

*Drew Lenox, journalism student board chairperson, delivered this speech during the March 27, 2009, luncheon culminating a successful Go FAR week of events to highlight the importance of realizing, remembering and reiterating the values of the First Amendment.*

Good afternoon. I do have to apologize. I am still feeling a little under the weather and after the beating that my Duke Blue Devils took last night, I'm feeling even a little bit worse. But I would like to thank you all for coming today and helping us to cap off our week of First Amendment Education here at Ohio Wesleyan University. There are some individual people I want to thank. I want to thank my parents and sister for coming to here me speak today and would also like to thank my lovely wife Michelle as well. Michelle and I were going to bring our daughter Mackenzie but at almost nine months, she is at that talkative age and we thought she might really express her right to Freedom of Speech.

I would like to thank the members of the Journalism Student Board for helping to make the events this week possible. If you are here, I ask you to please stand and be recognized when your name is read. Ryan Armstrong, Danny Eldredge, Shade Fakunle, Kyle Sjarif, Kimberly St. Louis, Greg Stull and Willy Yoder. I would like to thank Clay Davis as well being a student, not officially on the Journalism Student Board, who put a lot of work into this week. I would also like to thank all of the speakers from this week whose names I will mention specifically later. I would like to thank the Margaret Ann Beltz estate and the Inglehart Fund for awarding the board with this grant. And last but not least I would like to thank Dr. Melinda Rhodes for everything she did to assist us in this project. She was there to help with anything we needed from contacting and meeting speakers to picking up supplies that we requested to keeping us focused and on track as we worked to make the whole thing come together.

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”*

It was because of our belief and support of this so important part of the Constitution, that the Journalism Student Board decided to submit a proposal to try and receive the grant from the Inglehart Fund. The first paragraph of our proposal read:

“At Ohio Wesleyan University, we believe in First Amendment education. We believe that because everyone has these rights, it is important for all students-not just students in a media law or political science class-to be aware of the rights that are protected by the First Amendment. This belief prompts us to come to you now for the funding of our First Amendment Education Day.”

The board had a few initial goals when preparing our ideas for the proposal and the events. We wanted to highlight each right given in the First Amendment. It was our contention that almost everyone knows they have freedom of speech but we were not equally positive that the same amount of people knew where they were given that right. We wanted to educate our campus and the surrounding community of this right and the others given to them. We also wanted to set up a series of events that would invite people from all over campus and the surrounding areas to participate and learn.

So, we came up with our Go FAR week. The acronym of FAR stands for First Amendment Rights and our belief that your First Amendment Rights can Go FAR. If you will allow me to do so, I would like to take a few brief moments to detail our events if you were unable to make it to them. On Monday, Ohio Wesleyan's Lisa Ho and Reverend Charles Wilson from the St. Peter's Episcopal Church here in Delaware helped to lead a presentation and discussion on what Freedom of Religion means in our country. I think what is interesting and important to note about religion is that the First Amendment says two things. It says "Congress can make no law respecting the establishment of religion" and it says "or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This means that our government can not tell all of us what to believe when it comes to religion and cannot stop us from putting those beliefs into practice. I know for me personally, it is a blessing to be able to wake up and go to church, to have religious beliefs and not to be persecuted like so many in other nations around the world.

On Tuesday, the board hosted a panel discussion on the freedom of speech. A professor of journalism, Paul Kostyu, served as our moderator and the panel was composed of Mike Esler, a professor in the Politics and Government department, Randy Ludlow, a senior reporter from the Columbus Dispatch, and Joe Tomain, a senior associate at Frost Brown Todd in Cincinnati. Through our interesting discussion and debate, the audience was presented information about the court and case history of Freedom of Speech, learned how journalists and news organizations promote Freedom of Speech and how new technologies like the Internet have impacted and are impacting how Freedom of Speech is perceived and used in this country. Through our panel, we learned that amid the decline of newspapers, there are many organizations who are cutting jobs, and that our nation is losing some of the staunch defenders of the First Amendment. As we become a society that looks for information on the World Wide Web, we become selective truth seekers and we often shut out those voices that do not support our biases and prejudices. We also learned how the Internet can encourage everyone to engage in democracy and Freedom of Speech but that we must become greater detectors of what speech has credibility and be able to determine who on the Internet is just a spinner of the truth.

The idea the board came up with for the right to petition to government was to localize the issue and encourage students to come sign a banner to present a petition to our student government WCSA. It was our belief that in doing so, we could not only educate the campus on their right to petition but that we could encourage and facilitate thinking while letting WCSA know what the students thought could be done to better our university. What a wonderful privilege it is to know that we all have the right to "petition the government for a redress of grievances." This right not only confined to petitions to the executive branch and to the office of the president but can be exercised through letters to your local senator or representative. If you have a grievance with something in our nation, you have the right to petition your government. And students, we have a right to petition our student government.

Our Thursday event focused on Freedom of the Press and it was one that I know many on the board were looking forward too. We decided to hold a mock trial and put *The Transcript* on trial for libel. We selected a series of events involving the student newspaper in the fall and the Student Board sat as the Supreme Court to hear arguments from Jim Underwood and Frank Hinchey. We feel it was an interesting and fun way to get to the issue of Freedom of the Press. While the court ultimately sided with Mr. Underwood, both sides presented great evidence and case law to explain this

freedom. We learned that many elements must be found for one to win a case of libel and that even more must be found if the individual is a public figure. It is important for the press to have some freedom. I say that not only as a student and supporter of journalism but as a citizen. The press must be able to serve as the fourth estate, as a watchdog on the government and must have certain protections granted to tell for criticisms that may occur. The press must be able to critique the duties and actions of public figures and public officials without constant punishment. Through the Constitution and court decisions such as *New York Times v. Sullivan*, there is freedom of the press.

And that brings us to today. The right to peaceably assemble is probably the least recognized or talked about part of the First Amendment. It was often tied to the right to petition the government saying people could assemble to do so. But it has also been shown in *Hague v. CIO* that people can assemble for the “communication of views on national questions” and for “disseminating information.” For our purposes in the journalism department and the student board, we believe it can just be a group of friends and colleagues getting together for lunch.

So, what then is our obligation to the First Amendment? I believe it is our obligation to do three things. We must realize the First Amendment. We must remember the First Amendment and we must reiterate the First Amendment. Now the word realize has a few different meanings. In this case, the word realize does not mean understand. While it is important to try to understand the First Amendment, the Supreme Court has been trying to do this for many years and the interpretation of it has changed. In this case, the word realize is more about meaning appreciate. We all must appreciate and not take for granted the rights given to us in the First Amendment. If you are a person who goes to church, every Sunday you should be appreciative that you live in a country where you can go to church and worship the way you like to worship. But also be appreciative of the fact that right down the street, your neighbors have the right to worship in a different way. When you go to say something that may not be entirely popular, realize you have the freedom of speech. Please know that I am not encouraging feelings of hatred and bigotry but I also do not believe in the censorship of all kinds of disliked speech. Almost anything you say will be disliked by somebody, but in most cases, appreciate your right to say it. When you feel there is a problem in government, realize that you have a right to petition that government and if there are a number of people who share the same beliefs, you have the right to do so peaceably as a group. And realize and appreciate that when you pick up a newspaper, that's right some of us still read the newspaper, know that the journalists have a freedom to check the government and to serve the public interest.

Secondly, I believe it is our obligation to remember the First Amendment. This is perhaps the most important obligation we have. We can not realize or reiterate the First Amendment if we do not remember what it says. I think it is interesting to think about the thought process of our founding fathers when they had won the Revolutionary War and decided they needed to create a document of rules under which their new nation would operate. It is interesting to think about the First Amendment being some of the first ideas and rules that they wanted to have in their new country and to think about how they may have come to decide upon those standards. Some people came to America looking for religious opportunity and to break away from the Church of England. It is not a surprise that these founding fathers did not want to establish a national church and decided to let the people have free religion. With all the problems they had with England and the King, it is no wonder they felt they needed a law saying they could petition the

government and assemble peaceably. They also placed strong belief in the freedoms of speech and of the press. Because these were some of the most fundamental rights that our nation was founded upon, we should remember them. By a show of hands, how many people here today know the Star Spangled Banner or at least could get some of the words as the crowd sings it? I know there were times when I am told my sister sang it in her sleep. The part that we always sing is 81 words. How many people here know the Pledge of Allegiance? It is 31 words. And how many of you know the preamble to the Constitution? Now be honest, how many people that raised their hands, know it because of the song in School House Rock? It is 52 words. All of these are things we often remember because they are important to the history and foundation of our country. The First Amendment is only 45 words. If you are not able to memorize the entire thing, at least try to remember the freedoms granted to the American people there. Freedom of Speech, Freedom of the Press, Freedom of Religion, Right to Petition the Government and the Right to Peaceably Assemble.

And lastly, I believe it is our obligation to reiterate the First Amendment. We need to tell our friends and colleagues to let them know of the fundamental rights we all share. This is an obligation that is especially directed to our generation. We are the young people. There was great talk in the election about how the young people can make a difference and that so many were interested in voting and the democratic process. The First Amendment is part of the democratic process. We are a generation that is getting older. We are in college. We will leave college and become the leaders of this nation. And when we are the older generation, we will have to look back and decide what we taught those who came after us. We must reiterate and teach those around us and those who come after us about the rights guaranteed in the First Amendment and the rest of the Constitution. It is our obligation to teach our children how wonderful our nation is and the tremendous rights and privileges we are given by our government. It is our obligation to teach them why holidays like Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July are important to America and the American people. It is our obligation to teach them why, when we are watching fireworks, the song is playing that says, "I'm proud to be an American, where at least I know I'm free." We must reiterate that we are proud to be Americans where at least we know we are free to speak, petition, peaceably assemble, practice religion and where our press has freedoms as well.

In closing, I want to return to the original proposal. The closing paragraph read: "We hope that you will support our ideas to promote First Amendment education at Ohio Wesleyan University. We hope that in this day we are able not only to educate others on the First Amendment, but that we would bring groups and ideas together to better the university and in the process become better students ourselves." I hope that we helped to educate students and that we promoted the forming of ideas. I can not speak for the rest of the board, but I know through this week, I have become a better student and have learned a great amount about a fundamental Amendment to the Constitution and the history of our great country. I am proud to be an American and I am proud to support the First Amendment.

Thank you.

I would now like to introduce an honored guest here today. With part of our grant money, the Journalism Student Board decided to give a cash award to a student on campus who had exemplified the First Amendment through scholarship and practice. We wanted a student who was in good academic standing, was active on campus and

had some role in the journalism department. After talking with Dr. Rhodes about who had shown a First Amendment interest in her Media Law classes, we had a number of names to discuss and we selected Catie Coleman. Catie is a senior psychology major and journalism minor. On top of being a student, she works about 25 hours a week at a daycare and is currently doing research on how people communicate over the Internet and how this affects their face to face communication skills. Catie was at one time involved with track and cross country here at OWU and was a national qualifier in cross country. Catie has a GPA of 3.5 and spent some time writing for *The Transcript* covering groups like SUBA and events like Martin Luther King Jr. Day. She is also currently the President of Mortar Board. Catie said she really enjoyed Media Law class and wrote a paper about libel on the Internet. Please join me in welcoming and honoring Catie Coleman.