

# Speaker Ryan: Delivers farewell address

Posted on Wednesday, Dec 19, 2018

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**WASHINGTON**—House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) today delivered his farewell address at the Library of Congress. [Watch the address live on Speaker.gov.](#)

Following are Speaker Ryan's remarks, as prepared for delivery:

*Thank you, Trey, for being a great colleague, and an even better friend. And for combing your hair today.*

*Thank you to my great friends and colleagues for joining me here today.*

*Thank you especially to the Librarian of Congress, Dr. Hayden, for having us in this beautiful hall.*

*Anytime I come over here, I can't help but think back to a pivotal moment in my life.*

*It was the summer of 2012. I was about to speak to a local Chamber of Commerce group when I got a phone call.*

*It was Beth Meyers, from the Romney campaign.*

*At this point, I knew that I was being vetted for vice president, but I hadn't heard anything. I didn't know how serious this really was.*

*So Beth starts to walk me through how I would need to fly up to Boston incognito.*

*As she is going through the logistics, it just starts occurring to me that my life—my family's life—is about to change dramatically.*

*We hang up, I get through the speech I have to give.*

*And then I realize that I have to go vote on the House floor.*

*So at this moment when I want to be alone with my thoughts, I have to walk right into a swarm of colleagues and reporters.*

*It is one of those inflection points you just remember at certain crossroads in your life.*

*This building, that moment—it reminds me that your plan, your direction, can change in an instant.*

*I have had a number of improbable turns in my life, and I don't know what's next.*

*But before I go, I am grateful to have a chance to share a few thoughts and say goodbye: to you, to this job, and to this incredible institution we call the House of Representatives.*

*A long time ago, I came here to Capitol Hill as an intern for one semester during college. The plan was one semester here in Washington, and that's it.*

*Since then, I have met and been surrounded by some incredible people.*

*The mentors who helped set me on the right path. Jack Kemp, Bill Bennett, and Bob Woodson.*

*The intellectual giants who guided me in the things I wanted to pursue.*

*The people of Southern Wisconsin who gave me the chance to work for them.*

*The staff who always made me better.*

*The president and the vice president, for being my partners in government.*

*The colleagues who became lifelong friends.*

*And, of course, my family.*

*All of this began as a family affair. My mom, my brother Tobin, and my sister-in-law Oakleigh signed on for my first campaign.*

*And it ends with family, too. I would not have been able to serve as speaker were it not for the sacrifices that Janna, Liza, Charlie, and Sam made. Being a husband and a dad is everything to me.*

*We have come a long way together on this improbable journey.*

*From the bottom of my heart, thank you.*

*Over the years, and especially lately, I have found myself thinking about whether my dad would be proud of me.*

*Would he be proud of what I'm doing?*

*I lost him at a young age, before he really had a chance to shape my path in life.*

*I don't know what he thought I would make of myself, but this was certainly not my plan. Not even close.*

*All I keep thinking is: what a country.*

*What a country, where someone of an unassuming Midwest upbringing gets the chance to be a part of all of this. Where you can pursue whatever your passion is, wherever it takes you.*

*That's the American Idea, isn't it?*

*The condition of your birth isn't your destiny. Your struggle isn't your destiny. It is part of our journey.*

*It is all laid out right there in the first words of the Constitution. Before first principles even, a first mission: "to achieve a more perfect union."*

*We are conditioned to recognize that we are imperfect, but we are called to do better.*

*So we revere those beautiful founding principles—liberty, free enterprise, consent of the governed—as we work to apply them to the problems of the day.*

*We build up the country's fundamental resilience—the antibodies that protect us from whatever comes our way.*

*That is how we advance the American Idea. And how we build a more confident America.*

*As everyone here knows, I never wanted to become speaker.*

*I was just a policy guy. And I like to think I still am.*

*What I realize now is you don't really 'become' speaker. At least I don't see it that way.*

*I don't see power as something you take for yourself, as if it is a prize to claim or a trophy to raise.*

*You accept a temporary trust, to be a steward of the greatest legislative body in the world. It is an awesome thing.*

*Again the people have spoken, and soon the House will become the care of a new majority, and what I know will be a spirited Republican minority. I wish our next leaders well.*

*It is precisely because all of this is so momentary...it is because you are just a small part of history, that you are inspired to do big things.*

*On this score, we have achieved a great deal.*

*Three years ago, when we last gathered in this hall, we began a great journey. To set our nation on a better path. To move our economy from stagnation to growth. To restore our military might.*

*And we have kept our promises.*

*This House is the most productive we have had in at least a generation.*

*To date, we have passed 1,175 bills, more than half of them with bipartisan support.*

*And—it is my duty as speaker to say this—nearly 750 bills that the House has passed remain stuck in the United States Senate.*

*But the rest made it into law.*

*We have taken on some of the biggest challenges of our time, and made a great and lasting difference in the trajectory of this country.*

*We began a historic rebuilding of our military and national defense.*

*We enacted new and tough sanctions on some of our biggest foes.*

*We ushered in a new career and technical education system.*

*Record regulatory reform to help small businesses.*

*A long-sought expansion of domestic energy production, to be followed by America's new energy dominance.*

*To stem the tide of opioid addiction, the most significant effort against a single drug crisis in congressional history.*

*Criminal justice reform to give more people a chance at redemption.*

*A landmark crackdown on human trafficking that is already yielding results and saving lives.*

*A VA with real accountability, and finally, better care for veterans.*

*And, after years of doubt, years of the cynics saying it could not be done, we achieved the first major overhaul of our tax code in 31 years.*

*Think about it. We went from having the worst tax code in the industrialized world to one of the most competitive.*

*This is something I worked on my entire adult life, and it is something that will help to improve people's lives for a long time to come.*

*It is one of those elusive generational reforms.*

*It is why we do this.*

*Certainly one Congress cannot solve all that ails us. Not every outcome has been perfect.*

*But that is our great system at work. And I am darn proud of what we have achieved together to make this a stronger and more prosperous country.*

*My mentor, Jack Kemp, once said that the central task of any political party is to “offer the people superior ideas of government.”*

*I see it as even more than a task or an obligation. It is a labor of love.*

*Yes, you can make a career out of criticism. You can deal from that deck all day long. Many do, and I certainly don't begrudge that. It seems like an easy living.*

*But well-done is always a better pursuit than well-said, isn't it?*

*In this business, you catch slings and arrows. It is a price that I have been happy to pay.*

*Because nothing is as fulfilling as pursuing an idea that will truly make a difference in people's lives, and seeing it through from start to finish. To me, that is the ultimate proving ground of politics.*

*It is the great manifestation of this experiment in self-government.*

*And the more you get into it—when you choose to truly engage in the process rather than merely endure it—the more you come to see that even our most complex problems are solvable.*

*I leave here as convinced as I was at the start that we face no challenge which cannot be overcome by putting pen to paper on sound policy. By addressing head-on the problems of the day.*

*The state of politics these days, though, is another question, and frankly one I don't have an answer for.*

*We have a good sense of what our politics should look like.*

*A great clash of ideas. A civil, passionate discourse through which we debate and resolve our differences.*

*Our system of government doesn't just allow for that. Our system depends on it.*

*One side may win, and one may lose, but we dust ourselves off and start anew knowing each one fought in pursuit of their honest ideals.*

*But today, too often, genuine disagreement quickly gives way to intense distrust. We spend far more time trying to convict one another than we do developing our own convictions.*

*Being against someone has more currency than being for anything. Each of us has found ourselves operating on the wrong side of this equation from time to time.*

*All of this gets amplified by technology, with an incentive structure that preys on people's fears, and algorithms that play on anger. Outrage is a brand.*

*And, as with anything that gets marketed, it gets scaled up.*

*It becomes more industrialized, more cold, and more unfeeling.*

*That's the thing: For all the noise, there is actually less passion, less energy.*

*We default to lazy litmus tests and shopworn denunciations. It is just emotional pabulum fed from a trough of outrage.*

*It is exhausting. It saps meaning from our politics. And it discourages good people from pursuing public service.*

*The symptoms of it are in our face all the time. And we have to recognize that its roots run deep, into our society and our culture today.*

*All of this pulls on the threads of our common humanity, in what could be our unraveling.*

*But nothing—nothing says it has to be this way.*

*We all struggle. We are all fighting some battle in our lives.*

*So why do we insist on fighting one another so bitterly?*

*This kind of politics starts from a place of outrage, and seeks to tear us down from there.*

*So...how do we get back to aspiration and inclusion, where we start with humility, and seek to build on that?*

*I don't know the answer to that.*

*What I offer today instead is something to keep in mind as we all try to navigate through this moment.*

*Our culture is meant to be shaped not by our political institutions, but by the mediating institutions of civil society, of the community.*

*These are the places where we come together with people of different backgrounds—churches, charities, teams, PTA meetings.*

*It is where we build up our social capital, that currency which keeps us rooted to where we live, and how we live with one another.*

*Rediscovering that human connection is one lane on the road back to aspiration and inclusion as the guiding influences in public life.*

*As I said, the drivers of our broken politics are more obvious than the solutions.*

*This is a challenge I hope to spend more time wrestling with in my next chapter.*

*As I look ahead to the future, this much I know: Our complex problems are solvable.*

*That is to say, our problems are solvable if our politics will allow it. There are three big ones in particular that I think we can tackle in the years ahead.*

*They are challenges that have vexed this country for many years.*

*And as I leave, I recognize so much more work remains to be done.*

*And if we get them right, we can be certain that this will be another great century for our country.*

*You all know that finding solutions to help people lift themselves out of poverty is a personal mission for me. I think we have made real progress here in a relatively short time.*

*Four years ago, when our nation marked the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty, we exposed some hard truths.*

*For all the billions spent, and all the bureaucracies and programs created, the needle had barely moved.*

*We have begun to break this monolith. New opportunity zones, part of tax reform, will bring more investment to distressed communities.*

*Social-impact bonds will push more private capital toward community leaders that are solving big problems, whether it's helping the homeless or addressing recidivism.*

*New workforce reforms, job training programs, and a case management approach, will help more people move from welfare to work.*

*We have a long way to go. But this is what I find to be so dynamic about free enterprise.*

*It is not just about creating jobs. It is about restoring the meaning of a job, the meaning of work.*

*It is not just about getting people off the sidelines. It is about helping people get on the path of life.*

*I believe firmly that solving our poverty challenges once and for all will require not just a great undertaking, but a great rethinking of how we help the most vulnerable among us.*

*It begins with realizing that the best results come from within communities, where solutions are tailored and targeted for people's needs. This battle will be won soul-to-soul and eye-to-eye.*

*We have great advocates for welfare reform in our party, like my friend Tim Scott.*

*But I challenge my party here: Do not let this issue drift from your consciousness.*

*Every life matters, and every person deserves the chance to succeed.*

*Let us keep advancing ideas to allow people to live lives of self-determination.*

*Second, I believe that we can be the generation that saves our entitlement programs. And frankly we will need to be.*

*I acknowledge plainly that my ambitions for entitlement reform have outpaced the political reality and I consider this our greatest unfinished business.*

*We all know what needs to be done. Strong economic growth, which we have now, and entitlement reform, to address the long-term drivers of our debt.*

*Our revenue will soon return to its 50-year average.*

*What continues to plague us is a mandatory spending system that is deeply out of balance and unsustainable.*

*This was the case when I came here 25 years ago, and remains the case today.*

*Not too long ago, few were willing to recognize the scope of this problem, let alone engage on solutions. Our government was not even inclined to examine our long-term fiscal picture. It just didn't work that way.*

*We had to go about changing the debate before we could even begin to try and change people's minds.*

*I'm proud that every year I was Budget Committee chairman, we passed in the House a roadmap to balancing the budget and paying off our debt.*

*In this Congress, we came within one vote of real health care entitlement reform.*

*Federal health care spending remains the principle driver of entitlement spending.*

*Our bill would have reformed two of our major health care programs to make them sustainable and meet the health care needs of our country.*

*So we have come a long way, and we are closer than people realize.*

*Ultimately, solving this problem will require a greater degree of political will than exists today. I regret that.*

*But when the time comes to do this—and it will—the path ahead will be based on the framework we have laid out to solve this problem.*

*We can get there. We really can tackle this problem before it tackles us.*

*The third big challenge we have to address is fixing our immigration system.*

*Right now, we are yet again locked in another short-term battle over one aspect of this issue.*

*No matter what the outcome is in the coming days, the larger problem will remain.*

*The system will still be in need of serious reform. And no less than our full potential as a nation is at stake.*

*The right mix of solutions is there. Border security and interior enforcement, for starters. But also a modernization of our visa system.*

*So that it makes sense for our economy and our people. So that anyone who wants to play by the rules, work hard, and be a part of our American fabric can contribute.*

*That includes the Dreamers, those who came here through no fault of their own, and ultimately the undocumented population.*

*In order to fix the system, you have to reset the system. In order to truly enforce the law, you have to get people right with the law.*

*Again, we came closer in this Congress than people realize. And next year, the Supreme Court will make a ruling and then both parties can and should go back to the table.*

*Getting this right is an economic and moral imperative. And it would go a long way toward taking some of the venom out of our discourse.*

*If we do these three things—make progress on poverty, fix our immigration system, confront this debt crisis—we can make this another great century for our country.*

*I recognize that these challenges are ones we haven't made much progress on in recent years, but I am confident we still have it in us to solve them.*

*A good friend recently commented to me that, amid the frenzy of politics today, he has more faith in our system of government than ever before.*

*As he put it, in our system, really bad ideas get killed. And good ideas, they just take time.*

*Our problems are solvable if our politics will allow it. I know it. I have seen it.*

*In a confident America, we don't shrug our shoulders and pass the buck.*

*We roll up our sleeves and get on with our work.*

*A confident America leads the world, too. Not with bluster, but with steady, principled action.*

*Remember, history has a way of repeating itself. The democratic capitalist model again faces a generational-defining test.*

*Much of our day-to-day attention is focused on threats from illiberal regimes and radical Islamist extremism, as it should be.*

*That said, I strongly urge leaders in both parties to devote more time and energy to the direct challenge China poses to the West.*

*China unabashedly offers an alternative in the form of an authoritarian model with a veneer of 21st-century capitalism.*

*The sense I get, from when I have traveled overseas as speaker, is that our allies wonder whether we are still in the game here.*

*When we show that our way of doing things still has juice, that we can do the most good for the most people, liberty gains ground.*

*When we get complacent, we risk seeing more countries go in the direction of the autocrats.*

*A confident America stands up to its challengers by committing to the pillars of international relations.*

*In addition to rebuilding our military and giving our intelligence community the tools it needs, this Congress has worked to strengthen our security cooperation with our allies, particularly through NATO and in the Indo-Pacific region.*

*Good security cooperation goes hand in hand with strong economic ties. That is why we need to continue to pursue good free trade agreements that open up new markets to American-made products.*

*We don't want our competitors writing the rules of the road and shutting us out.*

*And a confident America exercises clear moral leadership. We need to continue to work together to promote global health initiatives, fight human trafficking, and be a voice for the voiceless.*

*Our economy is strong. Our military might is second to none. Clear American leadership in the world makes the most of both.*

*For each of the challenges I have discussed here today, there are people of goodwill in both parties who are ready and willing to take action.*

*Everyone doesn't need to agree on everything, and everyone doesn't need to disagree on everything, either.*

*All you need is enough people of good faith willing to take up an idea. That's a good start.*

*What comes next? Well, we'll have a lot of new faces around Congress next year. I hear great things about this new fresh-faced Senator from Utah...*

*So here is my advice, for members new and old.*

*This place is full of wonders and opportunity. But do your best to stay grounded. The way I think of this is, either you change things or they change you.*

*So you have to keep your sense of self. Work hard at staying who you are. Insist on it. It is what I have prayed about every morning since I first came here. To keep my sense of self.*

*I knew when I took this job, I would become a polarizing figure. It comes with the territory. But one thing I leave most proud of is that I like to think I am the same person now that I was when I arrived.*

*Still, never forget the excitement that brought you here.*

*Remember how awestruck you felt the first time you stepped on to the floor of the House. Keep that feeling, especially when so-called experts tell you that you need to tack this way or that.*

*Hone your ability to advance ideas. Sit down with people who know more about something than you do, listen, keep at it. Invest in the process.*

*You'll hit roadblocks. That's okay. Give yourself some grace.*

*Timing is everything though, so you have to get it right. You may not get too many shots at it. You need to be ready when the moment demands action.*

*Focus on good relationships with your colleagues. Get to know people on the other side of the aisle. Get to know the human side of serving with people. Build personal relationships, so it's not just transactions.*

*You want real relationships. Having real relationships will help you overcome pitfalls, and build trust.*

*When you give your word, keep your*