



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on May 7, 2013

Obama Defends Big Government in Ohio State Commencement Address

Despite his insistence that politics have no place in commencement addresses, President Obama again extended his dedication to partisanship when he spoke to the graduating class at Ohio State University about their future, while defending the government's general role in society and the economy. The president insisted that anti-government statements are nothing more than rhetoric used to "gum up the works" and are intended only to damage community, civic duty, and economic progress.



An audience of over 57,000 almost filled the university's football stadium for the ceremony, 10,000 of whom were expected to receive their diplomas. While emphasizing the economic peril that has burdened their generation — asserting his age-old "worst since the Great Depression" catchphrase — Obama reminded the class of 2013 of the utmost importance of serving their communities.

Obama's Sunday excursion to Ohio University was his fifth to the campus in the past year — as he worked tirelessly to court young voters during the 2012 election cycle — but his first visit in his second term, which has been ridden with a number of contentious political issues, including immigration, gun control, and the ongoing woes of the federal deficit. The president heatedly defended his big-government ideology to graduates, advising them to ignore statements that discourage government expansion.

"Unfortunately, you've grown up hearing voices that incessantly warn of government as nothing more than some separate, sinister entity that's at the root of all our problems," Obama [said](#) at the commencement ceremony. "They'll warn that tyranny is always lurking just around the corner. You should reject these voices."

The president also imparted his belief that the economy is continuing its recovery and that hope lingers on the horizon for young working Americans. Contending that employment is on the rise, he insisted that Americans have "a sense of civic duty," and that newer generations will help thrust the United States deeper into prosperity with individual compassion and an influx of new ideas:

While things are still hard for a lot of people, you have every reason to believe that your future is bright. You're graduating into an economy and a job market that is steadily healing....

You have been tested and tempered by events that your parents and I never imagined we'd see when we sat where you sit. And yet, despite all this — or more likely because of it — yours has become a generation possessed with that most American of ideas: that people who love their country can change it for the better.

Pointing to the responses to Hurricane Sandy and the Boston bombings as examples, Obama made a pitch for civic responsibility, emphasizing the importance of community service and participation in



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public life. Above all, the president stressed, young people need to “break through the cycle of cynicism” that too often impairs progress in the country.

Critics have pointed out that while optimism may be a virtue, realism and awareness also remain critical to the national dialogue, particularly relating to the political sphere and the general state of the economy. Student loan debt, for example, is rising at an alarming rate, with some economists predicting that it could spur another economic crisis, much like the housing crisis that helped spawn the 2007 recession.

From 2005 to 2012, student loan debt [spiked](#) from \$364 billion to a whopping \$904 billion, strapping college students with an average of \$26,600 in loan debt — up from only \$14,000 in 2004 — upon graduation. Currently, a startling [17 percent](#) of student loan borrowers are delinquent on their payments, a notably higher delinquency rate than most other forms of debt. “Student debt is the only kind of household debt that continued to rise through the Great Recession and has now the second largest balance after mortgage debt,” according to a recent [report](#) issued by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

Of course, beyond the student loan-debt debacle is the federal government’s insatiable desire to spend. And while nearly [\\$17 trillion](#) in national debt is nothing to sneeze at, the growing burden of government entitlements, if left unchecked, could spell doom for the future economy. Not including the unfunded liabilities of ObamaCare, “The actual liabilities of the federal government — including Social Security, Medicare, and federal employees’ future retirement benefits — already exceed \$86.8 trillion, or 550% of GDP,” according to a *Wall Street Journal* [article](#) last November.

Beyond these general economic implications, Obama’s regard for the role of government stands at odds with the beliefs of the Founding Fathers and the principles they wove into the U.S. Constitution. The structure of the U.S. government does not center on a trust in man, in fact, but on limiting — via a written Constitution, separation of powers, and a litany of checks and balances — the political powers that man may exercise.

As Thomas Jefferson [noted](#) in the Kentucky Resolutions, “In questions of power, then, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution.”

James Madison echoed Jefferson’s argument in [The Federalist, No. 51](#), asserting that in curbing the abuses of despotic power, those who administer each department of government must be provided “the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others.”

“The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place,” Madison resolved. “It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government.”



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