

Friends, family, and cherished guests, good morning on this auspicious day. I have the honor and privilege to warmly welcome you to our home at Bowdoin College, and to our home in the great state of Maine.

As some of you may have noticed during your travels here today, there is a large green welcome sign near the Kittery exit on the Maine Turnpike. It reads: "Welcome Home."

Now, whether you're from away or have lived here your entire life like I have, Maine has a magical way of feeling like home.

In Maine, I'm considered a city boy. I was born and raised in Portland, but my mother immigrated here from Somalia during the winter of 1993. She escaped a brutal civil war, with the hope that her children could have the opportunity to not only have a better life, but to pursue their wildest dreams. Maine has become home to families like mine who have traversed oceans and continents and faced adversity and hardship in the pursuit of happiness, opportunity, and a place to call home.

Growing up in Maine wasn't always easy. The winter starts when it wants to, and leaves when it's good and ready. And as Mark Twain once said of New England, "If you don't like the weather now, just wait a few minutes." But navigating Maine as a son of a Somali immigrant was challenging, and I struggled to find my place here.

But through those challenges, came growth, and with growth came progress. And I am proud of how much progress our state has made, and I am proud that someone like me can be a Mainer. Mainers are humble, kind, generous, and will always go out of their way to help others, to create this familiar feeling of home.

When I think of home, I see Maine's stunning stoic coastline, I see our iconic lighthouses perched along sparkling bays, I smell the brisk fall air while looking at the sunset at Mt. Katahdin. I feel the warm summer nights in Portland's Old Port, and now, I see a small liberal arts college nestled on the Atlantic coast. Maine is full of unimaginable wonder.

As we leave Bowdoin to blaze new trails, I ask that we remember the home we found and cultivated, right here in Maine. Class of 2019, wherever you may go and whatever you may do, know that Maine will always be a home that welcomes you with wide arms and an open heart.

I'd like to end with something that Governor Janet Mills, the first female governor of our state, said about that welcome sign. She said that "it is a reminder of the love we all share for this great state, as we ensure that Maine is a place of opportunity for all those hoping to create a better future for themselves and their family. To all of them I say, welcome home."

And to you all of you I say, as a proud Mainer, that Maine will forever be *your* home.

Thank you.