

CHIEF JUSTICE LEWIS: Good morning. And thank you very much for the very kind introduction.

Let me first start by bringing greetings from the entire Florida Supreme Court.

I learned a long time ago, growing up in the dirt, that things that are "I" and "me" centered are not very successful. Things that are "we" and "us" centered have a chance. And as we started looking forward to things that needed to be done within the Court system and things that just needed to be done in the communities around the state, some of the things that we asked and some of the things that we suggested came back with a response, "You can't do that. You can't do that. That's too big. You can't do that."

And I say to you that "I" or "me" cannot do any of those things. But "we" and "us" can do all things.

Coming out of the dirt, I understood that we need to set our goals very, very high. And I know that this has been a very wide-ranging and a mammoth task. Yet, if we do not set our goals there, we do not set our sights on the sky, we will remain in the dirt forever.

It is time that we act. Your actions and your presence here today are very, very important, not only to members of the court family, but your presence here today is important to this entire democracy and the stability of the entire court system.

And I want to thank each and every one of you for agreeing to participate. I want to thank those of you who provide special expertise that we need so terribly, in donating your time to do these things, to help us accommodate as we must for a fair and just society.

You know, the theme as I came in to start working in this kind of capacity in the front chair for the Court, the theme for access, has and will continue to be that we do not seek your sympathy, we do not want your pity. Just remove the barriers and let us have access. Pretty simple, pretty straightforward.

What we are talking about is access to justice, access to the world. Our drive must be for openness, must be for access for all people, no matter what.

And these things are going to benefit not just those individuals, because you see, we all benefit when our justice system thrives, and our entire society benefits. Our democracy benefits from the trust and confidence that is placed in us.

There is no doubt that the judicial branch and the court systems have faced timeless tensions over the years. We go back to most of those coming from misunderstandings and dissatisfactions with the court system.

And we have had enormous improvements over the years. Make no mistake, we have made some improvements in the

administration of justice. Now, a little over 200 years after our birth as a nation, we have not met the fundamental challenge to remove one source of dissatisfaction with the courts, dissatisfaction with one branch of our government. And that is access, access for all of our people.

Today, the promise of full and total and complete access simply has not been met, as I think you all know, and that is why you are here. This is a condition that none of us can and should tolerate. We cannot accept it. We will not accept it. This threatens who we are and who we are becoming as a people and as a nation. This is an internal threat to us, and it is no different -- in fact, it may be more dangerous -- than these threats we read about each day, about terrorists and those kinds of things, because if we lose the trust of our people, then our constitutional institutions suffer. We are dying from within for lack of attention to those things that must be addressed, must be addressed.

The failure to afford this access disfigures the administration of justice at every point -- at every point -- that it touches. And all of us, all of us pay the price. We do pay the price for each of those failures.

Because, you see, for every ounce of trust and confidence that we may build through whatever good deeds we may do as a system, as a government, as a judicial branch, we lose pounds of that confidence when we fail to afford access

to all people.

And we have had critics, and we will continue to have critics, and it is a good thing, because we need to know where we have shortcomings.

Chief Justice Marshall was nearly impeached in the early days by the efforts of Thomas Jefferson. A century later, Theodore Roosevelt was upset with the courts, and he said of one of our leading jurists, Oliver Wendall Holmes, "President Roosevelt could carve out of a banana a man with more backbone than the backbone of Justice Holmes."

Well, we have to have some backbone, friends. We have to stand up. What it is that you are going to be doing is not just doing a study that will be a relic on the shelf to catch the dust. Instead, what you will be doing is formulating architecture for a plan, for a plan of action. By golly, as long as I am up here, we are going to be seeking that action.

When I was a child, I saw signs all across the South on my first trip out of the hills of West Virginia. It was a big sign. It said, "Impeach Earl Warren." I didn't know who Earl Warren was, but I knew that something was happening that we needed to be concerned with.

But I tell you what, with all these criticisms that we have, the critics are justified when we fail to provide access to all people. And those criticisms are fair, and they

must be heard.

But we must move beyond just the mere recycling of our problems of the past. This can't be just a recycling effort and discussion of old things and old ideas; but this group must be in the forefront, must lead us to move toward resolving these issues. And we must draw upon your creative minds, we must draw upon your experience, we must draw upon your strength, if we are going to make anything happen.

We must and we shall connect the resources within our communities to resolve the issues we face.

You know with regard to the mental health initiative that we just started last June we created a subcommittee. And the stars just began lining up, because shortly after we created a subcommittee on how mental health issues impact our court system, there began to be a movement in the legal community with regard to holding people accountable.

Then we had an election, and then we had some folks coming into positions of authority and power and other branches of government that saw that issues with regard to mental health are important to all of us. And we had a Secretary appointed for the Department of Children and Families that began seeing that issues with regard to mental health are important.

So something as simple as placing in the proper position the Department of Family and Children structure, the

Court structure, and then looking to the Medicaid treatment structures, we began seeing the seeds of progress being made. And I can't tell you how pleased I was when I saw the headlines in the paper that Secretary Butterworth announced that we no longer had folks languishing that ought to have been treated properly, and we no longer have folks waiting to be treated for the criminal justice system.

So part of your issues and part of our concerns will be finding and connecting those resources that are necessary for all of our access issues. And I think that the committee structure has done a wonderful job, and our professional community is coming out to help us. It's a real blessing for all of us.

So I am not naive enough to think that there are no obstacles to be overcome. We do and we will have obstacles. You have to understand that as we go.

But we are going to attack each and every one of them, one by one, and methodically we will remove those barriers. But it is only with all of us working together.

You know, Morris Udall once said that he wanted God to give him the grace to make his words gentle and tender, because he feared that tomorrow he may be required to eat those words.

(Laughter)

Well, I came from the dirt, and I was eating dirt

before I even knew there was anything such as kind and gentle and tender food of any kind. But I hope that you will not be timid. I hope that you will speak out, and I trust that you will speak out so that we can take that speech into action, so we can resolve and solve many, many issues.

All access issues must be dealt with one day at a time, one week at a time, one month at a time.

But dissatisfaction with our justice system is fueled not by our words but by our lack of action, and that is what breeds the dissatisfaction. We can't simply articulate what is not working.

But I hope that by you coming together with these surveys that you have designed and your thoughts as you do these surveys, you will design quality initiatives that will work. It is very important that it will work.

Our challenges may be enhanced by physical and budgetary restraints. Since I've come to Tallahassee, every time we have asked for something we've needed, we have faced, "No, we can't afford that. No, we can't afford that."

Well, lack of money is not an excuse for lack of ideas or a lack of will. And I believe that a firm set of ideas that is supported by absolute will can overcome many, many things. Because as was mentioned, we are doing this because it's right, not because it's a nice thing, not because it is just some frill that we can be happy about. But it is

something that we are doing because it is absolutely right.

We must be innovative, even when the budget experts challenge our resolve. We must stand up, we must be firm, we must insist that all people have access to our court systems.

What our people want is very, very simple. Our people want an America and a Florida court system as good as its promise. That is all they ask for. It's very simple. That promise is access to all and access to all parts of the system -- facilities, programs, services, assistance.

The justice system cannot be just quick, it cannot be just clever, it cannot be just wise; but it must be fully just to every person who not only enters the courtroom or enters a court facility, but it must be just, and fully just, to every person who has a desire to access our services and our facilities.

You know, our society is in this measuring mode, and I speak about it with regard to our children and education systems and those kinds of things, and I comment not on whether it is right or wrong. But the one thing that I have learned is that in our high-stakes testing of our children, we are also measuring the widgets and gadgets of the court systems and all kinds of things. But what it is that we measure demonstrates what we care about.

So now it is time to measure ourselves in every aspect of what we do with regard to access. Everything that



we do that must be measured. It is time that we show that we care about all.

You know, I first became familiar with these issues with an ill kid. My child was very, very sick. And I learned very, very early on that if you are perfect, you are okay. But if you are not, to many people you are in the way.

Well, we're not in the way. We are going to give access to everyone. Each legal need may not have earth-changing circumstances and may not have those things that will change the world, but a desire for access to justice is a crucial human event.

And you must not lose sight of that. The work you will do has the potential to affirm our faith in the judicial system, Or it has the potential to shake and shatter that faith further.

All our people want is a system as good as its promise. That's all we want. That's access.

Let me close with a short couple of notes, because you have better things to do than listen to me all day. It's something I came across some years ago.

A man once said that a great deal of talent is lost in the world for want of a little courage. Every day, sent to their grave, an obscure person who was prevented from making a first effort, who, if they could, if they could have been induced to begin, would in all probability have gone to great

lengths in a career of fame.

The fact is that to do anything in the world worth doing, we must not stand back shivering and thinking of the cold and danger but jump in and scramble through as well as we can.

It will not do to be perpetually calculating, calculating the risk of adjusting the nice chances.

It did very well when a problem arose that a man would consult his friends upon an intended publication for 150 years and live to see his success thereafter. But at present, a man waits and doubts and consults his brother and his particular friends, until one day he finds that he is 60 years old, as I am now, and that he's lost so much time in consulting his cousins and his friends that he has no more time to follow their advice.

You know, you can learn a lot from what folks have to say. And I think it is important what you want to do.

And there is a comedian once that was sort of a satirist. Let me share with you his words:

"The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings but shorter tempers. We have wider freeways but narrower viewpoints. We spend more but have less. We buy more but enjoy less. We have bigger houses and smaller families, more conveniences but less time. We have more degrees but less sense, more knowledge but less judgment, more

experts, yet more problems, more medicine, but less wellness.

We drink too much, we smoke too much, we spend too recklessly, we laugh too little, we drive too fast, we get too angry. We stay up too late. We get too tired, read too little, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom.

"We have multiplied our possessions but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often. We have learned how to make a living but not a life. We have added years to life but not life to years. We have been all the way to the moon and back but have trouble crossing the street to meet our new neighbors. We have conquered outer space but have not conquered inner space. We have done larger things but not better things.

"We have cleaned up the air but polluted the soul. We have conquered the atom but not our prejudices. We write more but learn less. We plan more but accomplish less. We have learned to rush but not to wait. We have built more computers to hold more information, to produce more copies than ever, but we communicate less and less.

"These are times of fast foods and slow digestion, big men and small character, steep profits and shallow relationships.

"These are the days of two incomes, more divorce, fancier houses but broken homes. These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throw-away morality, one-night

stands, overweight bodies, and pills that do everything from cheering us to quieting us to killing us and our children.

"It is a time when there is much in the showroom window, but there is nothing in the stockroom; a time when technology can bring information to you through technology, but you can choose to either share this insight, or you can just hit your delete button on the computer."

A few things that we need to do is that we must remember to hold hands and cherish the moment, for some day that person will not be there again. Give time to love, give time to speak, and give time to share your precious thoughts in your mind.

We promise justice, but we deny access. We promise equality, but we deny access. We promise fairness, but we deny access. We don't seek your sympathy. We don't want your pity. Just remove the barriers, and let all have access.

Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE).

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