

## PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS

# KEEPER OF THE DREAM – 2023

**January 16, 2023**

- Thank you... and welcome to the 31st annual Keeper of the Dream Scholarship Awards Celebration...
- A hallmark event at Oakland University...
- And thank you to our special guests:
  - LIST HERE.... PATTY WILL UPDATE THURSDAY
- I, too, can't wait to hear Hill Harper...who has had an impressive career as an actor, author and political advocate.... Thank you, Hill, for spending this very special day with us.
- But first, I want to take a few minutes to share with you how deeply and passionately I feel about the principles that are the foundation of a just, open and diverse, and truly democratic America...the principles articulated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- I first heard Dr. King's words before I even knew who he was.
- It was the moment when many, many other Americans heard the resounding truth and conviction of his voice... and the words of his famous "I Have A Dream" speech in August of 1963...
  - I was six years old.
- Before we left our house, my parents told me there would be a crowd at the Lincoln Memorial to hear a famous man talk about the need to make America a better country...
- I asked my parents:
  - Who is this man?
  - Why are so many people coming to listen to him?

- And...what is wrong with America that it needs to get better?
- The man, I was told, was my father's friend.
- The world knew him as a 34-year-old Baptist minister and civil rights leader from Atlanta named Martin Luther King, Jr.
- The words from a lesser-known section of Dr. King's "I Have A Dream" speech still resonate with me...He said:
- "...we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution ... they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir...
- "... today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given African Americans a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'"
- He went on to say:
- "...we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check..."
- As my own career has evolved, I have arrived at the conclusion that universities must be a catalyst in opening the "vaults of opportunity."
- On this day when we honor a man and a mission, we recommit ourselves to making sure we do all that we can to provide "access to opportunity."
- A college degree is the most steadfast and reliable path into the middle class for individuals born into low-income families. Yet today, there is a startling completion gap based on income and race.
- As we celebrate Dr. King's legacy, we must ask ourselves how, as a university, can Oakland put the content of his philosophy into policy and action ....
- One way is by facilitating scholarships that connect students with access to higher education into greater career and life opportunities.
  - And, of course, to accomplish that requires partnerships.
- The impact and lasting importance of the Keeper of the Dream would not be possible without our generous sponsors.

- Thank you to the Keeper of the Dream event sponsor, Oakland University Credit Union...
- Our reception and program sponsor, PNC Bank...
- Benefactor sponsors Magna and Corewell Health...
- High Achievement Scholarship Sponsors Avis Ford, Inc. and Oakland University Credit Union
- And generous grantors of the Lynne & Lia McIntosh Scholarship, Lynne A. McIntosh Memorial Scholarship, Marshall Family Scholar Foundation scholarship, OU Alumni Association scholarship, and Willis Towers Watson scholarship.
- And, thank you to April Cobus and Mark Douglas, president Avis Ford for serving as our honorary Keeper of the Dream co-chairs.

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- When it comes to working to become a truly diverse, equitable and inclusive campus, our work is ongoing... and our commitment is firm.
- Placing the highest priority on diversity, equity and inclusion takes an unwavering commitment, and vigilance from each member of the Oakland University community.
- I am so proud.... and inspired by the work of our team and everyone at OU working to ensure Oakland is becoming a model campus of DEI.
- Thank you, Omar Brown-El and the staff of OU's Center for Multicultural Initiatives....
- You are instrumental in Oakland's ongoing effort to heighten awareness and appreciation for cultural and racial diversity. And, helping to close the educational achievement gaps through the OUTAS and CORE Programs.
- We are deeply appreciative for the strategic vision and inspiring leadership of Glenn McIntosh, our Senior Vice President of Student Affairs and Chief Diversity Officer.
- Glenn works tirelessly... and is an unflinching DEI advocate not only here at Oakland, but throughout the region and beyond.
- And thank you to members of the DEI council, Center for Multicultural Initiatives, Disability Support Services, Veterans Support Services, and the Gender & Sexuality Center.... for your advocacy, programs and services aimed to make everyone feel welcome on our campus.
- I encourage everyone to view the online OU DEI Report for 2022. It chronicles the great work occurring across campus in every division and department.

- Last Friday, we completed a construction project to support Oakland's Gender & Sexuality Center's move to North Foundation Hall.
- Thank you to Omar, Blake Bonkowski, Lori Marsh and Siraj Khan, Kevin McDougall, and Trevor Vallus for making sure we are striving to be as responsive as possible to the facility needs of our students.

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- Today, as we gather to honor Dr. King and the achievements of our scholarship recipients ... I have no doubt that they would make Dr. King very proud....
- They certainly make all of us proud.

Now, please join me in welcoming back to podium Omar Brown-El.