I would like to express my deep appreciation to President Daniel Habuki, the graduating classes, the esteemed faculty and the Board of Directors of Soka University of America for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. It is indeed a great honor to be here especially before the family members and friends of our graduates. I have titled this address To Be A Contributive Citizen. But what does it mean to be a contributive citizen?

To the graduates of Soka University of America I hope through expressing what is in my heart I can encourage all of you today to be contributive citizens of society when you leave this palace of learning. I developed the desire to relieve the suffering of this world at a very young age. My childhood and teenage years were spent in the ghettos of North Philadelphia and San Francisco surrounded by crime violence and poverty. When I was growing up I could not understand why people like me had to live in hunger, walk to school in the middle of winter in shoes without soles and live in fear of the violence that pervaded my neighborhood. I
could not understand why I had to be beaten up by fellow classmates if I answered too many questions in class. I couldn’t understand why my classmates and I were told we would never go to college. I could not understand why there were not even enough inadequate textbooks to study from. Yet my mother, a single mother who raised three girls, taught us that above all else we had a special calling to relieve the suffering and combat hopelessness. There were times in my youth when I nearly missed being shot when a stray bullet penetrated through the place I was living. There were times in my youth when I was so hungry that I wanted to give up because of the aching feeling in my belly. Yet I made a vow that if I was ever fortunate enough to leave my world of poverty, hopelessness and violence I would never forget those I had left behind. Thus, with that determination I excelled in academics and in my career driven by an unstoppable desire to achieve.

However, it wasn’t until I met the founder of Soka University of America, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, in March of 1996 that I was able to manifest my desire to be a contributive citizen. At that time I was a San Francisco Police Commissioner and part of the welcoming committee on behalf of San Francisco Mayor Frank Jordan for Dr. Ikeda. Prior to meeting Dr. Ikeda my life was in turmoil. I had just experienced the aftermath of the Rodney King riots in San Francisco which resulted in numerous arrests and serious acts of vandalism. I was in the middle of a notorious sexual harassment case within the San Francisco Police Department. My
name seemed to be in the paper every week. All I wanted to do was to live a peaceful life. Yet my life was anything but peaceful.

On the day I met Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, he was like no one I had ever encountered in my life. He was warm and compassionate yet at the same time the most knowledgeable person I had ever met on public policy and global affairs. He made all of us feel right at ease and was able to converse through an interpreter smoothly with our Mayor. I left the meeting with an incredible desire to live a contributive life so that I could touch the hearts of people in the manner that he did and relieve the suffering of society.

Towards that end I moved to Sacramento in 1999 while my family stayed two hours away in San Francisco so that I could serve as Undersecretary of the State and Consumer Services Agency under Governor Gray Davis. In my new position, Soka University of America was under my jurisdiction through the Bureau for Private Post-Secondary and Vocational Education. It was at that time that I became familiar with the values and ideals of Soka University of America, summed up succinctly by Dr. Ikeda when he writes: “What our world most requires now is the kind of education that fosters love for humankind, that develops character -- that provides an intellectual basis for the realization of peace and empowers learners to contribute to and improve society.” The students of
Soka University became my inspiration for combating the suffering. Thus began my quest to be a contributive citizen and to foster leaders for tomorrow.

I would like to tell you the quest to be a contributive citizen is easy. However, the quest to be a contributive citizen requires courage, hard work and yes, sacrifice. In the words of Marian Wright Edelman, the great child advocate whom I have had the pleasure to meet, “service is the rent each of us pays for living, the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time or after you have reached your personal goals”.

As I stand here today, I am no longer afraid of the sacrifices it takes to realize one’s dreams. For Dr. Ikeda has taught me the joy of life is actually in the struggle one undergoes to relieve the suffering of society. Let me explain. During the period of 1999 through 2003 when I was Undersecretary of the State and Consumer Services Agency everything that could happen did happen: the California Energy Crisis, the aftermath of 9/11, major contract and information technology scandals. In fact as a result of one scandal I actually became Interim Director of the Department of General Services while I was still serving as Undersecretary.

I could probably write a book on the California Energy Crisis. My entry into the crisis began when I received a phone call from a high level government official
that went like this: “We are having rolling blackouts in San Francisco and what are you going to do about it?” My reply was “Isn’t there an office of emergency services that handles this type of thing?” The official replied “You control the state facilities; we need you to operate like a power plant to relieve the pressure on the electrical grid.” The Sacramento Bee newspaper described it this way:

“It was just before 10 a.m. on January 18, 2001, when the people who operate California's electricity grid ran short of juice and started cutting off power to about 600,000 customers from Bakersfield to the Northern California border. Later that day, Governor Gray Davis declared a state of emergency, and the State Senate voted to spend hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayers’ money to keep the power flowing as two big utilities edged toward bankruptcy.”

Adversity almost always clears a path for creativity. Through that crisis we created the most dynamic proactive energy conservation program in the nation, named Flex Your Power. We designed cutting edge sustainable building, energy efficiency and clean technology practices all of which continue to exist and are flourishing today in California and the nation. Soka University’s energy efficiency lighting program also became a model for the State during that time.

Then on September 11, 2001 we experienced 9/11. I was Chair of the Victims Compensation Board. I was in charge of providing support and services
for the families who had lost love ones and providing for the survivors of 9/11 from California. This involved planning for the memorial services and insuring that the survivors had health care to address their physical and psychological needs. Most important of all, I had the responsibility of helping the families who had lost their loved ones, to heal. During the 9/11 crisis there were pregnant women who had lost their husbands on the planes and in the towers, there were children who were suddenly without parents and parents who had lost their children. The suffering was immense. At one point we divided groups of people by incident and planes so that they could bond together and help each other heal. Through the memorials and the candle light vigils I thought I was finished. I had absorbed their suffering and the suffering of our society. I felt being a contributive citizen in the aftermath of 9/11 was much too hard. I just wanted to live a peaceful life.

Each time I got to that point where I felt I could not go on, whether it was a result of a state scandal, the California energy crisis or the aftermath of 9/11 I would get on a plane and come here to return to your founder Dr. Daisaku Ikeda’s ideals and dream of the day when a steady stream of global citizens would graduate from this University and create a society of peace. You became the wind beneath my wings.
I remember vividly coming here on one occasion and there were no buildings. There was the foundation and a whole lot of dirt. Yet I stand here before you today to speak to the fifth graduating class and the thirteenth graduate class of Soka University of America. From the dirt, bricks and mortar have risen you, Champions of Justice, Champions of Peace, Champions who will relieve the suffering of the people.

In the words of the founder of this noble university, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, “Happiness doesn’t exist on the far side of distant mountains. It is within you, yourself. Not you, however, sitting in idle passivity. It is to be found in the vibrant dynamism of your own life as you struggle to challenge and overcome one obstacle after another, as you clamber up a perilous ridge in pursuit of that which lies beyond.”

Be True to your three mottos: ‘Be philosophers of a renaissance life; be world citizens in solidarity for peace; be pioneers of a global civilization.’ Be a contributive citizen of society.

Thank-you very much for the honor to speak to you today