

PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS

THE POLITICAL AND PRINCIPLED PRESIDENT PESCOVITZ'S ADDRESS AT THE ANNUAL 'KEEPER OF THE DREAM'

January 15, 2024

We gather today and annually to both celebrate and testify that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream is alive and continues to be a profound source of inspiration.

In honoring Dr. King's dream of an American society built on the pillars of diversity, social justice, opportunity and progress, we celebrate and honor those who are working tirelessly for a more just and inclusive world.

Those who will not "give up their seat on the bus."

Those who stand up against racism, sexism, and discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, country of origin, gender or any other form of injustice or exploitation.

Today, we also honor seven Oakland University students who have the courage to act based on their convictions and who make all of us so proud.

These seven students and past recipients of the Keeper of the Dream awards are outstanding examples of "keepers of the dream."

The stark reality, however, is that it's not enough to be a "keeper of the dream."

In today's world, every one of us must ask — what are WE doing to fulfill Dr. King's dream?

Are each of us doing what we can in our homes, in our work, at our university and in our communities to decrease discrimination and maximize inclusion and equity?

I have been asking myself these questions for a long time.

As a child, I was fortunate to have a front row seat to the civil rights movement.

My father spent his life as an outspoken civil rights advocate. He was friends with Dr. Martin Luther King and he invited him to use his Washington, D.C. office whenever he was in town.

It was in my father's office on Massachusetts Avenue that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were drafted.

I have vivid memories of accompanying my parents when I was a young child in August of 1963 when we sat together on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to hear Dr. King's stirring "I Have A Dream Speech."

I also recall being frightened when my father left home to march with many others in Selma, Alabama. I was frightened because some of those who marched for the right to vote had been killed.

And...I recall my father's powerful eulogy for Dr. King in Washington, D.C. after he was assassinated.

Dr. King dreamed that one day his children would live in a nation where they would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I often wonder what Dr. King would think if he were here today. How much of his dream would he think we have fulfilled?

At Oakland University, we aim to judge everyone by the content of their character and we embrace a definition of diversity that is inclusive and not divisive, a definition that binds us closer to one another – a definition of diversity that includes people of different races, socioeconomic backgrounds....different cultures, religions, countries of origin, genders, and also a definition of diversity that promotes a range of thought and ideas.

Are we achieving what we set out to accomplish?

When I look around, I think we're doing well in some areas and not so well in others. For example, I still see longstanding systemic inequities that have yet to be corrected.

But at the same time, I am also encouraged that in working together we can and will break down the barriers that stand in the way of becoming a truly diverse and just society where equity, opportunity and progress thrive for all people.

Today, as we honor Dr. King and his message, we renew our commitment to making his dream...our dream...a reality.

The most important reason for my great optimism is that I am so fortunate to work here at Oakland University where we have awesome young people like the outstanding leaders you will meet today.

This next generation is exceptional, and I am confident that they will show us the way.