

Coolidge National Declamation Contest

Official Speech Excerpt Packet for 2025

(Choose one excerpt to declaim on video)



Have Faith in Massachusetts

Boston, Massachusetts | January 7, 1914

Honorable Senators: [...] The commonwealth is one. We are all members of one body. The welfare of the weakest and the welfare of the most powerful are inseparably bound together. Industry cannot flourish if labor languish. Transportation cannot prosper if manufactures decline. The general welfare cannot be provided for in any one act, but it is well to remember that the benefit of one is the benefit of all, and the neglect of one is the neglect of all. The suspension of one man's dividends is the suspension of another man's pay envelope.

Men do not make laws. They do but discover them. Laws must be justified by something more than the will of the majority. They must rest on the eternal foundation of righteousness. That state is most fortunate in its form of government which has the aptest instruments for the discovery of laws. [...]

Courts are established, not to determine the popularity of a cause, but to adjudicate and enforce rights. No litigant should be required to submit his case to the hazard and expense of a political campaign. No judge should be required to seek or receive political rewards. The courts of Massachusetts are known and honored wherever men love justice. Let their glory suffer no diminution at our hands. The electorate and judiciary cannot combine. A hearing means a hearing. When the trial of causes goes outside the court room, Anglo Saxon constitutional government ends.

The people cannot look to legislation generally for success. Industry, thrift, character, are not conferred by act or resolve. Government cannot relieve from toil. It can provide no substitute for the rewards of service. It can, of course, care for the defective and recognize distinguished merit. The normal must care for themselves. Self-government means self-support.

Man is born into the universe with a personality that is his own. He has a right that is founded upon the constitution of the universe to have property that is his own. Ultimately, property rights and personal rights are the same thing. The one cannot be preserved if the other be violated. Each man is entitled to his rights and the rewards of his service be they never so large or never so small. [...]

Have faith in Massachusetts. In some unimportant detail some other States may surpass her, but in the general results, there is no place on earth where the people secure, in a larger measure, the blessings of organized government, and nowhere can those functions more properly be termed self-government.

Do the day's work. If it be to protect the rights of the weak, whoever objects, do it. If it be to help a powerful corporation better to serve the people, whatever the opposition, do that. Expect to be called a stand-patter, but don't be a stand-patter. Expect to be called a demagogue, but don't be a demagogue. Don't hesitate to be as revolutionary as science. Don't hesitate to be as reactionary as the multiplication table. Don't expect to build up the weak by pulling down the strong. Don't hurry to legislate. Give administration a chance to catch up with legislation.

We need a broader, firmer, deeper faith in the people; A faith that men desire to do right, that the Commonwealth is founded upon a righteousness which will endure, a reconstructed faith that the final approval of the people is given not to demagogues, slavishly pandering to their selfishness, merchandising with the clamor of the hour, but to statesmen, ministering to their welfare, representing their deep, silent, abiding convictions.

Statutes must appeal to more than material welfare. Wages won't satisfy, be they never so large. Nor houses; nor lands; nor coupons, though they fall thick as the leaves of autumn. Man has a spiritual nature. Touch it, and it must respond as the magnet responds to the pole. To that, not to selfishness, let the laws of the Commonwealth appeal. Recognize the immortal worth and dignity of man. Let the laws of Massachusetts proclaim to her humblest citizen, performing the most menial task, the recognition of his manhood, the recognition that all men are peers, the humblest with the most exalted, the recognition that all work is glorified. Such is the path to equality before the law. Such is the foundation of liberty under the law. Such is the sublime revelation of man's relation to man – Democracy.

Note this excerpt retains original spellings, which in some cases differ from modern spellings. For context and reference, the full speech is available here: <https://coolidgefoundation.org/resources/have-faith-in-massachusetts/>

The Inspiration of the Declaration of Independence (Excerpt)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania | July 5, 1926

We meet to celebrate the birthday of America. The coming of a new life always excites our interest. Although we know in the case of the individual that it has been an infinite repetition reaching back beyond our vision, that only makes it the more wonderful. But how our interest and wonder increase when we behold the miracle of the birth of a new nation. It is to pay our tribute of reverence and respect to those who participated in such a mighty event that we annually observe the fourth day of July. [...]

It is not so much then for the purpose of undertaking to proclaim new theories and principles that this annual celebration is maintained, but rather to reaffirm and reestablish those old theories and principles which time and the unerring logic of events have demonstrated to be sound. Amid all the clash of conflicting interests, amid all the welter of partisan politics, every American can turn for solace and consolation to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States with the assurance and confidence that those two great charters of freedom and justice remain firm and unshaken. Whatever perils appear, whatever dangers threaten, the Nation remains secure in the knowledge that the ultimate application of the law of the land will provide an adequate defense and protection. [...]

This obedience of the delegates to the wishes of their constituents, which in some cases caused them to modify their previous positions, is a matter of great significance. It reveals an orderly process of government in the first place; but more than that, it demonstrates that the Declaration of Independence was the result of the seasoned and deliberate thought of the dominant portion of the people of the Colonies. [...]

Governments do not make ideals, but ideals make governments. This is both historically and logically true. Of course the government can help to sustain ideals and can create institutions through which they can be the better observed, but their source by their very nature is in the people. The people have to bear their own responsibilities. There is no method by which that burden can be shifted to the government. It is not the enactment, but the observance of laws, that creates the character of a nation.

About the Declaration there is a finality that is exceedingly restful. It is often asserted that the world has made a great deal of progress since 1776, that we have had new thoughts and new experiences which have given us a great advance over the people of that day, and that we may therefore very well discard their conclusions for something more modern. But that reasoning can not be applied to this great charter. If all men are created equal, that is final. If they are endowed with inalienable rights, that

is final. If governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, that is final. No advance, no progress can be made beyond these propositions. If anyone wishes to deny their truth or their soundness, the only direction in which he can proceed historically is not forward, but backward toward the time when there was no equality, no rights of the individual, no rule of the people. Those who wish to proceed in that direction can not lay claim to progress. They are reactionary. Their ideas are not more modern, but more ancient, than those of the Revolutionary fathers. [...]

The rights of the individual are held sacred and protected by constitutional guaranties, which even the Government itself is bound not to violate. If there is any one thing among us that is established beyond question, it is self-government – the right of the people to rule. If there is any failure in respect to any of these principles, it is because there is a failure on the part of individuals to observe them. [...]

We live in an age of science and of abounding accumulation of material things. These did not create our Declaration. Our Declaration created them. The things of the spirit come first. Unless we cling to that, all our material prosperity, overwhelming though it may appear, will turn to a barren sceptre in our grasp. If we are to maintain the great heritage which has been bequeathed to us, we must be like-minded as the fathers who created it. [...]

For context and reference, the full speech is available here:

<https://coolidgefoundation.org/resources/inspiration-of-the-declaration-of-independence/>

Address Before the Congress Sitting in Joint Session in the House of Representatives

Washington, District of Columbia | February 22, 1927 (Washington's Birthday)

My fellow Americans, on the 22d day of February, 1932, America will celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of George Washington. Wherever there are those who love ordered liberty, they may well join in the observance of that event. [...]

Although considerable has been written about it, not many people think of our first President as an agriculturist. [...] He always had a great affection for Mount Vernon. He increased his land holdings from 2,500 to over 8,000 acres, 3,200 of which he had under cultivation at one time. His estate was managed in a thoroughly businesslike fashion. [...] He was one of the first converts to the benefits of scientific fertilization and to the rotation of crops, for that purpose making elaborate tables covering five-year periods. He overlooked no detail in carrying on his farm according to the practice of those days, producing on the premises most of the things needed there, even to shoes and textiles. [...]

He was engaged in many business enterprises. [...] In addition to his land holdings, wisely chosen, the rise in value of which accounted in no small degree for his fortune, Washington participated in a number of real estate and transportation companies. As a private citizen he was constantly on the outlook for sound investments and for ways to increase his capital. In the purchase of frontier lands and in the promotion of plans for the building up and development of new parts of the country he was performing important public service. [...]

To Washington, the man of affairs, we owe our national banks, for had he followed the advice of other leaders, great but less enlightened on matters of finance, the plans of Alexander Hamilton would not have been realized. As a result of the war the country was deeply in debt, and had no credit; but the solution of our financial difficulties suggested by the first Secretary of the Treasury was opposed by those from rural communities. [...] Had the President not been a man of affairs, had he not been for many years a large holder of stock in the Bank of England, coming from the estate of Daniel Parke Custis, he might have yielded to the opposition. Because he knew something about bank accounts and bank credits the bill was signed and the foundation of our financial system laid.

[...] Due to his investments, he became the president of the James River Company and of the Potomac River Company, organized in 1785 to look into the possibility of opening navigation through to the West. To the Potomac Company, which involved the first interstate commerce negotiations in this country, he devoted four years of service. It has been thought that these negotiations entered into by Washington led up almost directly to the calling of the Constitutional Convention. They revealed

clearly the difficulty under the Articles of Confederation of accomplishing anything involving the welfare of all the States, and showed the need of a more strongly centralized national government. His ability as a business man was the strong support of his statesmanship. It made his political ideas intensely practical.[...] He demonstrated that those who develop our resources, whether along agricultural, commercial, and industrial lines or in any field of endeavor, are entitled to the approval, rather than the censure, of their countrymen.

Washington was a builder—a creator. He had a national mind. He was constantly warning his countrymen of the danger of settling problems in accordance with sectional interests. His ideas in regard to the opening of our western territory were thought out primarily for the benefit of the Nation. It has been said that he would have been “the greatest man in America had there been no Revolutionary War.” [...]

[...] He understood how to translate political theory into a workable scheme of government. He knew that we can accomplish no permanent good by going to extremes. The law of reason must always be applied. He followed Milton, who declared “law in a free nation hath ever been public reason,” and he agreed with Burke that “Men have no right to what is not reasonable.”[...]

[...] His was the directing spirit without which there would have been no independence, no Union, no Constitution, and no Republic. His ways were the ways of truth. He built for eternity. His influence grows. His stature increases with the increasing years. In wisdom of action, in purity of character, he stands alone. We can not yet estimate him. We can only indicate our reverence for him and thank the Divine Providence which sent him to serve and inspire his fellow men.

For context and reference, the full speech is available here:

<https://coolidgefoundation.org/resources/address-before-the-congress-sitting-in-joint-session-in-the-house-of-representatives/>