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## 22nd Annual Joseph L. Rauh, Jr. Lecture. University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law

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**22ND ANNUAL JOSEPH L. RAUH, JR. LECTURE**  
**UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**DAVID A. CLARKE SCHOOL OF LAW**  
**FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 2014**

**Secretary Thomas E. Perez**  
**United States Department of Labor**

Good evening. It is great to see you all here today and it is an honor to be back here at this wonderful school. Wade [Henderson], thank you for that very, very kind introduction and Dean [Broderick], thank you for your leadership. I have a wonderful connection to this school and a wonderful affection for this school. I want to thank the Rauh family for your leadership and for continuing the legacy. The Rauh name is not just a name: it's a brand. It is a brand that stands for fairness, inclusion, and opportunity. That is pretty good when your name becomes a brand, and I really want to say thank you.

I started working in the civil right division in the late '80s, and the law school that had the greatest representation of attorneys in the section where I worked—it was then called Antioch School of Law—but we had a bunch of folks who were people who trained me how to be a lawyer. And I to this day have great gratitude for how they trained me, and how they mentored me. And I remember when I became the clinic director at Maryland Law School in 2001—and Maryland has pretty good clinics—I was seeking guidance on what to do. Who do I call? This Tulman guy—who's got game.

I get back to the civil rights division and I am thinking about people to recruit back in 2010, and who was one of the first people that I tried to steal? This guy named Jonathan Smith. I don't know if you heard from him earlier today. Jonathan is one of the most brilliant lawyers I have met. I had the privilege of serving on his board when he was the head of the Public Justice Center in Baltimore. Again, the footprint of this law school—you said you are small, Dean, but if you are small, I would say that you punch above your weight. And you are

always punching on behalf of people who need your help. And that is why it will always be a pleasure and an honor.

There is one other person with an affiliation in this school that I have been in a foxhole with and that is your president, Jim Lyons, with whom I served on the O'Malley cabinet. He is a man with integrity and I am honored to call him a friend.

To the students who are here, you are here because you made some decisions that you don't want to be just any old lawyer. You want to be a lawyer who when judgment day comes, you can look yourself in the eye and say I lived a life in which I tried to build a better community.

I used to give my students the following assignment on the second to last day of class. I used to ask them to write their obituary. And the purpose of that exercise on the second to last day was because it has been my experience in my career in law that all too many lawyers have disproportionate mental health bills because they fail to take that step back and ask that question: "What am I doing here on the planet Earth?" And "What do I want my legacy to be?"

Lawyers as a bunch are disproportionately risk-averse. I have taken a number of risks in my life and I am kind of an oddball because the older I get, the more willing I am to take educated risks—because I have led a charmed life. I have [had] the privilege of doing immigration rights work, labor rights work, civil rights work. Everyday I have woken up and have loved my job. I challenge my students every day to find [their] passion and follow [their] passion, because lawyers don't do enough of that. Fortunately, at the [U]DC School of Law—you do it, and that's why people like Jonathan end up being leaders around our community here in D.C., in Maryland, and, in his current job, across the nation. I hope you will spend sometime and do that and share it with your professor and put it in your drawer, and when you are having a bad day, read it and remind yourself why you are on the planet Earth. I know I did that, and that was helpful, especially on those periodic days when you did wonder.

Wade talked about the anniversary today, and I was reflecting on what to discuss today, and I could not help but start with Dr. King. I have the privilege of following a career path that takes me to civil rights work, immigrant rights work, and labor rights work. As Wade so correctly and, as always, so eloquently pointed out, at the time of [Dr. King's] death, he was organizing sanitation workers. If you have not been to the museum in Memphis, I really do encourage you to get down there. It is really remarkable. There is actually one of the trucks

there from the sanitation workers. You look at that and you see the movement.

I used to have a poster on my wall at my current job from the "I am a Man" campaign. That's what people demanding the minimum wage were asking about. I say I "used to" have that poster because one day recently I was meeting with some low-wage workers who were working in the fast food industry and they were telling me their stories. One woman was talking about how, "I am second generation fast food and I don't want to see a third generation in my family." Another person was talking about how, "My employer was going to fire me unless I could get a doctor's note to prove I was sick and not able to come to work. How could I get a doctor's note if I can't afford to go to a doctor?" I was so inspired by that, that I pulled that thing off the wall and I said, "you guys are the folks who deserve this poster, not me." So there is little bit of a hole if you ever come, on my wall in my room, and I hope you will excuse that.

You reflect on these things and you reflect on what was happening around the time of Dr. King's death. I can't help but continue to see the interaction and the intersection of labor rights leaders and civil rights leaders. People like Philip Randolph and Walter Reuther and Bayard Rustin, the heavyweights of this movement. The entity who bailed out Dr. King from the Birmingham jail was the UAW [United Automobile Workers]. When Dr. King wrote his "I Have a Dream" speech, he wrote that in Detroit, at the solidarity [house] from the UAW. The labor rights movement and the civil rights movement were very, very closely attached during this period of time. I find myself in the aftermath of Dr. King's death, as we celebrate it today, I find myself thinking a lot about this. I find myself fast-forwarding to that fiftieth anniversary when Dr. King was being commemorated here and the President was speaking. This is one thing that I learned that I had not known is that the involvement of the Department of Labor in the sanitation workers' issues in Memphis was significant. There was a person named James Reynolds, who was an Assistant Secretary of Labor for Labor Management Relations. President Johnson dispatched him down to Memphis to try to resolve this dispute. And with the tensions high and rioting ignited around the country, Mr. Reynolds was able to negotiate a settlement with the mayor that secured a wage increase for the workers and recognition for the union. I have a photo of Frances Perkins right behind me in my office. She is the gold standard for all labor secretaries. She is a remarkable woman. People like James Reynolds are folks who inspired me as well because they

did so much work against such difficult and challenging circumstances.

President Obama at the Lincoln Memorial I thought spoke very eloquently on that fiftieth anniversary. One thing he said, and I think this is important, was it is important not to overlook the progress we have made because we tend to focus on the remarkable amount of unfinished business that remains and sometimes when we do that, we overlook the sacrifice. And as the President said on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on the day commemorating the fiftieth anniversary, it would really do a disservice to those who fought so hard and in many cases died in that struggle to ignore the progress that we have made, progress that in no small measure enabled a guy named Barack Obama, community organizer, to be the President of the United States today.

But it would be equally wrong to ignore the unfinished business. He said of the original marchers: “They were there seeking not just the absence of oppression but the presence of economic opportunity.” He talked about the idea that one’s liberty is linked to one’s livelihood and the pursuit of happiness requires the dignity of work. He went on to talk about how it is along this second dimension of economic opportunity, the chance through honest toil to advance one’s station in life, where the goals of 50 years have fallen short. And he essentially declared economic equality to be the unfinished business of the movement and challenged us all to live up to the ideals that Dr. King set out. And I feel like the one of the luckiest people on the face of the Earth because I get to wake up every morning working on these issues. When I was at the Department of Justice, I got to wake up every morning working with remarkable people like Jonathan and others, addressing the unfinished business of civil rights. That’s what we are doing now.

I found myself as we mark this solemn day, reflecting on a number of questions which, really for me, is: “What would Dr. King would be saying if he were here today?” I can’t help start [by] reflecting on the question of what he would say about the status of access to healthcare for folks in America. I’ve spent a lot of time on this issue lately, [and] I suspect there are folks in this room [who have]. Because Dr. King said, of all of the forms of inequality, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and inhumane. I am quite confident that he would be here today looking down with great, great admiration at this President for what we have accomplished. Let me just give you a few facts and figures: 7.2 million people enrolled in the exchanges—and that figure

will go up because we haven't even counted the late enrollees. At least three million and growing newly enrolled in Medicaid. Thirty-one million young adults under parents' plans; the lowest increase in healthcare cost in over fifty years; 130,000 fewer hospital readmissions as a result of quality improvement innovations; ten billion dollars in savings for seniors and others on Medicare as a result of closing the donut hole—that's a \$1,200 raise per year that Medicare recipients have gotten. The Medicare trust fund has been extended for another ten years—ten years. And I could go on and on and on.

I don't think Dr. King ever met the Koch brothers. I would love to be a fly on the wall in that room if he did, because I think he would be telling them: "You are on the wrong side of history." Just as Ronald Reagan and others were on the wrong side of history in 1961 and 1962. You know, Ronald Reagan recorded an album, I've got the album cover in my room—I'm not kidding, I'm not making this up. He has an album that he recorded: "Medicare will lead to socialized medicine." I invite you—I'll give it to you if you want! You need one of those—I forgot what they're called now. Turntables. Sorry about that. I don't think this is on an iPod or an iPad. This is a true story, and by the way that album didn't simply say that Medicare will lead to socialized medicine. Mr. Reagan said—and by the way, he was a good-looking man, that album, seriously—he had a head of hair on him that I will never have. So I look at that album with some envy—I just want to be honest. But I will tell you—he said that Medicare will not simply lead socialized medicine. He said that the Medicare will lead to socialism in America. History, my friends, is repeating itself—except the challenges are greater because we have the 24/7 news cycle. We have unlimited amounts of money going into campaigns. The thing we've got going for us is the facts and history.

I travel this country and I see these stories that I know would make Dr. King happy. I was in Cleveland last Friday, and I went up to the NIC unit. I met this little baby—nine months old, seven and a half pounds, less than one pound when she was born. Less than one pound. A triplet. Her siblings are doing great, and so is she. She is a month or so away from leaving. Bright eyed, moving around. It was a remarkable scene. And the doctor says to me, "Do you know how much this has been costing? \$2.1 million dollars and running so far. \$2.1 million." Well, guess what, I leaned over to that little girl, I don't know if she understood me, I said "Hi, I'm Tom. It's an honor to meet you. Your parents would be a lot poorer but for the Affordable Care Act. Because you know what? That lifetime cap—you know? There is

a lifetime cap that used to be in place that's no longer in place. So your parents (by the way, her mother works at the hospital) are able to have a future." That's the Affordable Care Act.

This woman who I had the unenviable task of being introduced by, she told her story and it's a story that broke my heart. She and her husband were working. They both had jobs. They lost their jobs. Her husband had a knee replacement. That resonated with me because I'm two years removed from a knee replacement. In the aftermath he got MRSA, and he has been living with the consequences of MRSA for years. As a result of not being able to work because of the MRSA, he got fired, and so they lost their health insurance. And she talked about how she had to, among other things, sell her wedding ring at a pawnshop to help pay for healthcare. That is just not America. And I'm thinking to myself—I've got a wedding ring on. I was twelve when my dad died—this is my dad's wedding ring. Wedding rings are priceless—they should never be sold. She had to sell her car. In America! And now they have health insurance.

A little boy that I got to know [had] forty-seven visits to the emergency room over a one year period because he has asthma and he did not have a primary care physician. His primary care physician was the ER doctor. He got enrolled in Medicaid. Hasn't been back since. Helped his parents out now as well, addressing the underlying causes of substandard housing. His family is now on the road to opportunity.

Dr. King would be pretty happy, and Dr. King would be willing to take on those other folks who are on the wrong side of history of this one, who wake up everyday trying to make it harder for that little girl to get healthcare, harder for that little boy to get healthcare, harder for that Latino family I met in Houston to get access to healthcare. We are on the right side of history. And we are indeed making access to healthcare less shocking and more humane. And that's why I think Dr. King would be happy on that score, although he would recognize the unfinished business. I think Dr. King would be sitting here understanding that—you know what—the business of America, the unfinished business of America, in the wage context continues.

The President has talked about pillars of opportunity, access to good jobs that pay a fair wage, making sure people have the skills to compete, making sure everybody has access to a quality education starting in Pre-K, and making sure hard work is rewarded though a fair wage. Seventy-five years ago, Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act that set a wage floor. It stood for the value proposition that we should reward work by paying a fair wage. And over the

course of the ensuing decades, Congress, in a bipartisan fashion, has always raised the minimum wage, recognizing that nobody who works a full-time job should have to live in poverty. I have heard, and I agree with the notion that I have heard, across an ideological spectrum that we want to reward work and encourage people to become self-sufficient. Well, when you have a minimum wage today that's worth 20% less than it was 30 years ago, it's hard to live up to that value proposition. Imagine, everyone in this room: You got to take a 20% pay cut from what you were making when Ronald Reagan was president. You can't do it. And I meet people day in and day out who are telling me, "I have to make choices between a gallon of milk and a gallon of gas. I have to make choices between whether I'm going to pay the electric bill or whether I'm going to pay the doctor bill." "That's just not America," I'm confident Dr. King would say.

And tipped workers, disproportionately women, [are] more likely to be living in poverty, more likely to be on food stamps. Tipped workers are really getting the shaft. \$2.13 an hour. I can't tell you the number of people who say, "Tom, I know you're the labor secretary, but I think you've got your facts and figures wrong. The minimum wage for tipped workers cannot be \$2.13 an hour in the year 2014," and I tell them "Yes, it can—and yes, it is." And then I hear the concerns. FDR, when he signed the Fair Labor Standards Act, referred to opponents of the minimum wage as calamity howlers.<sup>1</sup> You hear from a lot of folk of that ilk that this is going to be the end of the world as we know it if we raise the tipped wages—restaurants will go under. There is this state out west called Washington State. They've had the highest minimum wage in the United States for the last fifteen years. And guess what? They don't have a tip credit. The restaurant workers make the same wage as everyone else. If you go to Seattle, you will find restaurants. I believe Starbucks is based there, last I heard. It's a level playing field. You look at their economic growth—they have been well above the national average. They continue to grow in that state because they understood what Henry Ford said one hundred years ago when he doubled the wages of those on the assembly line. Why did he do that? Attrition was 360%, or something like that. You can't run a business when you have attrition of that nature. You know what else he said? "The folk on my assembly line ought to be able to afford the products that they're making." And by the way, when you put

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<sup>1</sup> Seth D. Harris, *75 Years of Rewarding Work and Responsibility*, HUFFINGTON POST, June 23, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/seth-d-harris/seventy-five-years-of-rew\\_b\\_3480317.html?](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/seth-d-harris/seventy-five-years-of-rew_b_3480317.html?)

money in people's pockets, guess what they do? They spend it. And when they spend it, businesses have to make more things. And when businesses have to make more things, businesses have to hire more people. And when businesses pay a fair wage, like the owner of the Ace Hardware store half a mile from my office who owns nine Ace Hardware stores—who was with us at the Capitol yesterday with Harry Reid, with leader Pelosi, and others, talking about why she, as a business owner, pays the minimum wage and above for all of her employees: because she has a loyal workforce. When you see that, you understand why this is an economic imperative. It's a moral imperative. It's a civil rights imperative.

Nobody who works a full time job in this country should have to live in poverty. And that is why we continue to fight in this regard. To the students here, I've worked in local government, I've worked in state government, and I've worked now in the federal government. I can't hold a job—yeah, you might be thinking that. And frankly, there's a little truth to that. But the reality is I encourage you to get involved at a local level, at a state level. It started out as a prairie fire and then it became more of a prairie fire, and now it's a wildfire. It's a wildfire of fairness and opportunity across this country.

Connecticut just passed \$10.10. Maryland is going to do it in a few days, I predict. D.C. has done it, except they're at \$11.50 along with Montgomery and Prince George's counties. Get involved in this, Dr. King would say. Change doesn't initiate in Washington. Change all too frequently comes to Washington. We're going to keep fighting. We're going to fight across this country, and we are going to need your help.

The minimum wage is not the only issue of wage fairness that we are working on. I was very excited and honored that Wade mentioned the work that we're doing on behalf of home health workers. One thing I recognized early on is: What are your tools? What can you do to make a difference and expand opportunities? You have the ability to initiate litigation. You have the ability to issue regulations. You have the ability to use your bully pulpit. You have the ability to use education, outreach, and partnership. You have the ability to issue guidance. And the regulatory authority at the Department of Labor is very important. Home health workers are almost two million strong, 90% women, 50% of color, and roughly 40% on food stamps and/or some other form of public assistance.

Let me tell you about food stamps for a moment, because I cannot tell you the number of workers that I meet who look me in the eye and

tell me “Tom, I do not want to be on food stamps, but I can’t help it. I have no choice.” There are actually two proposals right now pending in the United States Congress that would reduce the ranks of food stamps recipients by about 3.8 million people. One proposal is from the Chair of the House Budget Committee and that would simply slash the eligibility and slash the ranks of food stamps recipients. The CBO has estimated that under that proposal, about 3.8 million less people would be on food stamps. There is another proposal called \$10.10—the minimum wage. The Center for American Progress did a study and it showed that you would save \$4.6 billion a year in food stamps expenditures by raising the minimum wage. And by the way, raising the minimum wage doesn’t cost a penny for the federal government. And guess how many people would no longer be eligible because they would be lifted above poverty? It just so happens that the number is 3.8 million. We have got two choices. Which choice would you take? I don’t think I need to ask for a show of hands.

The home health workers are a great example of why I love my job. It’s not that often that you go home and talk to my eleven year old, he says “Dad, what did you do today?” “Well, I helped a couple million people get a raise.” Home health workers were treated under federal regulations for decades as no different than babysitters. Anybody who has employed a home health worker—and I have, when my mother’s Alzheimer’s got bad—understands that they are doing anything but. They are indispensable professionals. I am so proud that we were able to implement that regulation, to give them the protections of the minimum wage and overtime laws that they so deserve.

That’s not all. In terms of addressing wage fairness, we have other tools. The President recently directed us to address an issue that is a real challenge for some, and that is overtime. Overtime stands for a very simple proposition: If you work more, you should get paid more. Here is what happened in that context. In 2004, the labor department issued regulations and they established a rule, a test, in which you could be exempt from overtime protections if you were performing, effectively, management functions. The problem is that the way the rule is written you can quite literally spend one percent of your time—and if you think I’m exaggerating, there is a Fourth Circuit case in which the worker was doing one percent of his work as management and 99% stocking shelves, and they were exempt from overtime protection. So what you have is a situation where people work seventy hours a week, they make \$455. Do the math—they are effectively

working ten, twenty, thirty hours for free. We've got to fix that. Who are those people? Folks at the Dunkin' Donuts. A woman in Boston, she works six days a week, nine hours a day. She actually thought she was making \$10 an hour because they told her that. Actually, if you do the math, \$455, you're right at the poverty line again. She was actually making about \$8.50 an hour when you do the math of what she was getting paid. We've got to fix that, so we are reaching out to businesses, we're reaching out to workers, we're reaching out to all the stakeholders. Once again, for so many of these people, the opportunity quilt is frayed—and we need to fix it, and we will continue to do that work. And that is yet another reason why I love my work.

I want to tell you about the work that we're doing that frankly keeps me up the most at night. There are a lot of things that keep me up, but this is the one that keeps me up the most. We don't talk about it enough, and that is the plight of people who are long-term unemployed. We had a good jobs report today. We have had forty-nine consecutive months of private-sector job growth to the tune of almost nine million jobs. Remember, when the President took office, we were hemorrhaging about 900,000 jobs a month, or something like that. We are moving in the right direction. We've got to pick up the pace. One aspect of this recovery that remains vexing is the high percentage of people who are long-term unemployed. In the pre-recession period, and in other normal times in the aftermath of recoveries from recessions, the long-term unemployment rate is about one percent. Currently, the long-term unemployment rate is about 2.4%. Let me translate that into numbers: That's like 3.5 million people. Or, to put it differently, if we had pre-recession levels of long-term unemployment, we would have an overall unemployment rate of about 5.3% instead of 6.7%.

And we'd have two million plus less people unemployed. Let me stop talking about aggregate data because this is all about people. I spent a lot of time doing focus groups with these folks because their stories inspire me. I was in Cleveland last Friday talking to a dozen long-term unemployed, and every single one of them, and every single person I have ever met, is working their tail off to find a job. I had one guy look me in the eye and say, "I've got no quit in me cause I've got a ten year old boy and I don't want him to think I'm quitting." I had another guy from New Jersey who said, "I'm a cancer survivor, I had a chemo drip in me for weeks and fighting cancer was a heck of a lot easier than fighting long-term unemployment."

I go to know a woman, and I continue to communicate with her, named Katherine Hackett.<sup>2</sup> Katherine is a single mom who lives in Connecticut. A mother of two. One is special forces, currently in Afghanistan, the other is a doctor in the military. She's played by the rules all of her life just like all of the other people I've met. She's college educated. She went to work one day, she worked in the healthcare sector, and was told, "we don't need your work anymore, we don't need your services." Totally blindsided. And she looked and looked and looked and she couldn't find a job.

She introduced the President at an event where we were talking about the plight of the long-term unemployed. We struck up a friendship and we got her some job leads and she would e-mail me. Let me read you a couple of these e-mails:

"Tom, I presented myself well today at the interview. I was extremely prepared. I have not heard anything yet but was told they would make a decision this week."

The following day: "For the first time since I've been unemployed, I had a meltdown. Up to that point I had remained positive, but I just felt mentally drained. I prepare, I rehearse, I learn the workings of the company—I memorize every answer to the questions that I think may be asked. It is so difficult to be overlooked time and time again."

She didn't get that job and she e-mailed me again and she said: "I had another interview today, and I don't know when that will be decided, but I just asked my marine how he has been trained to remain positive during dire situations. And he texted the following: "It is important to find small victories. They taught us that during SERE school." SERE stands for survival, evasion, resistance and escape. That's how the POWs in Vietnam stayed hopeful and positive despite their circumstances. "And so to honor the hard work my son does, I will focus on finding small victories each day."

This is exactly the type of folk I meet day in and day out. And they get you out of bed in the morning because they need our help. Next Monday, the Senate is going to vote on a bill extending unemployment benefits. Never in the history of Congress that I am aware of, has Congress refused to extend emergency unemployment benefits for long-term unemployed when we have a long-term unemployment rate as high as we have now. Never. Until December of this past year. And

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<sup>2</sup> See Tom Perez, *The Dignity of Work: Katherine Hackett's Story*, HUFFINGTON POST, Jan. 7, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/thomas-e-perez/the-dignity-of-work-kathe\\_b\\_4557760.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/thomas-e-perez/the-dignity-of-work-kathe_b_4557760.html), for more on Katherine Hackett's story.

two weeks ago they said we weren't going to get anything done in the Senate. We worked our tails off and we have a bipartisan bill that's going to pass the U.S. Senate on Monday, and we're going to get there in the House. And we're going to keep fighting, because I know Dr. King, were he here, would be there doing it. And we need that help. We need your help.

We got a letter in this case from an association of state workforce agencies saying it's really hard to administer benefits retroactively and all this other stuff. And I've been a state labor secretary. And by the way, retroactive benefits have only been done like four times in the last two years. If you're tired, get a new job. The burdens that states confront, and I can speak with some authority, pale in comparison to the burdens and challenges that Katherine Hackett and the millions of other folks are confronting. So we wrote a letter back, to Congress, and that was helpful in moving the ball forward.

If you're tired, get a new job. I really believe that. I'll tell you, I am not tired. I work hard but I get inspired by these folks. And I tell people I work with, if you're tired, don't come into work. We need people who have hop in their step. I have hop in my step—not just because of my knee replacement. But because of the work we've got to do. I have hop in my step because I see what's happening at my old job and I see the issues that are happening in the voting context. I spent the bulk of my time at DOJ working on voting issues. It's amazing to me. We're having this pitched battle about the future of our nation, and people have honest and serious disagreements about the nature of our democracy and the direction of our nation. That's fine, that's the essence of democracy. But we shouldn't be sitting here and targeting our perceived foes and making it harder for them to exercise their right to vote.

When I was at the Department [of Justice], we worked hard to make sure everybody had the right to vote, whether you were a service member, whether you were someone who lived in Texas, whether you were a limited English proficient Asian American in the Bay Area.

That's what we should be doing. We have some democracy maintenance to do. You are at the forefront of it. You do that work here at UDC. I love coming here because you all understand that this is a mission driven institution. We need your help in that because we have a lot going on.

We have Equal Pay Day next week. You know women are still taking it on the chin in the workplace all too frequently—nuts and bolts discrimination that I see day in and day out. Pregnant women

being told, “we don’t need your help.” Pregnant women seeking to get a mortgage being told they need to get PMI—private mortgage insurance—because I don’t know if you’re going to be going back to work. That’s illegal, folks. We addressed that in my old job. So we have some democracy maintenance to do. And we’ve got some opportunity building to do. We have an opportunity quilt that for all too many folks is frayed.

I am confident that we can do more. I am confident that we will succeed because we are on the right side of these issues. We stand for something. We stand for opportunity. We think we should expand the right for all eligible people to vote. We think we should expand the right for people to get access to affordable health insurance. We stand for opportunities in the workplace for people regardless of your religion, regardless of who you love, regardless of your race.

The beauty of this is the arc of the moral universe shifts toward justice for people who stand for opportunity. Not simply people whose basic premise is to be against everything. And that is why I come to you and I leave you tonight with an unremitting sense of optimism.

I look at history and folks who stand for something: inclusion, expanding opportunity. Those folks have won in the previous battles. And those folks—we folks—will continue to win in the future. We’ve got to be persistent. And yeah there are days when you get kicked in certain parts of the anatomy. But you know, as the civil rights saying goes: We fall down and we get up. And we continue to get up. And we’re persistent.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was first introduced in 1948. It took persistence. Fighting poverty will take persistence. Fighting poverty will take partnership. Fighting poverty will take leadership. Fighting poverty will take law schools like this great law school continuing to be at the forefront of these issues. And I am confident you will—I am confident that we will—succeed. And I leave you with one final point: Katherine Hackett has a job.