Good afternoon members of the faculty, fellow students, families and friends. Thank you for the opportunity to give this address.

This is an emotional day for many of us. Faculty, perhaps you are feeling a sense of satisfaction. You have achieved your goal—as the esteemed Fox News reported last year—of “indoctrinating” us with your “liberal bias.”

Families and friends, I am sure you are incredibly proud to see us succeed at a world-class university. But I imagine you will have cause for concern later today when you realize that you are sending us out into a world where a man whose longest sentence is “Make America great again,” could be our next president.

Fellow students, you must be feeling invincible. Today you can take your first steps towards “galactic conquest.” Yes, someone did actually write that on the survey I sent out about post-graduation plans.

When thinking about what to say to you today, I realized that any one of you could be up here giving this speech in my place. What could I tell students heading to top law schools, taking on positions in banking and finance, working in international non-profits and assisting with political campaigns that you didn’t already know?

But as I was crossing off my last college assignment in my Cornell planner, it hit me. There in the top left-hand corner was one of those motivational quotations that you usually just flip past and ignore. But this time I took notice. “Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.” Mark Twain. These words seemed to
perfectly sum up what this government major—and indeed our entire Cornell experience—has taught us.

First, it has taught us to think critically about the information presented to us in the media and in scholarship, and to question the assumptions on which our political views lie. The beauty of this school is that in a single classroom we may come head-to-head with an incredible diversity of views. I arrived at Cornell from England my freshman year knowing next to nothing about politics outside of Europe. I have come to love and appreciate the breadth of discussion possible here.

Second, the government major has taught us to challenge the status quo. We live in an imperfect world. Wars happen, demagogues arise out of the ashes of nationwide despair and regime changes leave instability that drives people from their homes and families.

Even in the United States—one of the most prosperous and arguably the most powerful nation in the world—there are still so many issues to address.

- Forty-five million people in the U.S. live in poverty amidst vast wealth inequality.
- Pervasive racism and police brutality subject certain minority groups to fear every day.
- Our broken immigration system and overcrowded prison system are in desperate need of reform.
- Women still earn only 79 cents to every dollar earned by men.
- And twenty percent of the U.S. population still believe climate change is a myth.

But we can challenge these things, because our study of government has given us optimism about our ability to affect change. It has given us the tools and confidence to advocate for the issues we care about, and united us in our passion for making a difference.
Looking out at this graduating class, I have hope for the future. Every one of us has found at least one issue that we care about on this campus or in the community.

- We have worked with the Cornell Police to make students feel safer on this campus.
- We have volunteered with the Cornell Prison Education Program.
- We have tackled the most pressing issues of the day as members of the debate team.
- We have logged hundreds of community service hours through the Public Service Center and Alpha Phi Omega, and through international service learning programs.
- And some of us finally passed Cornell’s required swim test just in time to graduate.

Today, as you get ready to leave the Hill, I offer you this advice. Never lose that passion. Channel the tools your study of government at Cornell has given you. We owe most changes in history to individuals who dared to speak up and challenge the way things were, from the end of slavery in America 150 years ago to the legalization of same sex marriage last year. So take time to stop and reflect on what you hope to achieve. And above all never be afraid to stand outside the majority.

I want to end by simply saying thank you. To our families and friends, thank you for instilling in us integrity and a spirit of inquiry, and for laying the foundation for our education. To the exceptional government faculty, thank you for being our mentors and for supporting the next generation of leaders. To my fellow students, it has been a privilege to share this campus with you. Thank you for broadening my perspective—on politics and on life. I am confident that the world will be stronger with you at the helm, breaking down barriers in everything you do.

And with that, I just have four more words to say: “Class of 2016 out.”