



Speech by Madam Nancy Pelosi, Speaker Emerita of the House of Representatives of the United States of America, at her award ceremony of the Doctor Honoris Causa by the University Paris-Panthéon-Assas

Bonjour. Merci. Thank you so much Chancellor Christophe Kerrero, thank you so much for your kind words. To Professor Emmanuelle Chevreau, thank you very much for yours as well and President Braconnier, thank you so much for this very distinguished honor which I'm very very proud to receive and thank you for your warm welcome to this distinguished university Paris-Panthéon-Assas.

The excellence of your academics, and the breath-taking beauty of your campus are the envy of the world.

With roots stretching back to the Middle Ages, really beyond, you've shaped many of the finest minds in human history.

And today, we salute Polina Pidhorodynska, she will soon grace us with her knowledge and insight. Polina is from Ukraine and she will just take us into the future, thank you Polina because with you and those in your class the future is bright!

And so, it's with great excitement that I'm in this wonderful company with all of you. To join all of you – and great pride – for me to return to France to humbly accept your Honorary Doctorate of Law.

I'm personally so gratified to receive it, but I do so on behalf of my many colleagues from the congress of the United States who had the courage to make many of the things that you've discussed possible. It's easy for me, because I represent San Francisco in the congress and for some of them using the words you used Emmanuelle, the courage that you said in Italian to get the job done and they even had the courage to elect the first woman speaker of the House in the American history. I'm proud to be receiving it in the presence of the distinguished Ambassador to the United States, the Ambassador to France, Denise Bauer who has the heir of the president of the United States and his great esteem.



Thank you Madame Ambassador for joining us today and I'm thrilled to be here with my daughter, Alexandra, my grandson, Thomas and we're happy to be here with my husband, Paul who - thank you for asking - is doing very well. I'm honored to be among each of you, citizens of America's most ancient ally, France.

Indeed, our nations share a history long bond that predates America's Founding – and even that of the First French Republic in 1792.

Our Founders loved France. Our first ambassador, Benjamin Franklin was a self-professed Francophile and served again as the first U.S. Ambassador.

But it was Thomas Jefferson who was rumored to say that everyone who loves democracy has two countries – their own if it's democratic and France.

And we will always remember that French soldiers fought alongside ours in our War for Independence.

That includes Marquis de Lafayette, who helped lead us to victory at Yorktown. A very decisive victory for us. You may not know this but in the chamber of the House of Representatives, there are only two paintings and they are massive. One on one side of the speaker's chair, huge, is our patriarch George Washington and on the other side similar size massive painting of the Marquis de Lafayette. I think that's pretty exciting. And for all who visit United States capitol, it is feeling for them to view Washington and Lafayette in the setting, because Washington treated Lafayette like as a son. So much respect.

Lafayette is in the House to honor because of his contributions to our country – and those of the French, others of the French, who helped win our independence.

And in Washington's state, Mount Vernon, hangs the key to the Bastille that was given to him by Lafayette. There may have more than one key. It is just a symbol; Lafayette is a symbol of respect for America's freedom.

After America secured its freedom Lafayette proudly proclaimed, Lafayette said this: "Humanity has won its battle, liberty now has a country."

So fitting that, it would be the French who gifted us the Statue of Liberty, which is a symbol of America, throughout the world, of our welcoming people to our country.

Our soldiers have fought side-by-side defending democracy: from the fields of Yorktown to the beaches of Normandy and then beyond.



Personally, it's meaningful to me: my uncle, Johnny d'Alesandro, was one of the brave Americans fighting for freedom in the Second World War.

When I brought an American delegation to Normandy to mark the 70th anniversary of D-Day, I said with the veterans, I told them: "My uncle fought at the Battle of the Bulge."

And they said: "We went there next with the French." Fighting together for democracy.

As you may know, we will be having the 80th anniversary of Normandy this next year and once again there will be ongoing manifestation of the friendship between our two countries. In many events our nations have been bound together by this everlasting commitment that you talked about. The shared values between our countries, shared values for this magnificent institution.

Values so eloquently summarized by your national motto: "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité."

These values have long been, and continue to be, a guiding light.

When, on the beaches of Normandy in the 20th century, we faced the great test of whether democracy or autocracy would prevail, we were honored to stand with you against the designs of imperialist of dictators.

And so now, in our time, we must stand together as we did, as all the principles of democracy are in periled in my own country and around the world.

The sanctity and dignity of the individual. The rule of law. Sovereignty. The institutions of self-government conceived to produce prosperity and progress for the many face profound challenges from the appetites and the ambitions of the grasping few.

As Voltaire said: "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities."

Across the world, we see despots and dictators launching despicable assaults against democracy.

Putin's invasion of Ukraine – and the many war crimes Russian Forces are committing against women and children. Democracy is of course on the line in Ukraine. Ukraine courage to fight for democracy is a fight for democracy everywhere.

The Chinese Communist Party's a litany of human rights abuses against the Chinese people, whether Uyghurs, or in Tibet and Hong Kong, in addition to their aggression against Taiwan.

The horrifying terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel, inciting a heart-breaking humanitarian crisis in Gaza.



This is a challenge to our conscience and to our courage for us to come together and say as barbaric as the Hamas attack was on Israel. And how heartbreaking it is for the families. How impatient we all are for all of the hostages to be released. It is a challenge for us to have justice but at the same time have humanity towards the civilians in Gaza as well.

That's why the secretary of state has asked for a humanitarian pause so that we can affect that, that's the challenge that we have.

While different and distinct threats, they force upon us, they share a common goal: they want to stamp out the flame of freedom. We cannot let them do that.

And make no mistake: history has taught us again and again that a threat to democracy anywhere is a threat to democracy everywhere.

Only weeks after President Theodore Roosevelt did his terms as president of the United States, he came here to the Sorbonne to speak on the duties of citizenship in a republic.

His words bear our consideration. President Theodore Roosevelt said:

“A democratic republic such as ours ... represents the most gigantic of all possible social experiments, the one fraught with the great responsibilities alike for good and evil.

The success he said of republics like yours and like ours means the glory, with the failures the despair, of mankind.” That is what is at risk.

The essential variable, Roosevelt reminded us, was—and is—the quality of the individual citizen. That is not easy. Citizenship is difficult and sometimes challenging.

Yet democracy is fundamentally a covenant: a recognition of rights and responsibilities that enable us to meet the perils of history with fortitude and grace and a determination to pursue the right way to go.

With that fortitude—with that grace—and with that determination, democracy can not only survive but thrive.

We must not only be defenders of democracy; but the future demands that we also play at the top of our agenda the existential threat of our time: the climate crisis.

It was here in Paris in 2015 where the global community forged an historic agreement to set ambitious climate targets, it was challenging.



When President Macron addressed the United States Congress in 2018, we were pleased to hear him, he forcefully declared: “There is no planet B.” We must take this action.

In 2019, France hosted the G7 Speakers’ Meeting in Brest under the leadership of National Assembly President Ferrand – addressing the devastating impact of the climate crisis on our oceans. It was a remarkable conference.

France has met this moment – domestically and globally. And we are all grateful to you for your leadership.

In our country, under the visionary President Joe Biden, America’s commitment to the climate cause has been ironclad: delivering the biggest, boldest climate action in history last year! You might not know this; President, then Senator Joe Biden introduced the first climate resolution in United States senate. It was in 1986 even before I was in congress and he had vision and foresight and leadership then on this subject. It is a very strong commitment for him.

Our law that we passed is about a healthier environment; a cleaner, greener economy; our security and our values. Our shared values. These are priorities our nations proudly share, as we work together to save our planet. We see it has a health issue, Clean air, clean water, we see it as an economic issue. New green technologies, we see it as a security issue.

The rising sea levels, encroachment of deserts, all of the things that you know are happening can create competition for resources and habitat and the rest, and that can cause conflict. So our national security advisors tell us this is a security issue as well. Health, economic security. But of course, first and foremost, it is a value issue for us. If you believe, as I do, that this is God’s creation, we have a moral responsibility to be good stewards.

But even if you don’t share that view, that we all know, we have a moral responsibility to future generations to pass on this planet in a very sound way.

Earlier, I spoke about two portraits in the House chamber. When I was invited, we were going to be in a different room, but we outgrew it. And in that room, there were two picked portraits by Benjamin Constant of Prometheus. One was Prometheus bound, representing the past. One, Prometheus unbound, to represent the freedom of the future. So that must be our heritage. Our heritage is our hope for the future. Now, I love bringing that up, even though we outgrew the room, because I do believe the arts are such a unifying factor in our lives.



They inspire us. We laugh together, we cry together, we enjoy together. We find our common ground, something we might not have recognized before. We put aside our differences as we. Whether it's a painting, a musical presentation, and the rest, we're in a different place. And I do believe one thing that gives me hope is that the arts will bring us together in that way. What place for Paris, Sorbonne in all of its manifestations.

Such an opportunity for us to come together on this day, let us celebrate that extraordinary bond between our nations. In some of the presentations, you mentioned my background, that I was from Baltimore. And my pride that I take and is part of my inspiration when we talk about democracy is that our national anthem was written in Baltimore during the War of 1812. Sometimes the Brits don't like me bringing that up.

But anyway, that's what it was. And in it, if you were at a ball game, or if you see a ball game on TV, when we play the national anthem at the beginning of every ball game, toward the end, everybody tears. Land of the free, home of the brave. But I tear before that, and here's why and how it relates to today. In the course of it, it says, proof through the night that our flag was still there. That's in this song. And that's when I start here. Proof through the night that our flag was still there.

Our democracy, our freedom was still there. And our flag is something that we take an oath to every civic meeting and children do in school. We pledge allegiance to that flag with liberty and justice for all. And that's what a democracy is about. In fact, that's what the arts are about, liberty and freedom of expression as well. So it is within us, and it is possible that we can reach out. And obviously we must win this fight in the world between democracy and autocracy. We fought it and won it at Normandy and the World War II, something that is part of our heritage together. I mentioned. I don't know if I mentioned earlier that my uncle was in that war. I did mention it. He is buried in France.

And I thank the French for the beautiful care and attention you have always paid to our American cemeteries in France, where our soldiers are just another connection.

So whether it's the arts, whether it's our shared history, whether it's our commitment to democracy, and whether it is now our coming together to advance more women in the political, academic, corporate arena, we say in America, when women succeed, America succeeds.



I again take honor to be the first woman speaker, but I certainly don't intend to be the last. But you have a woman president of the assembly here. You have a representative of the French government here, a woman member as well. So again, I don't know. Emmanuelle was saying this is the year of the women. So we like to think every year is so, whether it's about the women, and we do think that advancing women is advancing democracy as well. So thank you. Thank you for this tremendous honor, which I'll display with great pride on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

We have to go right after this meeting because of the session of Congress and on this day, again, let us celebrate the extraordinary bond between our nations and our people. And even renew our vow to stand together to build a brighter future, a brighter democracy, a safer planet for the families on all sides of the Atlantic, Pacific and the rest. Thank you again for this honorary Doctor of law. I'm so excited by it. I view it as a compliment to our country, to our Congress. And I consider it the highest honor that I will treasure forever.

Vive la France!

God bless America. Thank you all very much.

Paris, Grand Amphitheatre de la Sorbonne, November 6th 2023