

SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

10TH ANNUAL BIRTHDAY OBSERVANCE - DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING

Atlanta, Georgia

January 14, 1978

It is an honor for me to be here with you tonight to accept your warm tribute to my brother, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey. Hubert has asked me to express his sincere regret at not being able to be with you this evening. You have all been such an important part of his life.

My brother has prepared a brief message which I would like to share with you now:

"Fourteen years ago Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. shared with us his dream for America. That cherished dream of what our nation could and should be, became our dream as well. Today we come together to celebrate the forty-ninth anniversary of the birth of this champion of the rights of all people. We come together to recommit ourselves to the struggle to reach the promised land which he described from the mountain top.

"I am deeply moved by the tribute bestowed upon me tonight. To be linked to Dr. King in the battle for equal rights is a distinct honor. My only regret is that I cannot be with all of you tonight to share in your warm friendship.

"Your work, your sacrifice, your vision, your determination and your commitment to an equal chance in life for all of our people have made great progress possible. Because of your efforts we have rewritten the nation's laws to clearly recognize equal rights for all Americans. And, don't let anyone sell this achievement short -- it is monumental. Without it, equality of opportunity is not possible in education, in employment, in your neighborhood, in any important aspect of American life.

"Today, life is better for most black Americans than it was for their parents or grandparents. Incomes are better, educational opportunities are greater, health care has improved, political influence and representation has increased, and much more. That is progress. Progress which reaches into the homes of millions of our fellow citizens and directly affects their lives. It is real progress, and we must not forget that it has occurred.

"But, we cannot be satisfied in measuring our progress solely by the distance we have come from the abominable conditions that existed in a period of gross injustice. We must face the facts. For despite our progress, a huge valley of shame separates black and white America:

-- Black family incomes average only 62 percent of white family incomes.

-- Less than half of all black people over age eighteen have a high school diploma.

-- Unemployment rates for black Americans have been double the rates for white Americans for two decades.

-- Twenty seven percent of our black families still struggle to survive on incomes below the poverty line.

"These are only a few of the facts, but the point is clear. We are a long way from our goal of a society with equal opportunity and justice for all. In moving toward this goal, our focus today must be on jobs -- decent jobs, good paying jobs, jobs with a challenge, jobs with a future.

"That is why my first priority, and I think it should be yours, as well, is passage of the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Bill. This bill will commit the government to full employment in a politically accountable manner that has never existed in the past. It will make full employment the central focus of our nation's economic policy. It will result in a new and unparalleled push for full employment in America.

"Don't listen to those who say this bill is watered down and not worth fighting for. Most of these people have no idea how national economic policy decisions are made. Many of these instant experts have never taken the time or trouble to read the bill. Some of these commentators are trying to kill the bill by convincing its supporters that it is meaningless.

"I will never deceive you, and I believe you know it. This legislation is a must. It is no miracle cure, but it is an indispensable step toward economic justice. We must keep up the fight. If we do, I assure you it will be well worth every effort you make."

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