

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MARTIN LUTHER KING III
THE BRIGHTER CHOICE FOUNDATION'S
CHARTER SCHOOL FOR GIRLS & SCHOOL FOR BOYS LUNCHEON
ALBANY, NEW YORK
May 17, 2006
12 NOON

THANK YOU, MS. ANNE POPE (NAACP ALBANY CHAPTER PRESIDENT) FOR YOUR VERY GRACIOUS INTRODUCTION. AND THANK ALL OF YOU FOR YOUR WARM WELCOME.

TO MR. CHRISTIAN BENDER OF THE BRIGHTER CHOICE FOUNDATION, DISTINGUISHED PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS AND GUESTS, IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE AND AN HONOR TO BE HERE WITH YOU TODAY FOR THE 2006 BRIGHTER CHOICE FOUNDATION LUNCHEON.

I WANT TO THANK THE FOUNDATION AND MS. MAUREEN BLUM FOR INVITING ME TO BE YOUR KEYNOTE SPEAKER FOR THIS OCCASION, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY FOR THE GREAT WORK THAT YOU ARE DOING TO HELP CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS TO GET A GOOD EDUCATION. FROM WHAT I HAVE RECENTLY OBSERVED, THIS ORGANIZATION HAS MADE A TREMENDOUS DIFFERENCE FOR THE BETTER IN THE LIVES OF THE CHILDREN HERE IN ALBANY; AND I AM TRULY HONORED TO WITNESS WHAT YOU'RE DOING IN THE SCHOOLS AND TO SHARE MY THOUGHTS REGARDING THE POWER OF EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT.

LET ME BEGIN BY COLLECTIVELY CONGRATULATING THE FACULTY AND STAFF OF THE BRIGHTER CHOICE SCHOOLS THAT I PERSONALLY TOURED THIS MORNING. IN FACT, AFTER LEARNING OF YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS, I THINK I CAN FAIRLY DESCRIBE YOUR LEADERSHIP AS HEROIC BECAUSE OF THE LONG HOURS, PASSIONATE DEDICATION, AND SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE YOU HAVE EACH BROUGHT TO YOUR WORK. IT IS IMPORTANT AND MY PLEASURE TO COMMEND YOU FOR YOUR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS IN HELPING OUR CHILDREN TO FULFILL THEIR POTENTIAL, AND I WISH YOU THE GREATEST SUCCESS IN YOUR FUTURE ENDEAVORS.

I BELIEVE THAT IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT WHENEVER WE CAN TO TAKE THE TIME TO EXPRESS OUR APPRECIATION FOR ALL OF OUR NATION'S EDUCATORS WHOSE COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE IS TRULY EXTRAORDINARY.

LIKE THE AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, YOUR EFFORTS TO EDUCATE WHAT I LIKE TO REFER TO AS EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN AS OPPOSED TO "AT-RISK" IS ABOUT LIBERATION -- LIBERATION FROM PREJUDICE, LIBERATION FROM SOCIALLY-IMPOSED LIMITATIONS AND LIBERATION OF THE DIGNITY, CAPABILITIES AND POTENTIAL FOR EXCELLENCE THAT DWELLS IN THE HEART OF EVERY HUMAN BEING, REGARDLESS OF THEIR PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES AND/OR ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT.

WE NEED TO DO SOME SOUL-SEARCHING IN AMERICA ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING A QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF THEIR RACE, SOCIAL CLASS, AND/OR PHYSICAL AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES. ITS TIME TO DO A BETTER JOB OF MAKING EDUCATION A LEADING PRIORITY OF OUR NATIONAL AGENDA, SO THAT AN ADEQUATE INVESTMENT IN MEETING EDUCATIONAL NEEDS WILL BE ASSURED.

NOBODY WANTS TO PAY MORE TAXES, BUT WE HAVE TO FACE THE FACT THAT CREATING QUALITY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERY AMERICAN CHILD IS GOING TO BE AN EXPENSIVE UNDERTAKING. WE MUST HAVE MORE COMPETENT TEACHERS TO GIVE STUDENTS THE ATTENTION THEY NEED TO INSPIRE AND DEVELOP THEIR FULL POTENTIAL. THE PRESIDENT, CONGRESS AND EVERY TAXPAYER IS GOING TO HAVE TO MAKE A MORE SERIOUS INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC AND CHARTER SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO PREPARE THIS GENERATION FOR COMPETITION IN THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE. SOMEHOW, WE MUST MAKE WASHINGTON UNDERSTAND THAT EDUCATION IS AS MUCH OF A NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE FOR AMERICA'S SURVIVAL AS MILITARY PREPAREDNESS.

ACCEPTING THIS COMMITMENT WILL NOT BE AN INEXPENSIVE UNDERTAKING BECAUSE WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO TRAIN AND HIRE MORE TEACHERS TO ENSURE SMALLER CLASSES AND PAY THEM A BETTER SALARY. WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BUILD MORE SCHOOLS AND OUTFIT THEM WITH BETTER FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT LIKE THE BRIGHTER CHOICE FOUNDATION HAS DONE WITH THESE SCHOOLS; AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST, WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO PROVIDE MORE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY STUDENTS AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO MAKE SURE STUDENTS RECEIVE THE HELP ALLOCATED.

IF WE DECIDE NOT TO ACT, THE NEXT GENERATION MAY NOT HAVE A CHANCE TO CORRECT OUR MISTAKES. WE, AS VOTING CITIZENS, MUST MAKE IT CLEAR TO OUR LEADERS THAT THEIR SUPPORT FROM US DEPENDS ON THEIR FACING THIS ISSUE.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT WE CAN'T AFFORD THE LUXURY OF NOT INVESTING IN THE EDUCATION OF OUR YOUTH, BECAUSE OTHER NATIONS HAVE ALREADY REALIZED THAT THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THE EDUCATED YOUNGSTERS OF TODAY. IT IS PAST TIME FOR THE U.S. TO WAKE UP AND REALIZE THAT EDUCATION IS THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE INVESTMENT A NATION CAN MAKE.

TEACHING YOUNG PEOPLE ACADEMIC SKILLS IS RIGHTFULLY THE FIRST PRIORITY OF EDUCATION. BUT, SCHOOLS ALSO HAVE A VITALLY IMPORTANT ROLE AS A PLACE WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE CAN LEARN ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILLS, INCLUDING CONFLICT-RESOLUTION AND THE ABILITY TO WORK WITH PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT RACES AND CULTURES.

BY ALMOST ANY MEASURE, EDUCATION IS THE MOST WISE AND COST-EFFECTIVE INVESTMENT TAXPAYERS CAN MAKE. WHAT OTHER VEHICLE CAN WE UTILIZE THAT PROMOTES PROSPERITY, STRENGTHENS OUR

COMPETITIVE POSITION IN THE WORLD MARKETPLACE, ENRICHES OUR CULTURE, AND HELPS PREPARE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE FOR INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION? IN COST-BENEFIT TERMS, EDUCATION OF DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS IS THE GREATEST BARGAIN IN AMERICA.

WHEN WE EDUCATE AND TRAIN EXCEPTIONAL YOUNG PEOPLE TO HAVE MARKETABLE JOB SKILLS, WE NOT ONLY MAKE THEIR LIVES BETTER. WE ARE TAKING A PRO-ACTIVE INITIATIVE TO REDUCE DRUG ABUSE, REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF STREET CRIME AND LOWER THE COSTS FOR WELFARE, UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION, FOOD STAMPS AND A HOST OF SIMILAR EXPENDITURES.

IT IS HARD TO UNDERSTAND HOW ELECTED OFFICIALS IN THE MOST PROSPEROUS NATION ON EARTH CAN JUSTIFY CUTTING THE BUDGET FOR IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS --- ESPECIALLY AT A TIME WHEN WE ARE RAPIDLY LOSING OUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE TO OTHER LARGE NATIONS, SUCH AS INDIA AND CHINA.

WE ARE SPENDING 6 BILLION DOLLARS EVERY MONTH ON A WAR IN IRAQ, WHICH THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF AMERICANS BELIEVE IS UNJUSTIFIED AND HAS LITTLE OR NO CHANCE OF SUCCESS. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THE WAR IN IRAQ HAS ALREADY COST EVERY U.S. HOUSEHOLD TWO THOUSAND DOLLARS, AND THE PRICE OF GAS ISN'T GETTING ANY CHEAPER, IS IT? WE HAVE SPENT OVER 270 BILLION DOLLARS ON THE WAR IN IRAQ AND THE OCCUPATION, WITH NO END IN SIGHT, AND THERE WILL BE ADDITIONAL ECONOMIC COSTS WE HAVEN'T EVEN BEGUN TO CALCULATE. SUBSTANDARD EDUCATION, POOR HOUSING, LACK OF HEALTH SECURITY, AND INCREASING UNEMPLOYMENT ARE MORE OF AN IMMEDIATE THREAT TO OUR NATIONAL SECURITY THAN ANYTHING THAT IS HAPPENING IN IRAQ.

AS MY FATHER ONCE SAID, "A NATION THAT CONTINUES YEAR AFTER YEAR TO SPEND MORE MONEY ON MILITARY DEFENSE THAN ON PROGRAMS OF SOCIAL UPLIFT IS APPROACHING SPIRITUAL DEATH." THE QUESTION FOR EACH OF US IS: WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY NEEDS A NEW VISION, AND THAT'S WHAT WE ARE CHARGED TO PROVIDE. INSTEAD OF PERPETUAL WAR AND MILITARY CONFLICT, LET US DARE TO ENVISION A NEW ERA, WHEN THE ARMAMENTS OF ANNIHILATION ARE REPLACED WITH THE PLOWSHARES OF RENEWAL.

MY FATHER USED TO TALK ABOUT THE 'BELOVED COMMUNITY,' IN WHICH AN ETHIC OF BROTHERHOOD AND SISTERHOOD WOULD PREVAIL. ISN'T IT INTERESTING THAT WE DON'T HEAR THESE TERMS MUCH ANY MORE, 'BROTHERHOOD' AND 'SISTERHOOD'? HAS OUR SOCIETY BECOME TOO CYNICAL TO ENTERTAIN THE POSSIBILITY? I UNDERSTAND THAT IN TODAY'S HURRIED WORLD, WE ARE ALL SO BUSY WORKING AND RUNNING THE NEVER-ENDING ERRANDS OF DAILY LIFE, TENDING TO OUR FAMILIES AND PERSONAL PROBLEMS, THAT THE IDEA OF THE BELOVED COMMUNITY SEEMS ALMOST QUIANT.

AND YET, DEEP DOWN, I THINK WE ALL HAVE SOME KIND OF A SENSE THAT GOD DIDN'T PUT US HERE JUST TO COMPETE FOR FINANCIAL WEALTH, TO ACCUMULATE THE LARGEST PROPERTY, OR BUY THE BEST TOYS IN THIS MOST PROSPEROUS OF NATIONS. IF THAT'S ALL WE ARE ABOUT, THEN WE SERIOUSLY NEED THE WISDOM OF GOD.

INSTEAD OF PURSUING SELFISH GRATIFICATION, I BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE BEEN PUT HERE IN THIS WEALTHIEST AND MOST DIVERSE OF NATIONS TO BUILD THE BELOVED COMMUNITY AND CREATE A SPIRIT OF GENUINE BROTHERHOOD AND SISTERHOOD. I THINK WE, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, HAVE BEEN GIVEN A WONDERFUL GIFT THAT COMES WITH A DAUNTING CHALLENGE. OUR GIFT IS A NATION, WIDE WITH LAND AND RICH WITH RESOURCES. MANY OF US HAVE BEEN BLESSED BY UNPRECEDENTED FREEDOM FROM LACK OF RESOURCES, AND WE ALL BENEFIT FROM A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT THAT CAN EMPOWER CITIZENS TO BETTER THEIR COMMUNITIES. YES, WE STILL HAVE PLENTY OF POVERTY AND INJUSTICE, AND OUR DEMOCRACY NEEDS SOME SERIOUS IMPROVEMENTS. BUT THERE IS NO DENYING THE VAST OPPORTUNITIES AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ACCESSIBLE TO MILLIONS IN THE LAND OF AMERICA THAT EXISTS AT A LEVEL UNMATCHED IN HUMAN HISTORY.

THE DAUNTING CHALLENGE, OR THE CATCH, IF YOU WILL, IS THAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO USE THIS WONDROUS GIFT TO SET AN EXAMPLE OF HOPE AND BROTHERHOOD AND COMMUNITY FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD. I KNOW SOME MAY SAY THIS IS A UTOPIAN IDEAL. BUT THERE WERE THOSE WHO SAID THE SAME THING ABOUT THE IDEA OF AMERICA BACK IN 1776. THERE WERE THOSE WHO SAID THE SAME THING ABOUT ENDING SLAVERY IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND THOSE WHO SAID THE SAME THING ABOUT ERADICATING RACIAL SEGREGATION IN THE 1950'S AND 60'S.

I SEE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SOCIETY IN WHICH BROTHERHOOD AND SISTERHOOD CAN FLOURISH AS YET ANOTHER STEP TOWARD FULFILLING AMERICA'S DESTINY. YES, BUILDING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY IS A DAUNTING CHALLENGE. BUT IT IS ONE THAT WE CANNOT SHIRK, IF WE ARE TO BE WORTHY OF THE SACRIFICES AND SUFFERING ENDURED BY ALL OF OUR ANCESTORS WHO BUILT AMERICA WITH THEIR BLOOD, SWEAT AND TOIL.

THE MOST POWERFUL TOOL WE HAVE FOR MEETING THIS CHALLENGE, THE GREAT LEAVENING AGENT IF YOU WILL, IS EDUCATION. NOT ONLY IS EDUCATION A POWERFUL FORCE FOR EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE PROSPERITY; THE FREEDOM FROM DEPRIVATION IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF THE BELOVED COMMUNITY.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT SHOULD ALWAYS BE APPLAUDED, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT IS ACCOMPANIED BY A STRONG COMMITMENT TO REACH OUT TO HELP OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICTS, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS IMPROVE THEIR PERFORMANCE AS WELL. HONORING SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS AND THEIR DISTRICTS IS IMPORTANT. BUT IT IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT TO FOSTER A SENSE OF COMMUNITY, A SHARED STAKE, IF YOU WILL, IN THE UPLIFT OF DISADVANTAGED, AT-RISK, POTENTIALLY EXCEPTIONAL YOUNG PEOPLE.

IN COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE NATION, WE PLACE A HIGH VALUE ON INTELLECTUAL ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS, AS WELL WE SHOULD. GOOD STUDENTS AND GOOD SCHOOLS SET A POWERFUL EXAMPLE THAT OTHERS CAN EMULATE, AND THIS IS AN EXCELLENT THING. WE MUST CONTINUE TO EXPLORE NEW AND CREATIVE WAYS TO SPREAD THE ELEMENTS OF EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE TO STUDENTS WHO ARE STRUGGLING TO FIND THEIR WAY. I KNOW THAT THE BRIGHTER CHOICE FOUNDATION HAS BEEN CONCERNED WITH MEETING THIS CHALLENGE FROM THE OUTSET, AND AGAIN, I SALUTE YOU FOR YOUR COMMITMENT.

THERE YET REMAINS IN OUR SCHOOL SYSTEMS THE ISSUE OF EDUCATING THE HEART, AS WELL AS THE MIND. WE HAVE GOT TO START DOING A BETTER JOB IN AMERICA OF REACHING OUT TO EACH OTHER AND BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS SO THE DISADVANTAGED OF ALL RACES CAN FULFILL THEIR POTENTIAL AS HUMAN BEINGS. WE'VE GOT TO DO A BETTER JOB OF TEACHING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE IN PARTICULAR THE VALUES OF ALTRUISM AND SHARING, COMPASSION AND GENEROSITY, AND YES, SISTERHOOD AND BROTHERHOOD. THERE SHOULD NEVER BE A DAY WHEN WE HEAR OF TEENAGERS BEATING UP HOMELESS PEOPLE WITH BASEBALL BATS OR SETTING THEM ON FIRE AS THOUGH THEY WERE INHUMAN TRASH. THE FAILURE TO TEACH THE IMPORTANCE OF HELPING 'THE LEAST OF THESE GOD'S CHILDREN' DOES NOT BEFIT THE CITIZENS OF A GREAT DEMOCRACY REGARDLESS OF CHURCH DENOMINATION.

SOME WILL ARGUE THAT SUCH VALUES ARE BEST TAUGHT IN OUR HOMES AND PLACES OF WORSHIP, AND I WON'T ARGUE WITH THAT. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE SHOULD SHY AWAY FROM TEACHING THE VALUES OF BROTHERHOOD AND SISTERHOOD IN OUR SCHOOLS. NOT EVERY CHILD GOES TO CHURCH, THE TEMPLE, OR THE MOSQUE, AND SADLY, NOT EVERY PLACE OF WORSHIP PROMOTES THESE VALUES. EVEN MORE REGRETFULLY, NOT EVERY FAMILY TEACHES THESE VALUES. YET SOCIETY HAS AN INTEREST IN INSURING THAT ALL YOUNG PEOPLE ACHIEVE A DEEPENING SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND A GROWING REGARD FOR SERVING HUMANITY.

I CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THERE WILL BE A DAY WHEN OUR SCHOOLS TAKE A MORE PRO-ACTIVE ROLE IN EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT THE POWER OF NONVIOLENCE AS A FORCE FOR PERSONAL, AS WELL AS COMMUNITY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT. THE SAME GOES FOR IMPROVING RACE RELATIONS.

AMERICA'S SCHOOLS SERVE A GREAT AND NOBLE PURPOSE THAT IS SO OFTEN OVERLOOKED AND TAKEN FOR GRANTED. THEY ARE THE RACE RELATIONS LABORATORIES OF DEMOCRACY, AND IN MANY COMMUNITIES THEY ARE THE PRIMARY PLACE WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT RACES AND CULTURES COME TOGETHER AND LEARN HOW TO LIVE AND COOPERATE WITH EACH OTHER.

AMERICA'S SCHOOLS WERE AT ONE TIME THE MOST POWERFUL FORCE FOR EQUALITY IN HISTORY. BUT WE HAVE MUCH TO DO BEFORE WE CAN SAY THAT INEQUALITY HAS BEEN ROOTED OUT OF THE NATION'S SCHOOL

SYSTEMS; AND WE STILL HAVE TOO MANY SCHOOLS THAT LACK DIVERSITY AND EQUAL ACCESS TO UPDATED TECHNOLOGY AND RESOURCES.

IF WE CAN BUILD BRIDGES OF KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND GOODWILL BETWEEN STUDENTS OF ALL RACES AND CULTURAL GROUPS, WE WILL SOW THE SEEDS OF A NEW UNITY AND GREATER PROSPERITY IN AMERICA. PROMOTING DIVERSITY HELPS OPEN THE DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY TO ALL GROUPS, AND SOME FORM OF TRAINING, PERHAPS A COURSE IN MULTICULTURAL UNITY, SHOULD BE REQUIRED OF EVERY STUDENT BEFORE THEY GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL RATHER THAN ALLOWING FOR THE POTENTIAL RISK OF FACING PUNISHMENT FOR A HATE CRIME. I BELIEVE A COURSE OF THIS COULD BENEFIT EVERY CITY IN AMERICA. CIVICS OR CITIZENSHIP COURSES WHICH TEACH THE MECHANICS OF GOVERNMENT, ARE NOT ENOUGH. WE MUST BEGIN TO MORE ASSERTIVELY TEACH THE CORE VALUES OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY -- TOLERANCE, RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY, INTERCULTURAL COOPERATION, AND YES, EVEN BROTHER AND SISTERHOOD.

IN ADDITION TO EDUCATING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN DIGNITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS, WE HAVE TO INNOCULATE THEM AGAINST THE TOXIC VIRUSES OF RACISM, SEXISM, HOMOPHOBIA, ANTI-SEMITISM, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF BIGOTRY. THE QUALITY OF AMERICAN SOCIETY IN THE 21ST CENTURY WITH RESPECT TO EVERY HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE DEPENDS ON HOW WELL WE EDUCATE THE CHILDREN THAT ARE GROWING UP RIGHT NOW.

MORE THAN ANY OTHER INSTITUTION, OUR SCHOOLS SHOULD BE THE CATALYSTS AND FACILITATORS OF INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND GOODWILL AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE. IF WE EVER CREATE THAT MULTICULTURAL DEMOCRACY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S DREAM, IT WILL HAPPEN IN LARGE PART BECAUSE OF THE COMMITMENT AND DEDICATION OF THE TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL WHO RUN THE SCHOOLS.

WE KNOW THAT MANY EDUCATORS ARE CHALLENGED TO TEACH YOUNG PEOPLE READING, WRITING, MATH AND OTHER SKILLS OF THE VARIOUS DISCIPLINES, MANY IN OVERCROWDED CLASSES. HOWEVER, THE BEST TEACHERS ARE RIGHTLY CONCERNED WITH ENCOURAGING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE TO NEVER STOP LEARNING, AND GIVING WINGS TO THEIR HOPES AND DREAMS. I BELIEVE THAT THE LEADERS OF AMERICA'S FUTURE WILL BE THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE TAUGHT EARLY AND OFTEN HOW TO BUILD BRIDGES OF HOPE AND UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN DIFFERENT RACES AND CULTURES.

EVERY EFFORT THAT WE INVEST IN EMPOWERING DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE SELF-SUFFICIENCY WILL MAKE OUR COMMUNITIES STRONGER AND HEALTHIER. BY SUPPORTING PEOPLE IN THEIR NONVIOLENT STRUGGLES TO ACHIEVE THEIR ASPIRATIONS, WE NOT ONLY BRING HOPE AND OPPORTUNITY INTO THEIR LIVES, BUT ALSO GREATER MEANING, PURPOSE AND NOBILITY TO OUR OWN.

IT IS UP TO US TO FULLY EXERCISE OUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS, AND IT IS CRITICALLY-IMPORTANT TO OUR HOPES FOR FULFILLING THE DREAM OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. WE MUST WORK TO ELECT MORE CANDIDATES OF CHARACTER, INTEGRITY AND COURAGE AT THE FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS – ESPECIALLY MORE MINORITY AND WOMEN CANDIDATES. AND I EMPHASIZE WOMEN HERE, BECAUSE WE STILL DON'T HAVE ENOUGH SISTERS IN GOVERNMENT. UNTIL WOMEN OF EVERY RACE ACHIEVE PARITY IN POLITICS, WE ARE SIMPLY NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO BUILD THE GOOD AND DECENT SOCIETY.

TODAY I WANT TO CHALLENGE ALL OF YOU TO MAKE A COMMITMENT TO HELP US FULFILL THE DREAM OF A NATION UNITED IN JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERYONE. I CALL ON EVERYONE OF VOTING AGE TO COME FORWARD AND USE THE POWER OF THE BALLOT. PLEASE, BECOME INFORMED ABOUT THE CRITICAL ISSUES THAT WILL SHAPE OUR FUTURE, AND DON'T BE FOOLED BY SLICK PR CAMPAIGNS AND SLOGANS, DO THE RESEARCH BEFORE VOTING.

GETTING A RECORD TURNOUT AT THE POLLS IS A WORTHY CHALLENGE FOR US ALL. BUT IT IS ONLY HALF THE BATTLE. TO FULFILL THE DREAM OF A NATION UNITED IN JUSTICE, SISTERHOOD AND BROTHERHOOD, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE VOTE FOR CANDIDATES WHO SUPPORT NEEDED REFORMS. THESE INCLUDE UNIVERSAL HEALTH SECURITY, AFFORDABLE COLLEGE TUITION, BETTER JOB TRAINING AND MORE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES. WE MOST CERTAINLY NEED TO MAKE SURE THAT THE POLITICIANS WHO ASK FOR OUR VOTES ARE NOT GOING TO SUPPORT PRIVATIZING SOCIAL SECURITY OR CUTTING SOCIAL SECURITY OR MEDICARE BENEFITS.

AND ONE ISSUE THAT HAS NOT GOTTEN ENOUGH ATTENTION OR MEDIA COVERAGE IN RECENT YEARS IS THE ENVIRONMENT. WE REALLY MUST STRENGTHEN AND ENERGIZE A NATION-WIDE COALITION TO COMPELL OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS TO TAKE DECISIVE ACTION TO STOP POLLUTION FROM FOULING THE AIR WE BREATHE AND THE WATER WE DRINK. PLEASE BE SURE TO TAKE THESE CONCERNS WITH YOU INTO YOUR PRAYER CLOSET AND THEN TO THE VOTING BOOTH IN NOVEMBER.

I'M SURE YOU WILL JOIN ME ALSO IN CALLING FOR A POLITICAL CONSENSUS THAT A QUALITY EDUCATION OUGHT TO BE CONSIDERED A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT IN ANY CIVILIZED NATION. ONE OF THE MOST CRITICAL PRIORITIES FOR GENUINE NATIONAL SECURITY IS AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM THAT COVERS ALL CITIZENS. NO MATTER HOW MUCH MILITARY PREPAREDNESS OR SUPERIORITY WE ACHIEVE, WE WILL BE WEAK AT THE VITAL CENTER OF OUR NATIONAL SECURITY UNTIL WE PRODUCE SCHOOL SYSTEMS THAT MAINTAIN HIGH ACADEMIC STANDARDS IN SAFE AND NURTURING ENVIRONMENTS FOR EVERY SINGLE PERSON IN AMERICA. THE ABILITY TO BOMB THE REST OF THE WORLD TO SMITHEREENS DOESN'T MEAN MUCH, WHEN ALARMING PROPORTIONS OF AMERICAN CHILDREN

HAVEN'T HAD A CHECK-UP SINCE THEY WERE BORN AND ARE FUNCTIONALLY ILLITERATE.

A QUALITY EDUCATION IS NOT A PRIVILEGE TO BE GRANTED ONLY TO THOSE WHO CAN AFFORD IT, BUT A PROVISION THAT EVERY NATION SHOULD BE MORALLY AND LEGALLY OBLIGATED TO PROVIDE AS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT.

WHEN WE EDUCATE AND TRAIN DISADVANTAGED YOUNG PEOPLE TO HAVE MARKETABLE JOB SKILLS, WE ARE ENHANCING THE ABILITY OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE -- AND OUR NATION -- TO COMPETE IN THE WORLD MARKETPLACE. WHEN WE MAKE AN INVESTMENT SO SINGLE PARENTS CAN HAVE AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE, WE TRANSFORM RECIPIENTS OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE INTO WAGE EARNERS AND TAX-PAYERS. WHEN WE PROTECT THE RETIREMENT AND PENSION ASSETS OF OLDER WORKERS FROM CORPORATE PIRACY, WE STRENGTHEN OUR ECONOMY AND STABILIZE OUR COMMUNITIES. WHEN WE MAKE REPAIRS IN BRIDGES, HIGHWAYS AND WATER LEVEE SYSTEMS WHEN THEY ARE NEEDED, WE CAN SAVE BILLIONS IN MORE EXPENSIVE REPAIRS LATER.

YOUR VOTE DOES COUNT, AND I HOPE YOU WILL USE IT TO SEND A MESSAGE TO THE CANDIDATES THAT NOW IS THE TIME FOR OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT IN ADDRESSING CRITICAL HUMAN NEEDS.

IF WE ARE GOING TO FULFILL MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S DREAM, WE MUST CREATE A SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION IN EVERY SECTOR OF OUR SOCIETY. WE HAVE TO BECOME AGITATORS IN THE SPIRIT OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. WE HAVE TO BECOME AGITATORS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, AGITATORS FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DECENCY, AGITATORS FOR INTERRACIAL SISTER AND BROTHERHOOD, AGITATORS FOR PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE AND THE BELOVED COMMUNITY.

IN CLOSING, I WANT TO SALUTE ALL OF YOU FOR YOUR ENERGETIC DEDICATION TO THE ADVANCING OF EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION. STANDING BEFORE YOU TODAY, I SEE IN YOUR FACES THE FUTURE OF A BETTER AND BRAVER AMERICA, BECAUSE YOU ARE THE LEADERS PROVIDING HOPE FOR A MORE DECENT LIFE TO AMERICA'S CHILDREN. I KNOW I CAN SPEAK FOR MANY MILLIONS OF CONCERNED AMERICANS IN SAYING THAT WE SINCERELY THANK YOU, AND MAY GOD GIVE YOU THE STRENGTH AND RESOURCES TO CARRY FORWARD YOUR GREAT WORK UNTIL EVERY CHILD IN EVERY COMMUNITY HAS ACCESS TO A QUALITY EDUCATION. WHEN THIS GLORIOUS DAY OF HOPE AND OPPORTUNITY DAWNS ON HUMANKIND, WE WILL NOT ONLY BE SHARING THE DREAM; INDEED, WE WILL BE LIVING IT, AND THE TEACHERS, MOTIVATORS, MENTORS, AND LEADERS FROM HEAVEN WILL LOOK UPON US WITH GREAT JOY.

TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE GATHERED HERE TODAY, I WANT TO SAY THAT I KNOW YOU WILL FACE PLENTY OF CHALLENGES IN THE YEARS AHEAD, BUT DON'T LET ANYONE KEEP YOU FROM FULFILLING YOUR DESTINY AND PURPOSE. MY GOOD FRIEND, THE REVEREND DR. CHARLES ADAMS OF DETROIT SAID IT WELL: "LIFE STRUGGLES ARE ONGOING; BUT YOU NEED

NOT MAKE ANY EXCUSES OR COP ANY PLEAS. DON'T GO TO THE COMPLAINT WINDOW. GO TO THE CLAIM COUNTER. DON'T TAKE CARE, TAKE CHARGE. IF TIMES GET TOUGH, YOU GET TOUGH. FOR YOU CAN RISE AS HIGH AS YOU CAN REACH, SO DON'T BE INTIMIDATED BY FEAR. DO NOT BE BLINDED BY PREJUDICE. DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED BY THE SYSTEM. BUT FACE IT, CHALLENGE IT, CHANGE IT, AND OVERCOME IT. NEVER GIVE UP ON ANY GOOD THING. IF YOU HAVE A HARD WAY TO GO, WALK IT BY FAITH. IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM, WORK WITH IT TILL YOU WORK IT OUT. IF YOU'VE GOT A GRUDGE AGAINST ANYBODY, DROP IT. IF YOU'VE GOT HATRED OR RESENTMENT, SHAKE IT OFF. IF YOU'VE GOT A HIGH MOUNTAIN IN FRONT OF YOU, CLIMB IT. IF YOU'VE GOT A BATTLE, FIGHT IT. IF YOU'VE GOT A HANDICAP, RISE ABOVE IT. IF YOU'VE GOT PREJUDICE OVERCOME IT. IF YOU HAVE EVIL INSIDE OF YOU, DESTROY IT. IF YOU'VE GOT A CHALLENGE, FACE IT. IF YOU'VE GOT A CROSS, BEAR IT. IF THEY KNOCK YOU DOWN, GET BACK UP. IF THEY PUSH YOU AGAINST THE ROPES, COME OUT SWINGING. IF THEY HATE YOU, KEEP ON LOVING. IF THEY LAUGH AT YOU, KEEP SMILING. AND FINALLY, IF THEY MISREPRESENT YOU OR LIE ON YOU, DON'T LET IT BE TRUE."

THANK YOU AND GOD BLESS YOU.

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