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ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE
51ST ANNUAL NAACP FIGHT FOR FREEDOM DINNER
DETROIT, MICHIGAN
APRIL 30, 2006

“WE’VE COME TOO FAR TO TURN BACK NOW”:
ACTING AFFIRMATIVELY TO PRESERVE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

BY
SHEILA JACKSON LEE
MEMBER OF CONGRESS FROM TEXAS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

INTRODUCTION

Thank you so much for that warm introduction. Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and Governor Jennifer Granholm, it is a great privilege to be back in your wonderful city and state again.

I have been honored many times to visit Detroit, the birthplace of the auto industry which revolutionize the world and is more responsible than any other industry for creating the great middle class in America.

I have so many dear friends who hail from the Motor City: Senators Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow, who every day wage the good fight on behalf of Michigan families in the United States Senate; my colleague in the House, Congresswoman Carolyn Kilpatrick,

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a tireless champion for economic and social justice; the great John Dingell, the dean of the House who has waged a 50 year fight for universal health care for all Americans, and my good and dear friend, the Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee, John Conyers.

Might I say also how much I am looking forward to next January, when I expect to call him Mr. Chairman. Forgive me for taking this opportunity to publicly thank John Conyers again on all our behalf for his good work in arranging for Rosa Parks, a woman small in stature but larger than life in history, to lie in state in the Capitol of the United States and receive the sorrowful thanks of a grateful nature.

I thank also the Co-Chairs of this Dinner, Don Barden and Don Davis. You have made everyone in attendance tonight proud to be here. Reverend Anthony, thank you so much for all you have done as the president of this great NAACP chapter. I thank the Host Committee very inviting me to be with you.

My heartfelt congratulations to the award recipients: the Rev. Joseph Lowery for Lifetime Achievement; Dr. O'Neil D. Swanson and Ms. Karen Anderson, both recipients of the Freedom and Justice Award. It seems to me that there can be no award more special than one given for service in the fight for freedom and justice. Thank you Rev. Lowry, Dr. Swanson, and Ms. Anderson for your service and sacrifice.

Last, let me thank you, all of the guests assembled here tonight, for your steadfast support, financial and otherwise, for this organization that has for more than 50 years answered the call whenever truth needed a spokesman or equality needed a champion or justice needed a warrior. The Detroit Chapter of the NAACP has always been there when we needed her, and she has never been needed more than she is at this moment.

Thanks to your generous support, she will have the resources to fight on till victory is won!

PURPOSE AND OCCASION

Ladies and Gentlemen: we gather here tonight at an important moment in history. As a nation we confront big problems and major challenges. The problems are big, but so are we. And we can and will surmount them if we stay focused and do not allow ourselves to be distracted by phony side issues like the need for the so-called Michigan Civil Rights

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Initiative, which is neither civil nor right.

Tonight, somewhere in Detroit and in Houston and in Los Angeles, a father just pawned his television for money to fill his car with gas so he can drive the 20 miles to his other part-time job. He hopes his 5-year old doesn't have another asthma attack because he no longer has health insurance and the emergency room is too far for his wife to carry a sick child and she can't afford to take a cab. Let's pray the child doesn't get sick. But we know he will because the worst that can happen always does when you can least afford it.

[KATRINA]

Tonight, there are scattered across this broad land survivors of Hurricane Katrina who, having survived the greatest natural calamity to befall the nation, are struggling to survive the catastrophic response of their own national government. There are thousands and thousands of them, our brothers and sisters, fellow citizens stranded and dislocated in their own country, their past forgotten, their present unbearable, their future uncertain. This is no way to live in America. This is no way to live in America.

[IRAQ WAR]

Tonight, in Iraq and Afghanistan and countless other places around the world, the men and women who risk their lives to preserve our freedom are spending another night away from their homes, their loved ones, their favorite places and familiar faces. We were told they had to be sent over there . . . Over there . . . To face the enemy who attacked us here. Over there so we wouldn't have to confront them here. Except we now know the enemy who attacked us wasn't in Iraq. We also know now that even if Iraq wished it could, it had nothing to attack us with. There were no Weapons of Mass Destruction over there. Only Words of Mass Deception over here. We were led to believe that Iraq would pay for the war with its oil. Instead, we are now paying through the nose for the gas we never got from the oil. Words of Mass Deception. Our troops would be greeted as liberators. Words of Mass Deception. The war would be a cakewalk. Words of Mass Deception. Mission Accomplished. Words of Mass Deception.

[DARFUR & SUDAN]

Tonight, in Darfur, in the western region of the Sudan, a faraway place in a faraway land unknown to most Americans, a baby cries out in hunger and in pain. Does the world hear? Tonight, nearly three years into the crisis, Darfur is a humanitarian and human rights tragedy of the first rank: humanity, security, and politics have given way to unimaginable barbarism, fear, and war. The situation deteriorates on a daily basis:

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atrocities continue, large numbers of children die every day of malnutrition and disease, a new famine is on the way. According to the World Food Program, the United Nations and the Coalition for International Justice, 3.5 million people are now hungry, 2.5 million have been displaced due to violence, and more than 400,000 people have died. After Rwanda, the civilized world said never would a blind eye be turned again to genocide. But here we are, just 12 years later, witnessing and watching unspeakable acts of barbarism being committed by man against his fellow man.

[IMMIGRATION]

And finally: tonight, as we gather on this great occasion to celebrate and reflect upon our long struggle for justice and equality and an honored place in the American family, there is another family about to begin a similar quest. Somewhere down South, more precisely down Southwest --- across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Laredo, Corpus Christi, or Brownsville Or maybe just south of Tuscon or San Diego or Douglass, Arizona – there is a family in Old Mexico anxiously about to embark on their own journey to the New World of America. They come for the same reason so many millions came before them, in this century and last, from this continent and from every other. They come for the same reasons families have always come to America: to be free of fear and hunger, to better their condition, to begin their world anew, to give their children a chance for a better life. Like previous waves of immigrants, they too will wage all and risk all to reach the sidewalks of Houston. Or Los Angeles. Or Phoenix. Or Chicago. or Atlanta. or Denver. or Detroit. They will risk death in the desert, they will brave the elements, they will risk capture and crime, they will endure separation from loved ones.

And if they make it to the American Promised Land, no job will be beneath them. They will cook our food, clean our houses, cut our grass, and care for our kids. They will be cheated by some and exploited by others. They work in sunlight but live in twilight, between the shadows; not fully welcome as new Americans but wanted as low-wage workers. Somewhere near the borders tonight, a family will cross over into the New World, willed by the enduring power of the American Dream.

[SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES FACING NATION]

And so here we are. In addition to the enormous challenges we face in:

? relieving the growing economic insecurity gripping more and more millions of Americans every month;

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- ? Rebuilding and Revitalizing Communities in New Orleans, the Gulf Coast, and Across America;
- ? Winning the War Against Al Qaeda and Ending the War in Iraq;
- ? Healing the Human Suffering in Darfur and other troubled spots around the world; and
- ? Devising a humane and comprehensive immigration policy that balances legitimate concerns over border security without closing the “Golden Door” to America symbolized by the Statue of Liberty,

As a nation we must also solve the problems of: our dependence of foreign oil; skyrocketing healthcare costs and the increasing percentage of Americans without health insurance; the quality of education and the ability of our schools and colleges to produce graduates capable of outcompeting their peers in the rest of the world in the fields of math and science.

We must find ways, as well, to ensure that elderly Americans who spent a life building and contributing to this nation’s greatness are able to live out their golden years in dignity and security.

Of course, we have an obligation to our children and theirs to protect the nation’s security, and this means we have to secure our ports and plants and critical infrastructure.

We must narrow and then eliminate the digital divide so all children, urban and rural, of every color and creed and nationality can have the tools needed to compete in the global economy.

And we must restore the national government’s fiscal condition to health. We simply cannot sustain the present course of reckless federal budgets which created trillions of dollars in new deficits that threaten our economic future.

The challenges we face are great. But I believe we can overcome them. Know this much, however, we cannot stand one more year or month or week of the status quo which, by the way, is latin for the “mess we are in.” So where do we go from here? How are we going to tackle these challenges?

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And you know, I have been thinking about this question a lot lately. I have to.

I sit on the Homeland Security Committee, which among other things is responsible for developing strategies to protect against terrorist attacks against the United States and defeating terrorist efforts to inflict economic costs through threats and violence and mitigating the potential consequences of terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure, and for devising policies to protect the security of the nation's borders, ports, and transportation systems.

I sit on the Judiciary Committee, where as I mentioned, my leader is the honorable future Chairman of the Committee. As a member of the Committee on the Judiciary, every day I am reminded that I am expected to contribute to legislation involving the federal judiciary and judicial proceedings, civil and criminal; Bankruptcy, mutiny, espionage, and counterfeiting; Civil liberties and Constitutional amendments; the enforcement of the Criminal law, including oversight of the FBI; immigration policy and non-border enforcement; intellectual property rights including patents, copyrights, and trademarks; antitrust; and Presidential succession, including impeachment.

I am also a member of the Science Committee, which has jurisdiction over all non-defense federal scientific research and development (R&D) and NASA, EPA, the Departments of Homeland Security, Energy, and Transportation.

I chair the Congressional Children's Caucus and am a member of the Caucus for Women, the Caucus on Ethiopia, and the Congressional Black Caucus.

My assignments as a Member of Congress keep me focused on the major problems we must overcome.

[MICHIGAN]

It is for that reason that I was delighted to receive the invitation to address you tonight in Detroit, Michigan.

For I know that if any state in the union had the knowledge and the experience and the incentive to deal with big issues, it had to be Michigan. If any city knows how to cope with global changes to the economy and how we live, work, recreate, and stay healthy, it would have to be Michigan and Detroit.

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Here in Michigan you invented the auto industry and ushered in the transformation of the American economy.

You virtually invented modern manufacturing and collective bargaining and created the American middle class.

During World War II, when the nation went to war in the mother of all wars, you answered President Roosevelt's call to turn your ploughshares into swords and became the backbone of the American arsenal of democracy.

Michigan has always been imaginative, resourceful, creative, and indomitable. Folks know how to get things done in this state.

Michiganders are model stewards of the environment, trustees of world-class universities like the University of Michigan and Michigan State University.

Perhaps most important, it is a state that has learned that the answer to the haunting question for the ages posed by Rodney King – can't we all just get along? --- is a resounding "Yes, we can. Yes, we must." So here in Michigan – and metro Detroit – folks are working together to overcome some major economic problems and build a common future of opportunity and respect for all.

Detroit is the home of General Motors, once the undisputed behemoth of the automotive industry and unmatched as a job creator.

Today, the leveling effects of the globalization on the economy can be seen and felt in Detroit better than any city in the nation.

If you want to understand why it is so important to control the costs of health care without sacrificing quality, you need to come to Detroit. If your interest is environmental protection, border security, transportation infrastructure, or the quality of education you can learn a lot from Michigan and from Detroit.

And so I came to Detroit.

Guess what I learned?

[MCRI]

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I learned that Ward Connerly got here first. I learned about the MCRI.

The “Michigan Civil Rights Initiative.” The MCRI, I discovered, is a topic of considerable discussion in Michigan because of what it does.

Its backers, including Mr. Ward Connerly, the former chair of the California Board of Regents who led the fight in that state in favor of Proposition 209, claim it respects civil rights by prohibiting discrimination by government against individuals based on their race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin.

Opponents say it bans affirmative action in admissions, employment, and public contracting.

I have my opinion regarding who is right in this controversy but that is not the main point that needs to be made now and here.

Here is the point: as I see it, and as I have said it, Detroit and Michigan and the nation face several significant challenges today.

? GLOBALIZATION and ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

? COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

? MILITARIZATION

? IMMIGRATION

Affirmative action did not create any of these challenges.

Banning affirmative action will not solve any of them.

So the question before the house is why this? Why now?

I would like to venture an answer if you would be so kind.

WHEN CONFRONTED WITH BIG CHALLENGES, SMALL MINDS RESORT TO PETTY SCHEMES!!

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Let me repeat: When confronted with big challenges, small minds resort to petty schemes!

And that is what you have in Michigan today with the so-called Michigan Civil Rights Initiative.

Here is what the MCRI provides:

The state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.

The language of the MCRI tracks nearly verbatim the language of California Proposition 209 and Washington State Initiative 200, both of which passed in 1996 and 1998, respectively.

In California, after its version of the MCRI went into effect,

- ? Initiatives designed to encourage the number of women to pursue fields where they have traditionally been underrepresented, such as math and science studies, were no longer permitted.
- ? pre-college programs that encourage underrepresented minority groups or girls to apply to college or pursue nontraditional academic courses were likely prohibited if targeted exclusively to women or minorities.
- ? immediately following enactment of Proposition 209, minority admissions at colleges and universities decreased by more than 50%:
 1. For example, at the University of California at Berkeley, only 191 black students were admitted compared with 562 students the previous year; only 434 students admitted were Hispanic compared with 1,045 students in 1997).
 2. The overall percentage of enrolled underrepresented minorities declined at both University of California-Berkeley and UCLA, the two largest schools in the UC System. For example, at UCLA, the number of black students from California admitted dropped from 3.3 percent to just 2.8 percent in the fall of 2003.

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3. In addition, minority enrollment numbers in the UC medical schools and law schools still have not rebounded to pre-Proposition 209 levels, which were consistently higher than 20 percent. The enrollment percentage for underrepresented students in the first-year class for UC medical schools in 2002 was 16.5 percent. The proportion of underrepresented students in the law schools was 16.2 percent of the first-year class.

Similar results were experienced in the state of Washington the year after it passed a law similar to the so-called Michigan Civil Rights Initiative.

- ? Minority enrollment at the flagship University of Washington dropped from 373 to 255 in the year following passage of the initiative.
- ? At Washington State University, the number of black, Latino, Native American, and Asian students dropped from 396 students to 284 students.

If the MCRI is passed, educational opportunities for minorities and women will diminish as they have in other states adopting similar anti-affirmative action proposals.

THE MICHIGAN CIVIL RIGHTS INITIATIVE IS NOT “CIVIL.” IT CERTAINLY ISN’T “RIGHT”!

AND MICHIGAN VOTERS WILL REJECT IT IN NOVEMBER.

BECAUSE MICHIGANDERS DON’T WANT TO TURN THE CLOCK BACK.

MICHIGAN IS A PLACE WHERE OPPORTUNITIES EXPAND, NOT CONTRACT!

MICHIGAN IS GOING FORWARD TO A BETTER FUTURE.

The MCRI is, as Yogi Berra once said, “déjà vu all over again.”

The organizers of the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative raise two principle objections to the continued use of affirmative action in admissions, employment, and public contracting:

- (1) it is unfair because it penalizes “qualified” non-minorities and stigmatizes qualified minorities by tarring them as affirmative action beneficiaries.
- (2) it is unnecessary because the badges and vestiges of past discrimination have long since faded

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Neither of these claims can be taken seriously.

[AFFIRMATIVE ACTION DOES NOT MAKE BENEFICIARIES FEEL INFERIOR]

Some opponents of affirmative action say that it inflicts psychological harm on women and minorities because they will go through life wondering whether they earned their opportunities based on merit or were give special treatment because of their race or gender.

Give me a break!

Do you think Michael Brown stayed awake at night wondering whether he deserved to be Director of FEMA?

How much sleep does Clarence Thomas lose every night worrying whether he really earned his way on the Supreme Court? Or Condoleeza Rice? Or Colin Powell?

The special treatment and special privileges that come with being born rich and famous and connected doesn't seem to have destroyed the psychological well-being and self-esteem of the fellow living at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

I say: Give women and minorities the opportunity to succeed and let them worry about their self-esteem. Believe it or not, women and minorities are mentally and emotionally tougher than you think.

[RACISM STILL EXISTS TODAY]

In the first place, the racism and sexism that created the remedy of affirmative in the first instance has not yet vanished from American life.

I am reminded of the words of President Lyndon B. Johnson at the 1965 Howard University Commencement. President Johnson, who had a deeper and richer understanding of the centrality of race in American politics of any president since Abraham Lincoln, used to explain why the eradication of the badges and vestiges of slavery required more than just the cessation of racial segregation and discrimination. It was not sufficient to stop the harm; it was essential that you begin to help. In other words, active engagement or "affirmative action" was required:

"You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you're

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free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates or opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates We seek not...just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.”

Minorities and women continue to face discrimination on many fronts, and that shows up in many ways. Women in Michigan today are paid only 67 cents for every dollar paid to men.

Consider these alarming facts, which I learned from One United Michigan, the leading coalition opposing the MCRI:

- ? The FBI report for 2004 shows that Michigan ranks third in the U.S. with 556 reported hate crimes. Of those, 366 were motivated by race. This reveals a climate of racial tension and hostility which creates further discrimination and barriers.
- ? The Michigan Department of Civil Rights is investigating racial steering by a metro Detroit real estate firm, where agents routinely discriminated by sending African-American home seekers into minority neighborhoods and white homeowners into white communities.
- ? As reported in recent Gallup Poll results, 31% of Asian-American respondents have faced incidents of employment discrimination, the largest percentage of any racial or ethnic group
- ? In Livonia, discussion over location of a Wal-Mart store into the city turned into an attack on minorities when speakers at a public hearing said the store shouldn't be built because it would attract African-Americans from Detroit.
- ? In June 2005, a local paper published a blatantly anti-immigrant cartoon, targeting Latino/a immigrants as welfare seekers. A month later, another paper ran an offensive cartoon featuring a “Muslim” in confessional for “failing to detonate.”
- ? In Chesterfield Township, Macomb County, a police chief was fired after he suggested the community should consider hiring minority police officers.
- ? In Cutlerville, near Grand Rapids, a woman applicant to the local fire department was asked during her interview whether she was planning on becoming pregnant

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and could cook – and then was denied a position when the department decided to hold off on hiring. It later opened hiring without informing the woman, a paramedic, and hired a less qualified male applicant.

[AFFIRMATIVE ACTION WORKS]

We have come a long way: It may be hard to believe but it has only been in the last 40 years that barriers to systemic discrimination have been coming down. The U.S. Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. Title IX, barring sex discrimination in education, was passed in 1972. We have seen growth in the numbers of minorities and women in the workforce, as elected officials, and in colleges. We celebrate those gains. During the last 40 years, women and minorities have made progress in many areas, often thanks to strong governmental action to break down the barriers of discrimination.

Diversity and affirmative action is good for everyone in Michigan: Diversity helps enrich the lives of all Michigan citizens, in many ways, including improved learning, better health and safer communities. Michigan faces international competition as it works through its economic transition. We need to have every Michigan citizen engaged if we are to compete with other parts of the nation and world in providing a highly educated and motivated workforce.

Understand there are social benefits flowing from the diversity that affirmative action helps promote. For example, woman and minorities have better access to treatments that particularly impact their communities. An important reason we pay more attention to issues like breast cancer and have made tremendous progress as a result of investments in research in women's health is because we have so many more women in the research and health professions. So, in a real sense, we can say that affirmative action is responsible for saving hundreds of thousands of women's lives.

[CONSEQUENCES OF ENDING AFFIRMATIVE ACTION]

My friends, you know better than anyone that choices have consequences. If we are apathetic and unmotivated and do not do all we can to defeat this anti-Civil Rights Initiative, the people of Michigan will suffer the adverse consequences, which include the elimination of:

- Outreach programs that encourage minorities and women to enter fields such as police, fire fighting, and engineering or to attend college will be ended.

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- Programs to encourage women and minorities to stay in school and prepare for good-paying jobs in engineering, science, or even construction and law enforcement will be eliminated.
- Programs to encourage men to become teachers or nurses, where they are under-represented and needed.
- No affirmative action goals for contracting or hiring in state and local governments, and fewer opportunities for minority and women-owned firms to compete with big business.
- Gender- and minority-based representation on boards and commissions, including advisory boards dealing with corrections, education and public health, will end.
- In other states that have eliminated affirmative action, lawsuits threaten the ability of the state to provide gender-specific health services such as breast or prostate cancer screening.

But we are not going to let that happen because:

Affirmative action has been healthy for Michigan and America.

It has helped maintain diversity in education.

Affirmative action encourages women and minorities to enter high paying fields where they can add to Michigan's economy.

Affirmative gives small businesses a chance to compete against larger businesses and helps communities create democratic institutions that look like the constituencies they serve.

BECAUSE MICHIGANDERS DON'T WANT TO TURN THE CLOCK BACK.

MICHIGAN IS A PLACE WHERE OPPORTUNITIES EXPAND, NOT CONTRACT.

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AND MICHIGAN VOTERS WILL REJECT THIS BACKWARD PROPOSAL IN NOVEMBER!

[TYING IT ALL TOGETHER AND SUMMING UP]

Friends, this is 51st time the Detroit NAACP has gathered to remember the "Fight for Freedom." But the fight for freedom never ends. It goes on and on and on. Because freedom

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is precious, it is worth fighting for. Tonight, that father in Detroit I spoke about struggling to make ends meet, is fighting for freedom from economic insecurity. The survivors of Katrina are fighting for freedom too. They have a right to be free from the fear of being abandoned in their own country by their own government. The soldier and airmen and marines and sailors deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan and around the world are fighting for freedom. They will gladly give their lives so that we can live the life we can imagine. The immigrant family south of the border risking everything to come to America are fighting for freedom as well: the universal longing to secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity. That is the desire that beats in the hearts of every man and woman and leads them to risk everything to spend at least one day in America.

The fight for freedom is never done, it is never complete, it is never over. There is always more struggle. Which means there will always be a need for warriors for justice to wage that struggle. Which means my work is not near done. Neither is yours. There is much work we need to do and we need to work together to win. Here is what I think we should do:

1. Change Our Economic And Budgetary Priorities: stop Bush tax cut giveaways, invest in health care, education, job creation, energy independence.
2. End the War in Iraq and Win the War Against Al Qaeda: adopt the Murtha plan and redeploy troops to region and disengage them from Iraq civil war. Insist that Shiaa, Sunnis, and Kurds recognize they have a common future and destiny and need to form a government that is pluralistic and diverse.
3. Stand Up And Speak Out For Human Dignity and Against Genocide.
4. Work For A Humane Immigration Policy That Secures Borders But Offers Chance To Earn Access To Legal Residency And Citizenship For Those Already Here.
5. Avoid Being Distracted By “Wedge Issues” Like Affirmative Action, Flag Burning, Pledge Of Allegiance, Gay Marriage, Death Penalty, Etc.

CONCLUSION

I am reminded as I stand before you tonight that the “moral arc of the universe is long but it bends toward justice.” When the guests sat down for dinner at the very first Fight for Freedom Dinner, I was but a little girl of five living in a little apartment/house in Jamaica, Queens, New York. The Supreme Court had decided Brown v. Board of Education the previous year.

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Little did I know then that decision would give hope to my parents, and countless others, that mine would be the first generation to enjoy the full promise of America. The parents of our generation were the first who could reasonably dream that their children might enjoy opportunities denied their forebears for more than three centuries. That decision inspired me to work hard in school, which won me admission to Yale University as a part of the cohort that admitted women in large numbers for the first time. I was inspired to attend and graduate from the University of Virginia Law School, where I deepened by commitment to serve the public interest.

I had no idea when I was a child growing up in Jamaica Queens that one day I would be elected to serve in the Congress of the United States from the same district that sent Mickey Leland and the immortal Barbara Jordan to Washington. I remember watching Barbara Jordan serve on the House Judiciary Committee during the Watergate Hearings. I'll never forget when she said:

“Earlier today we heard the beginning of the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States, We, the people. It is a very eloquent beginning. But when that document was completed, on the seventeenth of September in 1787, I was not included in that We, the people. I felt somehow for many years that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton just left me out by mistake. But through the process of amendment, interpretation, and court decision I have finally been included in We, the people.

“Today I am an inquisitor. I believe hyperbole would not be fictional and would not overstate the solemnity that I feel right now. *My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total.* I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution.”

I understand much better now the faith and passion of which she spoke. And I say to you tonight as a member of the Brown v. Board of Education generation, the greatest victory for civil and human rights in our nation's history which was won by this august organization, that my faith is whole, my faith is complete, my faith is total.

I have faith in the NAACP.

Thank you for all you have done and continue to do to help America realize its promise.

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