd sourcing with no interest. The repayment rate for these loans is an astounding 97 percent. This is hope not a handout. It gives people the strength to lift themselves up knowing that tomorrow will be a better day.

As another example I remembered many years ago standing on a deck near my home in California looking over the valley, there to support some wildlife veterinarians who were part of a hail marry to rescue African animals and sequester them away on private ranches where they would be safe from poaching.

The pact of the landowners and the children that it was finally safe to move back to their homes that the descendants of those original refugees would be reintroduced to their former range. I wonder if I would ever live to see their plan fulfilled. I learned last week that in celebration of eight years of peace, the black Rhino now roams the National Park in Chad for the first time in nearly 50 years.

[Applause]

This animal is hope for tourism and prosperity following decades of civil war and strife. Even more amazing is the kind of hope that is realized from collective actions when citizens feel empowered to change the course of their lives. It is empowerment from collective action that keeps diversity strong.

We've seen so many examples of collective action in the last year. The 'me too' movement from sexual harassment out of the shadows and into the daylight. First in the entertainment industry and then in the halls of Congress, it has even spread to academia.

As the anthropologist Margaret said never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. As I see the 'me too' movement sweeping in a change of cultural reforms where recourse have repeatedly failed, I would like to think that Margaret is looking down and smiling.

[Applause]

The reason I became a scientist is because of the hope it brings for a better tomorrow. I view the science, technology, and innovation can provide solutions to the zero-sum gain. In other words, one person getting ahead doesn't come at the expense of someone else losing ground.

When science is applied with important care and aforethought. More abundant catches for fisherman men with less efforts. The so-called triple bottom line if we use science to manage the oceans as a precious, sustainable resource rather than as a one-time race to grab that last fish in the sea.

A few decades ago, I met biologist Robert when we were asked to be co-organizers of a meeting of early career researchers. He told me about his work with stem cells, a biological cell that is not yet stimulated to become a skin cell or whatever. At that point he was at an early point of developing these cells, most often harvested from umbilical cords turning them into whatever kind of cell he wanted them to be.

To me, it sounded like magic. Well, what was magic then has now progressed clinical application. The most common being stem cell therapy for bone marrow transplant but many other applications are now on the horizon to cure neurodegenerative diseases, diabetes, and heart disease. For people with debilitating and chronic conditions, research like this is a profound source of hope. And I still think magic.

Hope can come in the form of just throwing someone a lifeline. I know for a fact I would not be standing before you today had it not been for the hope that a professor handed me many years ago. As the only woman among the first-year graduate students in geophysics, he knew the deck was stacked against me. Far too many women before me had failed because of the male culture that was not welcoming. So, he sent me to Navy SEAL team school my first summer to learn explosive training. After I graduated first in the class, upon returning to geophysics, I had no problem with the male culture.

[Laughter]

And no one messed with me.

[Laughter]

[Cheers and Applause]

My prospects turned out to be a completed degree and I tried for the years after to repay that favor forward with my own students and my daughter and the other women that I came in contact with. The moral is hope is contagious, and it's a good kind of contagion.

So, hope is actually all around us but there's still not enough of it. The good news is that each of you graduates here today has just the skills you need to become an agent of hope. A recent report from the national academy advocates that citizens of the 21st century will benefit from an education integrating the arts, the humanities, the sciences,

and the social sciences. The type of education provided by George Washington University.

Because hope can inspire when you can dream like the artist. Show the heart of the humanist formulate solutions with the inside of the scientist and execute projects with the pro significance of the engineer. I heard a former Navy SEAL say that just the sound of an approaching helicopter would be enough to rally the vital sounds of a grievously wounded comrade. Often enough for that soldier to hang on until the medics could treat his injuries. Something as simple as that helicopter sound, and he lives to fight another day. Godspeed, to you class of 2018! I charge you to be that helicopter.

[Cheers and Applause]

MALTZMAB: Thank you. Your words give us hope. Graduates, commencement is a time to celebrate your accomplishment. It is my hope that this educational journey as you live a life of inquiry, discovery and service.

President LeBlanc, I invite you to join me at the podium to offer your charge to the graduating class of 2018.

LEBLANC: I now have the honor of welcoming our new graduates to the lifelong and worldwide community of George Washington University alumni, now numbering more than 290 thousand.

Class of 2018, you are an exceptional group of motivated, hard-working individuals. During your time at GW, you pursued scholarship with focus, learned with wonder and debated with respect.

You collaborated with one another, and with your faculty and staff mentors.

You created knowledge and used it to build bridges and cross borders.

You sought excellence.

You took risks.

You chose to lead.

Today, I charge you to keep alive that commitment to leadership, as you pursue whatever it is that makes you happy.

As the leaders of your generation, remember, as President Macron told you last month: "At the end of the day, you will be the one to decide." I charge you to always keep learning—with open eyes, mind and heart.

Read, study, and listen first—then question and debate.

Accept others'.

And show them your respect, offer them your empathy.

I think you'll find that during a lifelong journey of learning, what you discover will change you.

I charge you to embrace that change—in opinion or in your life’s path— while never forgetting where you came from, how you got here and those who supported you along the way.

Class of 2018, I know that through your many and varied contributions to society, and in service to others, you will continue to bring distinction not only to yourselves but also to your families, to your communities around the world and, beginning now, to your alma mater.

Congratulations!
[Cheers and Applause]

MALTZMAN: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. Now the president of the university will confer the associates bachelors, master's, doctoral, and professional degrees.

I ask the Deans to rise and come forward in the order of the founding of their schools.
Graduates: As your Dean announces degrees from your college or school, please rise and remain standing until all the degrees of the university are called.

[The Deans of the 10 schools that comprise The George Washington University each stood and presented their students]

[Band played theme music for the university’s alma mater]

LEBLANC: As a symbol of your graduation you may move your tassel from the right to the left as a sign that you have graduated.

Congratulations to all graduates.

[University fight song and recessional]

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