

## Salute to Graduates

Written by Sen Chuck Grassley  
Tuesday, 24 May 2011 11:42

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by U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley

Congratulations to all the high school and college graduates who this month celebrate hard-earned academic achievements and scholastic success. Enjoy the pomp and circumstance and school traditions, from the caps and gowns to the commencement speeches and graduation ceremonies. By earning a high school diploma or advanced college degree, our young leaders have earned the accolades and support from their family and friends gathering to celebrate these milestones.

The United States also is celebrating a milestone this month against the war on terror. After nearly a decade-long search for the mastermind behind the 9/11 terror attacks, U.S. military and intelligence forces found Osama bin Laden. He was killed during a covert raid on what turned out to be his hideaway in Pakistan, half a world away from the devastation and agony he unleashed in America on September 11, 2001.

Just consider the graduates of the Class of 2011 have lived half of their lives in an era shaped by terrorism. Many members of this generation joined the military after 9/11, putting their lives on the line to protect their country and defend the freedoms for which it stands. Following in the footsteps of World War II veterans who sacrificed life and limb to end a reign of tyranny shaped by Nazism, Imperialism and Fascism, our men and women in uniform today are once again fighting for liberty and justice to preserve freedom and our American way of life.

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Thanks in large measure to the service and sacrifice of America's veterans and current soldiers and sailors, today's graduates have the opportunity to pursue their dreams and taste the fruits of freedom and free enterprise from the tree of liberty.

Plenty of uncertainties exist -- from the lukewarm job market, to high gas prices, school loans, national debt and natural disasters -- that arguably cast a shadow over the next chapter for the Class of 2011.

However, as smiling graduates walk across the stage to receive their diploma, the energy and excitement hanging in the air symbolize a collective sense of optimism and hope that will help them achieve their dreams. Dwelling on what could go wrong instead of taking risks and putting in the extra effort to succeed would undermine the hard work and sacrifice that today counts them among the Class of 2011.

Representing Iowans in the United States Senate, I appreciate both the uncertainty and the fresh-faced optimism I see so often with new graduates and young job applicants. While new graduates work to land a job or continue their education, I'm working in Washington to help better manage the federal budget, revive the U.S. economy and boost job creation. During visits with students in school districts across Iowa, I've found younger generations want the federal government to work together and stop overspending. They've figured out the national debt will fall disproportionately on their shoulders. The \$14 trillion dollar national debt translates into roughly \$45,000 for every man, woman and child in America.

If Washington fails to rein in federal spending, graduates entering the job market today will face an unbearable tax burden throughout their lives in the workforce.

Consider a recent report issued in May by the Social Security and Medicare trustees. The findings shifted the projected insolvency dates earlier than before, finding Medicare's trust fund exhausted in 2024 and Social Security's in 2038. Today's demographics simply can't support the status quo. Consider life expectancy in 1930 was 59.2 years, whereas, someone born in 2006 can expect to live to 77.7 years. A shrinking pool of U.S. workers is financing a growing pool of retirees collecting federal pension and health care benefits.

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These two entitlement programs account for two of the largest drivers of projected federal deficit spending. With combined annual budgets of \$1.3 trillion, they also account for one-third of total federal spending. What's more, Medicare costs are on track to soar as more baby boomers qualify for the program and health care costs rise faster than revenue.

Political leaders in Washington have a big job to do. Let's hope we don't travel down the tiresome path of political demagoguery. I'd like to raise the bar of expectations and challenge the White House and Congress to solve problems together for the good of the country.

I encourage the graduates from the Class of 2011 to set a high bar of expectation for themselves, as well. America is built on the can-do spirit that challenges each successive generation to out-do the achievements of the one preceding it. Whether setting their sights on working for or opening a business, or pursuing military or public service, graduates from the Class of 2011 have a chance to make a difference.

Please celebrate safely and responsibly. America is counting on your generation of innovators and hard workers to keep the American Dream alive.

Friday, May 20, 2011