

Good morning families, faculty, and classmates. I have been asked to speak to you today with the expectation that I will tell the truth about my Morristown-Beard experience. But is that even possible? What does that really mean? If I recounted even my clearest memories from the past seven years, I would inevitably leave some out. If I reflected on the importance of certain moments in ninth grade, I would be reflecting from the perspective of 18-year-old me - not as the me that directly experienced those moments, or as any of the people around me watching those moments play out. If I told you about which aspects of an MBS education will have the most profound impact on our lives, I would be making all sorts of assumptions about which directions our futures will go.

So what is the truth I should speak? I am not capable of capturing the all-inclusive, unabridged, multi-faceted truth about what MBS has contributed to my life. The way we perceive ourselves is constantly under revision based on new experiences and acquired knowledge. Imagining what I'll think of when I look back on my high school experiences in five years, the only thing I'm certain of is that I'll have a different view than I do now.

But just because the truth is sometimes hard to arrive at and cannot always be captured in a speech does not mean that it isn't there or isn't worth searching for – and that is probably the truth that has been most important to my time at MBS.

Instead of shying away from the most difficult questions about morality, history, social justice, technology, and the future of science, my classmates and I

have had the opportunity to approach them head on, with the assumption that those questions point to something true that is worth understanding. Most of all, my time here has helped me to accept why, as young adults about to gain more influence in the world, we have a responsibility: not just to ourselves or the people we know, but to truth itself. Unless we serve truth in each of our actions, words, and decisions, the truth will cease to exist as a guiding principle in our shared life.

That will mean different things for each of us, and hopefully our years here have given some clarity on what that is. Through my experience, from academic classes and extracurricular clubs to summer programs outside of school, I've discovered a passion for environmental science. More particularly, in the past four years, I have tried to take advantage of every opportunity to express that climate change will result in catastrophic land loss, disease, poverty, and massive displacement of life unless we take drastic steps to stop it. This year, things all seemed to fall together, forming an opportunity for me to take a stand: after discussing and thinking about climate change throughout my time at MBS, I got an email from my science teachers with a link to the Class of 0000 website. Founded by high school and college students who are passionate about climate change, the Class of 0000 launched an initiative for valedictorians and salutatorians across the country to dedicate time in their graduation speeches to reciting the same call for climate action. Instead of speaking to you about this issue in my own words, I have chosen to merge my voice with countless others across America.

“Today, we celebrate our achievements from the last 4 years. But I want to focus on what we need to achieve in the next 11. That’s how long climate scientists have given us; 11 years to avoid catastrophic climate change. It’s already damaging our homes, our health, our safety, and our happiness. We won’t let it take our futures too. Our diplomas may say Class of 2019, but marked in history, we are the Class of Zero. Zero emissions. Zero excuses. Zero time to waste. Across the country, our class stands 7.5 million strong. And in unity, we’re giving 2020 political candidates a choice: Have a plan to get to zero emissions, or get zero of our votes. Together, we have the power to solve the climate crisis. Every student. Every parent. Every teacher. Every leader. The future is in our hands.”

I speak these words because they are a truth that matters to me--and that I believe should matter to everyone. Although I think the message is one that everyone should heed, I don’t assume they are words that everyone here would speak. It is too easy to sit back, staying silent with the expectation that someone else will speak for you. I have had the privilege of being able to use this platform to speak for myself, but it is definitely not the only way to make an impact. You don’t need a podium, TV camera, or outlet in the news. If you believe deeply in a cause, live your life in dedication to it, and tell the people around you about it, you are speaking truth to power. Register to vote. Put your ideas into action. Be a proponent of truth, not an impediment.

Any lesson we draw from our MBS experience has to be bigger than the small community we were part of on campus. Looking back also requires looking forward and outward. If we focus only on the past, reminiscing about the lost glory of the olden days that never really existed, we will not be able to appreciate the rest of our lives. Looking to the past becomes valuable only if we draw from it to imagine a better future.

I'm not going to predict that one day, I'll see all my fellow graduates become high-profile lawyers, successful executives, well-respected surgeons, or influential entrepreneurs. No one has the ability to see into the future. But that is far from saying that each and every one of us will not find and contribute value to the world. Greatness, whether in the form of a monumental accomplishment or world-altering invention, is impressive. But it can also be daunting, imposing, and alien to what feels most human and accessible between us. If we expect ourselves to reach greatness as a nation or planet, we will never be satisfied with our smaller, local achievements and imperfect but genuine efforts.

Acknowledging responsibility to ourselves and those we love; recognizing our faults while being proud of our capabilities; making a commitment to the pursuit of truth even when it brings discomfort - together, these virtues may be greatness, but greatness does not have to be the goal. Maybe we don't even need to have a clear goal. Maybe it's enough to have a commitment to live by something we know to be true. When I think of what that means for my own life, in the years

ahead, it makes me nervous. It's easier to aim at something as simple and one-sided as being great than it is to think about what the truth demands of us from moment to moment. But being nervous doesn't make me want to back down.

If we remain committed to something we believe in, then no matter what we do, there will be people around us experiencing the effects of our actions.

Everything we say and do has some kind of impact. In my mind, giving advice to a friend, voting mindfully, making time for family, or even turning the car off when you're waiting in a parking lot all bring value to life. When we do these things, we are trying to live by something we believe to be true. The most meaningful part of my education so far has been learning to see that. Each of us has been given an opportunity and responsibility, and I've learned just how much that matters: find a truth and speak it.

Thank you.