

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
University of Mississippi Commencement  
University, Mississippi  
Saturday, May 8, 2010

Thank you Chancellor Dan Jones, a great chancellor for a great university, to the class of 2010 and to all the friends of Ole Miss who are here on this podium and here in this grove today.

I'm glad to be back home; Ole Miss is home to me in so many ways. My uncle Leslie's, class of 1917, picture still hangs in Hume Hall, behind us here, for his Taylor Medal in Mathematics. My dad, class of 1922, lived in the top right-hand corner room of the Lyceum as a student. My days here - graduating in 1969, and driving the 161 miles between my home in Jackson and here for two years to teach. One of my earliest memories is coming up here with my parents to the dedication of the engineering building, behind me, where my father brought me when I was 4 or 5. I, like most of you, have lived and died in Vaught-Hemingway Stadium and at the Tad Pad and at Swayze Field.

Now I know that you know what a great school this is, but I'm not sure you understand the full power of Ole Miss. I had just gotten out of the Navy, I was back in my home town of Ackerman and I was walking down Main Street where my dad's hardware store was. I ran into the librarian, a woman in her 70s at the time that I had known all my life and she said, "What are you going to do now that you're out of the military?" I said, "I'm going to law school." She said, "Are you going to Old Miss, son?" I said, "No ma'am, I'm going to Harvard." She looked at me and she said, "Couldn't you get into Ole Miss?" So, I'm honored to be here with you today.

I want us to pause for just a second in the midst of this happy day and think about some tough times in the past few weeks that people in our state have had. Flooding, tornadoes and the oil spill on the coast. All of this on top of Katrina that we are still getting over five years later. So many families, so many people have been affected, some of them represented here today. Our thoughts, our hearts, our prayers are with you and with them.

On the subject of families, for those of you sitting in front of me here graduating today, congratulations, you've worked hard for this, you've earned it. You've put in the hours, you've put in the time, you've put in the effort and this is your day. But I do want you to remember that you didn't get here by yourself. Behind every one of you, there is a momma and a daddy, a grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, brother, sister, friend, teacher, coach and a hundred others that you may not even know about. And you've stood and applauded them, but I hope you'll take the time when this ceremony is over, and before you start celebrating, to give them a hug. Take time to remember, take time to thank them for what they have done because in a very real sense, today is just as much their day too.

In your time at Ole Miss, you've heard one question probably a thousand times. It's a reflex almost. I'm going to ask it again today, I'm going to ask it in a little different context, in a little different way, for a different reason. Are you ready? Are you ready?

You're sitting here today because you've done your job and Ole Miss has done its job. And it's an uncertain and sometimes complex world that you're going into, but one thing is certain, there is no lack of things that need to get done. Are you ready?

There's the teaching of the generations of students that are going to come behind you. Are you ready? There's the healing of this planet and the people who inhabit it. Are you ready?

There's being one of the people being behind the graduate on another commencement day in the future. Are you ready? And there's doing something bigger than yourself. Are you ready?

{HELL YEA – from the audience}

Right answer. There's one other certain thing, besides somebody's going to yell go to hell LSU, and somebody's going to give the right answer to that. The world is going to be different in the decades ahead than it is today. It's going to be different from what you know and it's going to be different from what you expect.

When I graduated four decades ago, the Cold War and the Vietnam War were at their height and technology was incredibly different and far less advanced than it is today. We do a thing in the Department of Defense every four years, the Quadrennial Defense Review, and we look out for 30 years and try to see what challenges are going to face America, try to see what things that America's going to have to be ready for and what armed forces will we need to meet those challenges. And no matter how smart the people are who work on it, no matter how good they are, no matter how insightful they are, they're almost always going to be more wrong than right. Because if you had done this QDR, the Quadrennial Defense Review, in 1989 before the wall came down in Berlin, you wouldn't have seen what we're facing today. If you had done it in 1999 before the tragedy of 9/11 you wouldn't have seen what we are facing today. And whatever we do and whatever these great professors have taught you, there is no way that you or they will know what is coming. And that's why your education cannot end here today and that is why your education can never be stagnant. Are you ready for whatever comes?

There are some folks here today that I don't have to ask that question to. Later today, some of the people in this class will be commissioned as officers in our country's service; in the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Army and the Air Force.

They know they are ready. They are ready to defend our country and to defend all of us. There are others here who have already served, a lot of them in Afghanistan and Iraq, who went to Ole Miss on the GI Bill. And I want to thank them for what they've done for us, for their service to our country.

It's my privilege to lead the Navy and Marine Corps, the greatest expeditionary fighting forces the world has ever known. Today they are literally around the world defending our freedom. Right now, today there are 20,000 Marines - our sons and daughters in Afghanistan. Today there are 12,000 Sailors on the ground in the Middle East. Today there are 10,000 Sailors and Marines at sea in the Middle East. They are ready and they are taking action. Off the Horn of Africa, our ships are combating modern day pirates. In South America and the Pacific, around the coast of Africa, our ships are building partnerships. You can surge people, you can surge equipment, but you cannot surge trust. You have to build it day after day, year after year, and that's what they're doing. Our Sailors and Marines are ready. And they are responding to humanitarian crises and disasters around the world. They've been in Indonesia for the tsunami, they're still in Haiti taking care of the aftermath of that earthquake and they were here in Mississippi immediately after Katrina.

The Navy and Marine Corps and all our armed forces are out in the world every day fighting America's wars, building security and protecting our trade. They are hard jobs and a lot of the times they are dangerous jobs, and not everyone can do them. Fewer than 1 percent of our

country wears the uniform of this country. But to those Sailors and Marines, Soldiers and Airman, and Coast Guardsmen, they know they are making a difference, they know that they are doing something bigger and more important than themselves.

And I hope that every one of you here today will do something likewise. Sometime in your life, do something outside yourself, do something big and important, do something to make a difference, do something to give back to this unique nation of ours, do something to help people who may never know you and may never realize what you did, do something not about you or about your advancement.

Now there is absolutely nothing wrong and a lot right about looking after yourself and your family. There is nothing wrong and a lot right in seeing how far you can go in your chosen field or your profession. There is nothing wrong and a lot right about making money. But, at the end of your life, probably the most important things aren't going to be the money or the stuff that you have accumulated. I personally have never seen a hearse with a U-Haul. The important things probably will be the people you've touched, the lives you've made better and the future's you've made brighter. I meet veterans every day, they come up and talk about their time in our country's military. They remember those days vividly and it's one of the most important things that every one of them says they've done with their lives. And it doesn't matter how long ago it was, it has not dimmed in its brightness or its importance.

I learned as a 21-year-old officer of the deck on the USS Little Rock what it means to be part of a team when lives may be at stake. I hope that you will do something you don't see the results of the next day or maybe ever.

My father, Raymond E. Mabus Sr., class of '22 here, died at the age of 85. He grew trees for a living and owned the hardware store in Ackerman. The last year of his life he did not cut a single tree, but he planted thousands. He knew for an absolute fact that he would never get any benefit from those trees. He knew for an absolute fact he would not see them grow and mature, but he did it as a matter of faith, he did it as a matter of hope, he did it for the granddaughters he never met and he did it for their children and generations in his family that he will never know.

I hope you will do something selfless. Do something for people you may not know.

There was a Mississippian named Jack Lucas. One of the great things I get to do in this job is I get to go see where Americans have fought. Last summer I went to Iwo Jima, which is one of the most powerful places on this earth. Half of the Medals of Honor which have been awarded to the United States Marine Corps were awarded for actions on Iwo Jima. Jack Lucas from south Mississippi lied about his age and joined the Marine Corps at 14. He made it through boot camp. He made it all the way to Hawaii when they found out how old he was. They separated him from his unit and said, we're sending you home, you're too young. Jack stowed away on a ship, he didn't know where it was going but he thought it was going to the fight. It happened to be going to Iwo Jima. By the time they discovered Jack Lucas, it was too late to send him back and he went ashore in one of the first waves of Marines. His position came under attack and two grenades came in. Jack Lucas grabbed them both and fell on them. The sand at Iwo Jima is very fine, black volcanic sand. It's one of the problem's Marines had, it's so hard to move in. Jack Lucas took both grenades and jammed them down in the sand. They both went off and he was pretty badly hurt, in fact he had to wave to get a corpsman because everybody thought he was dead. Jack Lucas came back from Iwo Jima, went to the White House and was awarded the

Medal of Honor. Then he went back to south Mississippi and started the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. That's what Mississippi is made of.

You know I'm certainly not asking and I certainly hope you don't have to risk your life. But there are quiet acts of heroism that go on around us every day. A woman I've worked with for years found out about her father putting people through college only at his funeral when scores of people came up to explain what a difference he had made in their lives by allowing them the chance for education. I'm not saying that you need to join the Marine Corps, but you might take a look at the Peace Corps.

You don't have to run for office, but vote and get passionately interested in the events of your time whether they are political or not, don't let them pass you by. Get involved. Get involved in your school or community, get involved in your state or your country, get involved in your world. Change our world, make it better. Do something to touch other lives.

I also meet a lot of people who aren't veterans, but remember the two years they spent teaching and helping, or the years they spent helping to get something they cared about into action. They talk about the mission trip that they made and helped somebody far away.

Your Chancellor here, when he spent seven years as a doctor in Korea, probably didn't think it would help him get to this day, but he knew it would help a lot of other people and it's what makes him a great leader today. Those are the vivid memories, those are the ones that jump out, those are the ones that people talk about, those are the ones they're proud of.

Ole Miss has produced so many people who have made a difference in so many ways. And one of them came with me today, James Reed. One of the first two African Americans to play football at Ole Miss; he and Ben Williams were the first two. James was a great running

back here at Ole Miss and was drafted by the Cleveland Browns in 1976, the same year Ben Williams went to the Buffalo Bills. But James Reed chose a little different path than athletics, he went into law enforcement. First here in Mississippi, and since 1985 as an agent for the Naval Criminal Investigative Services, NCIS. Yup, it's the same one you see on television. James is a real agent and he's making a real difference for his country. When James Reed left Ole Miss 35 years ago, he was ready. He was ready to serve and he is still serving today. Thank you, James Reed.

So now it's your turn. It's your day and your life. Are you ready? Are you willing to lift your eyes to greater possibilities? Are you willing to put your heart and your hands to the work that needs doing? But to the work that offers something different and maybe something greater than just pure material gain. Are you willing to make a difference? So I'm going to ask you one more time, and you know the answer, you've already heard it once, you've given it a thousand times, you don't even think about it. But answer me this time, answer me with those words that come right before Hottie Tottie. Are you ready?

Thank you.