Ike's Timeless Legacy

Farewell Addresses: A Look Back

On Tuesday evening President Obama delivered his Farewell Address to the Nation. Let's take a look back at President Eisenhower's Farewell Address, arguably one of the most well-known speeches of the twentieth century.

No other modern President entered the Oval Office with more military prestige than Eisenhower, yet none did more to preserve the peace. On January 17, 1961, after a half century of service to the country, Eisenhower used the occasion of his departure from the public spotlight to warn Americans of the unchecked growth and influence of the "military-industrial complex" at the height of the Cold War.

Excerpts from the famous speech will be inscribed on the Eisenhower National Memorial, where visitors will read and reflect on Ike's timeless message much in the way we do now at the other iconic presidential memorials in the nation's capital.
TIMELINE MILESTONE: "Farewell Address" to the Nation

Page 2 from Eisenhower's marked up reading copy of his "Farewell Address," document courtesy of the Eisenhower Presidential Library

To explore other milestones in Eisenhower's legacy, visit the E-Memorial's Interactive Timeline.

56 Years Later: Certain Themes Continue to Resonate

President Obama spoke about American leadership and exceptionalism, threats to our democracy, and urged us to be an engaged citizenry. Eisenhower spoke about similar themes.

Take a look:

In the councils of government, we must guard against
the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.

We want democracy to survive for all generations to come...

America's leadership and prestige depend, not merely upon our unmatched material progress, riches and military strength, but on how we use our power in the interests of world peace and human betterment.

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Teachers, are you looking for a timely lesson for your students?

The E-Memorial's Educational Resources includes a lesson comparing Eisenhower's address to another famous farewell by General and President George Washington.

Not only will students examine excerpts from each of the addresses, they will write an opinion piece explaining what each president would think of the country today.

Click the image above to download the PDF or browse the entire lesson archive here.

Test Your Ike'xpertise

Trivia Question: How many U.S. presidents have presented or published formal farewell addresses? (See answer below)
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Blanche L. Lincoln
Ray McGrath
Frank Murkowski
Jim Slattery
Todd Tiahrt

Senior Presidential Officials
David Abshire (1926 - 2014)
Trivia Answer: 10.

George Washington and Andrew Jackson both published farewell addresses. The following presidents presented formal farewell addresses: Andrew Johnson, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. The number is disputed among historians, with some crediting George H.W. Bush’s speech at West Point on January 5, 1993, and others including either Richard Nixon’s resignation announcement on August 8, 1974, or his broadcasted farewell remarks to White House staff the following day, as a farewell address. Although the practice has become more common in recent history, the vast majority of U.S. presidents have bid farewell during their Annual Messages to Congress or State of the Union addresses.
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Norman Lear

Distinguished Americans
Judy Burgess
Gerry Cassidy
Andy Demetriou
Larry Field
Lou Galambos
Jane Gosden
Vernon Jordan
David Keene
Tom Korologos
Tom Lorentzen
Frank Luntz
Tim McGivern
Ralph Mecham
Paul O'Day
Roswell B. Perkins
Donald Putnam
Gil Robinson
Matt Schlapp
John Shlaes (1942 - 2015)
Jill Sommers
C. Langhorne Washburn (1918 - 2011)

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