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“Our Greatest Inheritance”—2018 Commencement Address

Mike Pence

Vice President of the United States



MIKE PENCE is the 48th vice president of the United States. A native of Columbus, Indiana, he earned a bachelor's degree in history from Hanover College and a juris doctor from the Indiana University School of Law. After graduating, he practiced law, served as president of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, and hosted a syndicated talk radio show and a weekly television public affairs program. He was elected to Congress from Indiana's Sixth Congressional District in 2000 and served for six terms. In 2012, he was elected the 50th governor of Indiana.

The following is adapted from a speech delivered on May 12, 2018, at Hillsdale College's 166th Commencement ceremony.

To the Board of Trustees, to the members of this remarkable faculty, to all the distinguished honorees and guests, to the proud parents, family members, and friends gathered here, and most importantly, to the extraordinary men and women seated before me today, the Class of 2018—thank you for the honor of addressing this 166th Commencement ceremony at this beacon of liberty and American ideals that is Hillsdale College.

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Let me begin by sharing a message from a good friend of mine, who’s also a great admirer of Hillsdale College: I bring greetings and congratulations from the 45th President of the United States, President Donald Trump.

I’ve always marveled at Hillsdale College’s long, and often lonely, stand for freedom in America. This College was founded at a time of great consequence in the life of our nation—a time when Americans were deeply divided over the meaning and purpose of our country, and over the question of whether, as the Declaration of Independence says, we are, all of us, “created equal.”

For the founders of Hillsdale College, the principles of the American Founding were universally true—true for all people and true at all times. So upon its founding in 1844, this College became the first to prohibit, in its charter, any discrimination based on race, sex, or national origin. In the words of its Articles of Association, Hillsdale was established to provide “sound learning” of the kind needed to preserve the “inestimable blessings” of “civil and religious liberty and intelligent piety”—and so Hillsdale has done in every era since.

Inscribed in a Bible placed in the cornerstone of Central Hall are the words: “May earth be better and heaven be richer because of the life and labor of Hillsdale College.” And I know these words will continue to ring true for generations to come because of the men

and women of the Hillsdale College Class of 2018.

You are an extraordinary group of men and women who have accomplished extraordinary things in your time here, and you’ve only just begun. You are 366 strong, you represent 37 states and five countries, and you’ve persevered through one of the most challenging and transformative educations in the country.

Although it seems, at times, that we live in an age of grim relativism, this class has seen the power of unchanging truth to change lives. You’ve learned the vital importance of character, that it is essential for self-government, and that right conduct is its own reward.

It also seems, at times, that we live in an age when too many disregard the wisdom of the past. But here at Hillsdale you’ve been grounded in the teachings and traditions that are our greatest inheritance as Americans—the same teachings and traditions that are the surest foundation of a boundless American future.

Today you will receive a diploma that has been minted in independence and tempered with truth. It is a day of celebration, but it’s also a day of appreciation—especially for those who believed in you and helped bring you to this day: your friends, your professors, and of course, your wonderful families.

Today you will graduate and enter new careers and endeavors. And before I go further, I’d like to take a moment to talk about what good timing you have.

You’ll be glad to know that the

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[Latin]: in the first place

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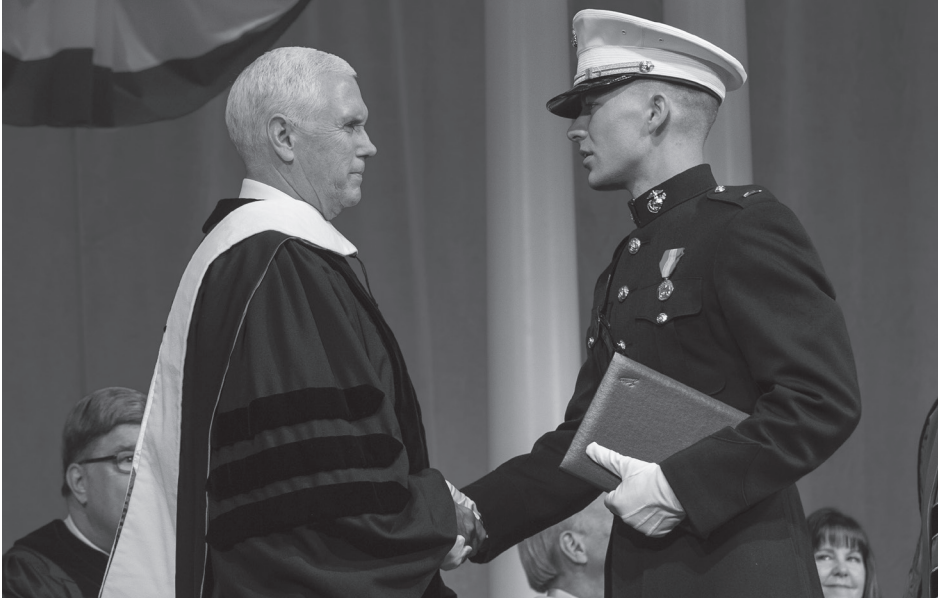
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Vice President Pence congratulates 2018 graduate and newly commissioned U.S. Marine Corps 2nd Lieutenant Mitchell Moutard.



A capacity crowd attended the Commencement ceremony in Hillsdale's Margot V. Biermann Athletic Center.



Nathan Gill and Kathleen Thompson became the first students to earn a Ph.D. in politics from Hillsdale College's Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship.

America that awaits your energies and ambitions is experiencing a new era of opportunity and optimism. You are graduating at a time of a growing American economy and restored American stature at home and abroad. And I can personally attest, from my travels across this nation, that faith in America is rising once again.

On the world stage, we've seen America embracing our role as leader of the free world—with action just this week on Iran and North Korea. And on Monday, America will lead again when we open our new American embassy in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel.

Here at home, businesses large and small are growing again. More than 3.1 million new jobs have been created in the last 15 months, unemployment is at a 17-year low, and there are more job openings in America than ever before in our history.

This is no accident. Faith in America is on the rise because President Trump and our administration have been returning America to the principles that have always been the source of our national greatness and strength. We've been expanding freedom, cutting taxes, rolling back the regulatory state, and returning authority to the people and to the states. We've been upholding the Constitution and defending the God-given liberties enshrined in our Declaration of Independence, including the unalienable right to life.

The truth is, when you leave this place, you're going to find an America filled with promise, being built anew on a foundation of personal responsibility and individual freedom.

And faith itself is on the rise in America as well. Despite the fact that we live in a time when traditional values and religious convictions are increasingly marginalized by a secular popular culture—a time when it has become acceptable, even fashionable, to malign religious belief—I believe with all my heart that Americans' faith in God is growing.

People who know me well know that I'm a Christian, a conservative, and a Republican—in that order. As the Good Book says, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. In fact, it was 40 years ago this spring that I put my faith in Christ as a freshman at another liberal arts college not very far from here. And while, in some areas of society, deeply held religious belief is growing rare, leading to claims that America's rich faith tradition will soon be a relic—it just isn't so. Faith is rising across America: in communities large and small, in good times and in times of great hardship, the faith of the American people shines forth.

I see this as I travel across this great land, as countless Americans take the time to tell us, often with great emotion, the sweetest of words: "I'm praying for you." And I see it right now, right here, at Hillsdale College—an institution founded by those who proclaimed themselves "grateful to God for [His] inestimable blessings."

Even as many continue to forecast the decline of religion in American life, the truth is, as President Trump recently said, this is a nation of faith—and faith continues to exert an extraordinary hold on the hearts and minds of our people.

The percentage of Americans who live out their religion on a weekly basis—praying, going to church, reading the Bible—has remained remarkably consistent over the decades, even as the population of the United States has grown by leaps and bounds. And for my part, I've long believed that nothing is more important to our nation's future.

Faith has always been the wellspring of hope for millions of Americans. It has been the foundation of our freedom as well. Our Founders recognized religious faith as essential to maintaining our republic. In the words of our nation's first Vice President, John Adams: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

The Young Jane Austen:
Northanger Abbey

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This is not a new thought to those gathered here. Hillsdale is a place where faith flourishes. Indeed, I note with admiration that Hillsdale will soon complete construction of its new Christ Chapel, which will be the largest college chapel built in America in almost 100 years.

As all of you can attest, here at Hillsdale, students and professors of many different faith traditions sharpen one another, just as “iron sharpens iron.” And as you prepare to leave this special place, I encourage you to take your convictions into every facet of your lives. Add your voices and your convictions to this great American experiment.

Class of 2018: At Hillsdale College, you have received an education uniquely grounded in American ideals. But as the Bible says, “to whom much is given, much will be required”—and so it is with each of you. Your education in the liberal arts has equipped you to conserve the foundations of our freedom, and you are now uniquely suited—and I believe you are uniquely called—to renew the fabric of our national life with your character and with your ideals.

This is an ongoing and monumental task—a task not for the faint of heart or the small-minded. It will require courage and tenacity and greatness of spirit. At times, you will face opposition, even ridicule, for taking a stand for what you know to be right. But to quote Hillsdale’s motto, “Strength rejoices in the challenge.”

And remember, the most heroic acts and the greatest feats aren’t the stuff of headlines and fame. They’re actually to be found in the daily choices that you’ll make and the habits that you’ve already begun to form.

So let me urge you, with the greatest respect, to continue to grow as men and women of character. Continue to forge friendships that will help you grow and pursue what’s right. Form strong, vibrant, and loving families—the foundation of our free society, where we pass along our cherished values to the next generation. Continue to build strong communities, those “little platoons” that shape the citizens within them—and, in the process, shape America.

Let me also encourage you to have faith—faith in yourselves, proven by what you have accomplished to get to this day; faith in the principles and the ideals that you learned here, the principles and ideals that bind us together as a people and give purpose to our nation; and faith that America is rising, and that you have a role to play in “redeeming the time.”

And lastly, I pray that you’ll leave this place with faith in God. As Winston Churchill reflected in his speech to Congress in 1941, “Some great purpose and design is being worked out here below, of which we have the honor to be faithful servants.”

Trust that He who brought you this far will never leave you, nor forsake you, because He never will. If you hold fast to Him, if you live according to all that you have learned and the examples that you have seen in this special place, if you rededicate yourselves to the noble mission that has always animated the graduates of this College, I know that once we get done making this nation great again, your generation will make America greater than ever before.

Congratulations to the Class of 2018. You did it. This day is yours. Your future starts today. God bless you. God bless Hillsdale College. And God bless the United States of America. ■