

# **“This is Your Moment – Now is Your Time”**

**Commencement speech delivered by Ann M. Keehn, Director of Operations,  
Health Services Division, and Senior Consultant, John Snow, Inc.,  
to the 2021 and 2020 graduates of the  
College of Business Administration, Kansas State University,  
May 16, 2021, Bill Snyder Family Stadium, Manhattan, Kansas**

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## **EXCERPT 1**

To President Myers and Provost Taber; to Dean Gwinner and distinguished guests; to faculty, family and friends; and to all the graduates:

Good afternoon and thank you!

I am honored to be a part of this celebration. Because it IS such a sweet celebration, considering all you have overcome to be here.

My speech today is much different than what I would have delivered in May of 2020.

But I drafted that speech before COVID-19. Before George Floyd. And before the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack on our nation’s Capitol.

This is a different speech. Because this is a different moment.

Today, we are a nation divided.

Economically. Racially. Politically.

During your time at Kansas State, you have seen this division yourselves, right here on campus.

But despite what divides us, one thing is certain:

Our division is a threat to our democracy.

We saw it on January 6<sup>th</sup>.

On that day – set aside every four years to count electoral votes – some people tried to stop our democratic, constitutional process to confirm the next duly-elected President of the United States.

On that day, if the people who stormed our Capitol had succeeded, they would have disenfranchised every voter in our nation. Your vote and my vote would not have counted!

In countries around the world, dictatorships have begun this way.

However, in OUR country on January 6<sup>th</sup>, the people who breached our Capitol DID NOT SUCCEED!

And yet – we should all be concerned that the threat to our democracy remains.

Last month, U.S. Supreme Court Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Neil Gorsuch – who usually hold opposite views on the bench – agreed that misinformation is an urgent threat to our national security.

In fact, misinformation is fueling our division that threatens our democracy.

And that is what we saw on January 6<sup>th</sup>.

Neil Gorsuch went on to say:

“... if we don’t tend to the garden of democracy and the conditions that make it right, it’s not an automatic thing.

“Democracies fall apart from within.”

Today, we are a nation divided. But these are not unprecedented times.

This is a moment in time.

Think of all the divisions that were sown in this country during the Revolutionary War. The Civil War. The war in Vietnam.

Despite our divisions, we have always prevailed.

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## EXCERPT 2

That is why today – because of who you have become at Kansas State – you are ready to take on the not-so-easy times!

You are the generation ready to BE THE CATALYSTS who will drive change in your workplaces, your C-suites, your boardrooms and your communities!

Heroic efforts will be required to meet this moment.

That is why your generation must come together, compelled by a shared vision:

To help all of us believe that we don't always have to be AGAINST something, or AGAINST each other.

That we can actually be FOR something. Together.

And so you have a choice.

The author David Foster Wallace once talked about the need to exercise control over HOW to think and WHAT to think about. He said you must “choose what you pay attention to” and “choose how to construct meaning from experience.”

I am asking you today to choose to pay attention to the division in our country that threatens our democracy.

Your choice will define your life and the legacy of your generation, just as it did for The Greatest Generation that came before you.

That is why this is your moment – and now is your time.

This is your call to be a generation known for securing a more free, just and equitable nation – a nation with a stronger democracy no longer threatened by misinformation and division – a country that lives by its Constitution so that “government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.”

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### EXCERPT 3

Today, it is fitting to celebrate your commencement – one of the best days of your life! – here in Bill Snyder Family Stadium, where we cheer on the CATS!

One of my best days happened here in 2019, when I saw the Kansas State Wildcats beat the Oklahoma Sooners for the first time in my life.

I remember that game because I love the Cats, and I love football!

You’ve probably seen the movie “Remember the Titans” starring Denzel Washington as Head Coach Boone, and Will Patton as Coach Yoast. It tells the story of what happened to a high school football team in Virginia in 1971, after busing forced the integration of a white school with a Black school.

Toward the end of the movie, the team had come together – but the coaches were still at odds.

It’s halftime – and the team is losing the state championship game.

Yoast and Boone agree that if they want to win, they need to end their division, work together and shake things up.

They have to BE BOLD.

And they have to GO BIG.

So Denzel Washington – Coach Boone – calls out to the players:

“Listen up!

“This is our time now.

“Second half is our time!

“We’re gonna make some changes ...

“Let’s go!

“It’s our time!

“Everybody in.

“Our time! ...

“Let’s go! ...

And so, to all the graduates:

LET’S GO!

Be BOLD!

Go BIG!

Make some changes!

Take a position!

EVERYBODY IN!

Because THIS IS YOUR MOMENT!

And NOW IS YOUR TIME!

LET’S GO!!!

Thank you!