

Burgess Remarks at MLK Celebration  
January 14, 2016

## **It's Not Enough**

It's great that we gather to celebrate the legacy of Dr. King, a truly remarkable man, a pastor who never shied away from preaching truth and preaching to power.

It's also good that we acknowledge the progress we have made in this country as we wrestle with injustice, racism, and poverty . . . the challenges and themes Dr. King addressed on a regular and consistent basis.

But, as good as this celebration is, it's not enough.

Some of the progress we have achieved is being reversed. It's amazing to me that state legislatures around the country continue to pass laws making it harder to vote . . . Harder to vote for people living in poverty and people of color.

This has been brought home to me again over the past few weeks as I have read new research from Columbia University about the huge equality of opportunity gap we have in America today.

The research findings were put together by researchers in the UK, Canada, Australia and the United States . . . four similar countries with a common language, similar cultures and similar diversity within their populations.

Here's what the researchers found—when it comes to equality of opportunity there is a huge gap in our country between those from more advantaged families compared to less well-off families. Now, that's probably not too surprising to us; it intuitively makes sense. Being born into a stable, middle or upper class family has its advantages.

But what's striking about the research is that this opportunity gap is more pronounced in our country compared to Britain, Canada and Australia and it is more persistent, meaning it lasts well into adulthood.

Put another way, Britain, Canada and Australia have a *smaller* opportunity gap and it's a gap they have narrow more quickly.

The good news is that these same researchers carefully studied the evidence of what works to reduce and even eliminate this opportunity gap, especially among children.

Their conclusion: we know what to do!

High-quality, universal preschool for 3 and 4 year-olds.

Proven home visitation programs like the Nurse Family Partnership, the Parent-Child Home literacy program.

High-quality child care designed to create focused and meaningful interactions with adults, strong vocabulary exposure, and reading, reading, reading.

Public schools that set high expectations, believe every child can learn, and teachers that are well trained and compensated well.

Family supports and income enhancements, like an increase in the minimum wage, expansion of income tax deductions for families with children, paid sick leave and paid parental leave.

So, in conclusion, let me challenge us to do two things.

First, let's recommitment ourselves to what Dr. King preached—justice, equity, fair opportunity for everyone, the elimination of racism, creation of the beloved community where everyone is valued and respected.

Second, let's do the stuff those matters, the evidence-based, pragmatic things that will shrink the opportunity gap and give all of our children a strong and fair start in life.

We can do it, if we chose.