

## CLASS DAY 2021

JUNE 11

**PRESENTED BY: Congressman Andy Kim, AB '04**

Hi everyone, I'm Andy Kim and I just want to thank you all for inviting me to be able to be your class day speaker and I'm just so incredibly happy to be able to share this moment with all of you. I know this isn't how you imagined graduating from the University of Chicago, but it's so important that we recognize that our community, what you're doing, the steps that you're taking, that this transcends this moment. That this isn't just a day, it's a moment in your life where you're transitioning to this next exciting adventure in this effort going forward.

And what I find so remarkable about this particular moment, is that you're going through this transition. You're taking this next step, during what is arguably one of the most historic moments in modern history.

Right now, what we're going through in as a country, as a world.

This is a historic moment.

It's not something that we necessarily asked for. But we were thrust upon in there, we are experiencing an extraordinary challenge right now here at home. With the pandemic and the economic crisis, but what we're also facing is a paradigm shift moment when it comes to our world. When it comes to this new era that we're emerging into.

You're right here at the nexus of it.

I know it can be concerning I know that it can be worrisome about the uncertainty about what comes next, I feel it to all of us are feeling it, but I'm sure it's particular, with all of you, that you're going into this next step with this level, deep level of uncertainty about what comes next, but I hope you think about it, not just in terms of it being a challenge and a concern, but as an opportunity to step up and make your mark.

For me, I graduated from the University of Chicago in 2004.

And through my years in college, we were facing another historic moment. As a country, as a globe.

I was a sophomore in college when September 11th happened.

And I'll tell you I didn't even know where Afghanistan was on a map on September 11th.

And that day, that experience that moment changed the course of my life, set me on a path towards where I am now.

And it was because I was at the University of Chicago, during those formative moments during that specific historic moment that I was in a position to really contemplate and understand what I wanted my role to be.

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I came to understand that in these moments of historical magnitude.

The question now falls upon us to ask, what are you going to do about it? That when we recognize that we're at this inflection point where individuals can have tremendous impacts on what comes next. What kind of world are we going to be emerging into? What kind of world are my three year old and my five year old baby boys be growing up into.

That's something that all of us have to contemplate that's not just for leaders in Washington or business leaders or others to think about all of us had to be thinking about that question.

What are we going to do about this.

What I experienced at Chicago.

I sum up in a world of community.

I came and experienced a community that changed the way that I understand my responsibilities my roles with people around me, friends, family, strangers alike.

And what I came to understand is that within our community whether that was the community in Hyde Park, whether that was a community across Chicago or spread that out across our country, that there comes to be that responsibility that we recognize that there are things that we are part of that are bigger than all of us.

Now what that responsibility manifests as for me, was a sense of service.

That was something that really guided me that became my North Star in terms of understanding what it is that I had to do.

Now my parents when I was growing up taught me a line, that service isn't just a job, it's a way of life.

It's about our fundamental connections with the people around us. It's not just some job that you do nine to five and you hang up your hat at the end of the day, it's something that is intrinsic within us. And it's not just about government work though, you know I certainly will put in a strong plug for people to work in government because I honestly believe that you don't have good government unless you have good people working in government. But what we recognize is that it really requires an entire society, to take on board more of that element of service that we recognize that there are things that are bigger than all of us.

I feel blessed to have learned these lessons in Chicago, whether it was the work that I did the classes that I took in committee on social thought or the core. University Chicago also gave me an opportunity to work at the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and really tried to put that into practice and to be able to understand that these are not just words on a page or ideas in our minds, but something that we need to actualize and realize that's the next challenge. And for me I took that

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on board, full force and dedicated my career to service. And I feel blessed that I get to do this job, and I get to represent in Congress my home district where I went to kindergarten, where my oldest son is now going to kindergarten, that me, as a son of immigrants, married to an immigrant, that I have the chance to do a job, whose job description is written in the Constitution of the United States.

That is a deeply humbling experience.

And that word that concept really underpins what I believe is so important about recognizing that we live in this community that we have a responsibility to one another and that's grounded in service, is that we have to recognize in this moment, this historical moment that we have to ground ourselves with a deep sense of humility.

Right now, no one knows what's gonna' happen next. Everyone says they do. It's not true.

We are all trying to make the most of this, trying to sort out kind of feel around in the dark about what comes next.

And that's where the humility, needs to come, we recognize that we don't have all the answers. that we depend on each other, to be able to make those connections and draw upon the best of us, to try to come up with a way to be resilient, through these difficult times.

We have to be respectful for one another and we need to make sure that we treat each other in that kind of way that we would hope to be treated back.

That's something we're losing touch with right now.

I really do believe that right now with all the divisions that we face, whether the hyper partisanship or the problems that we face in systemic racism and inequality.

These deep problems that we see manifested.

What we recognize right now I truly believe is that we are facing a crisis of empathy right now, as a country.

We're losing touch with what it's like to walk in someone else's shoes to see the world through someone else's eyes, and try to understand and draw upon our own experiences, to try to understand the pain and the struggles and the opportunities of others.

That's there in lies that question about humility that we can't assume that we know what's best for others, you have to engage and earnestly tried to listen.

I recognize that full force in my current job is I represent 750,000 people.

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And yes, these are 750,000 of my neighbors, but I don't know what is at the top of their priority list. I can't assume that they're all going through the same exact thing that I am. So it's important that we have that humility, which pushes us to listen, pushes us to try to find connections between us and to use some of those connections as foundations for that kind of empathy that we need that we recognize that while we are dealing with so much challenge right now with the pandemic and all these other policy issues that we're dealing with, that it's not just about what we try to accomplish, but how we go about doing it, and how we treat people along the way.

I really do believe that the next few years will shape the next few decades of our country, and frankly the world.

And all of us are trying to figure out our way through that you all are coming into this moment with such opportunity.

And I know it's going to be tough, there's going to be challenges and a lot of uncertainty, but know that you're not alone, and if there's anything I can do to help please don't hesitate to reach out.

I am so impressed and inspired by all of you, the grit and determination that you've gone through over the course of your lives and gone through with your education at Chicago in terms of what comes next.

I want you to have every chance of living your best life and be able to have that kind of experience where at the end of the day you can be proud of and satisfied of what it is that you accomplish.

And if I can play any role in helping shape that, please let me know.

Not just me, the entire University of Chicago community.

It's not just moment in time that you're here you're entering this broader community.

And it is such a worthwhile and meaningful community.

I never necessarily thought that people that I worked alongside and was in class alongside at the University Chicago that they would be the people that would be alongside me standing by my side at my wedding, or visiting me and my wife when we had our first kid.

But that's exactly what happened.

That, that broader community was really there for me. In the times that I needed. The good and the bad, and that's what makes it a community.

So, in these moments, in these historic moments it's important that we recognize that we're not alone.

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And sometimes I can feel all the more difficult when we've been social distancing and the virtual so much over this course of the last year. But that's when we recognize what community actually is.

And I hope you feel it.

And I hope today gives you that sense that you're part of something bigger, bigger than all of us, and that your accomplishments are real.

They're meaningful, and they are going to propel you forward into this new era, with a tremendous amount of momentum.

I am excited to see what you do with that.

And I hope you draw from my words, any bit of wisdom, to be able to give you some sense of the excitement that you should have about what comes next.

That we live in historic times, we didn't necessarily ask to be here. But that is what is happening, and future generations will ask us, what did we do? What did we do at this important moment in American history?

And I want our answer to be that we did everything we did everything we humanly can to try to fight for the kind of future that we want.

That's what's on the line.

No pressure.

But there's a lot on the line, but instead of being fearful of it, or having anxiety about it. I hope you take it as a challenge.

That this is a challenge of your generation to be able to work with our whole community to solve these problems.

And try to tackle it, while also making sure that we treat each other with respect, that we conduct ourselves with humility.

And that we recognize that we are all facing these same problems. And fundamentally, we share a lot of these same values and beliefs, going forward.

There's no doubt going to be disagreements. No doubt going to be big arguments along the way I get I face it every day in the halls of Congress.

But we cannot lose sight of that which connects us.

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Which is the reason why the University of Chicago has the core curriculum that we talk about things in that kind of fundamental way. I still go back to the lessons that I learned there, in Chicago, in the cloisters there, in the quad, a lot.

And I feel blessed to have had that experience and that kind of training, and it has prepared me well. And I'm sure it has prepared you well.

So I'm just excited. Good luck with everything to come, know that me and others we stand with ya cheering you along the way. To your parents, thank you for continuing to give your kids every opportunity, and as I'm now a Father of two baby boys I know how hard that can be and how much you want to make sure everything can come out well.

So, congratulations everyone. I'm really excited for you all, and wishing you the best. Take care.