

## Six Overlooked Speeches

To anyone who studies the history of political speech, it is amazing how many good speeches nobody knows. Here are a few.

### **1. JOHN F. KENNEDY’S “THE PROFESSION OF POLITICS,” 1957.**

Everyone should study this Ted Sorensen–written Syracuse University commencement speech for its combination of wit and serious insight.

[bit.ly/JFK\\_Syracuse](http://bit.ly/JFK_Syracuse)

### **2. RICHARD DURBIN’S “THE GLORY OF A DAY AT HOME PLATE,”**

**1989.** This one-minute rant by the current Senate Majority Whip bemoans the prospect that metal baseball bats might replace those made of hickory and ash. One great line: “I do not want to hear about saving trees. Any tree in America would gladly give its life for the glory of a day at home plate.” [bit.ly/Richard\\_Durbin](http://bit.ly/Richard_Durbin)

### **3. RONALD REAGAN’S FAREWELL FROM THE OVAL OFFICE, 1989.**

This speech offers a romantic take on John Winthrop’s 1630 “City upon a Hill” sermon, with an eloquent line about the “pilgrims from lost places hurtling home.” Peggy Noonan wrote the passage about Reagan’s feelings without knowing whether it was true. Speechwriters sometimes have to make that leap.

[bit.ly/Reagan\\_Farewell](http://bit.ly/Reagan_Farewell)

### **4. MARY FISHER’S REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION**

**ADDRESS, 1992.** We forget how much courage it took to talk frankly about AIDS in 1992. But this speech by someone HIV-positive and facing death (she lived)—part rebuke to politicians silent about it, part passionate plea for acceptance—is not just courageous. It’s great. “I want your attention, not your applause,” she says at the start. She gets and deserves both. [bit.ly/Mary\\_Fisher](http://bit.ly/Mary_Fisher)

### **5. EDWARD M. KENNEDY’S EULOGY FOR JOHN F. KENNEDY JR.,**

**1999.** Eulogies often mix grief with humor. From the opening, where Ted Kennedy tells a story on himself, this brilliant and moving Robert Shrum–composed eulogy leads us through a mix of serious stories, funny moments, and a heartbreaking poem leading to the final line (“Like his father he had every gift but length of years”). [bit.ly/Ted\\_Kennedy](http://bit.ly/Ted_Kennedy)

### **6. SARAH PALIN’S GRIDIRON ROAST SPEECH, 2010.**

The usually harsh Palin startled the audience by poking fun at herself, with line after deft line—including a mock-reading from her book where Palin recounts hearing John McCain say, “You betcha,” and thinks, “Who talks like that?”

[bit.ly/Sarah\\_Palin\\_Gridiron](http://bit.ly/Sarah_Palin_Gridiron)