

Acceptance Remarks
for the
Public Service Award
by
Justice Lubbie Harper, Jr.
Presented by
The UConn Law School Alumni Association
at

Aqua Turf Club
556 Mulberry Street
Plantsville, Connecticut
October 25, 2022

Thank you so much Chief Justice Robinson, for such a warm and heartfelt introduction. I am truly humbled by your kind words and deeply appreciate the sincerity of your sentiments. I am so grateful to you for sharing this evening with me.

To the ladies and gentlemen gathered here, I say good evening. To my wife, Twila, daughter, Lyjune, grandson, Cohen, other family members, colleagues, friends and mentees who are here, I say thank you. Thank you for your presence this evening. It is truly appreciated, as well as your friendship, love and unyielding support. You have given so much to me. You have enriched my life in so many special ways, and for that I am truly grateful.

I cannot begin to tell all of you how thrilled I am to have the honor on this special occasion to receive the Public Service Award from my alma mater's Law School Alumni Association. The recognition of my public service is something that I will always cherish. I am humbled and profoundly honored to accept this award and in so doing, I am privileged to join the ranks of many outstanding individuals who are being honored this evening and those who have received this award in the past.

As I reflect on my career, I have always been mindful of my desire to make a difference. I have always been thankful for my blessings and have been committed to use those blessings to help others. I have always viewed public service as a noble undertaking; an undertaking in which I as a judge, have always attempted to dispense justice in a fair, impartial and respectful manner. As a civic minded individual, I have continued that service beyond my judicial role in hopes of positively impacting the lives of individuals who have crossed my path. You see public service gives us a reason to strive for ideals that enhances the societal good. It gives us a reason to believe that we as civic minded professionals can successfully make a difference by tackling many of the issues currently facing all of us. The plethora of problems percolating in our society and the myriad of issues facing the legal profession cries out for us to get involved, to speak out and to zealously address those challenges. It is precisely for that reason that it would be disingenuous, if not the epitome of hypocrisy, for me to stand here this evening and accept a public service award without discussing in public, at least in part, some of these issues and the concomitant public discord. I cannot do that!

Accordingly, if we look at our national landscape, we must acknowledge that America is on the precipice of becoming a very different country. Yes, America in a state of crisis. A crisis

exemplified so very recently by the cruel, inhumane and abusive treatment of migrants for political reasons. A crisis exemplified by two recent incidents of deadly violence being directed at local police, one against an officer in New Haven and the other against three officers in Bristol. A crisis involving the exploitation of unimaginable tragedies for profit. A crisis involving our national politics, a divisive and at times a dysfunctional congress. Yes, I am concerned about the conduct of those elected officials who take an oath to defend the constitution, and who, nevertheless, violate that oath by valuing self-interest, power, partisan politics over the will of their constituents, fairness, the rule of law, our democratic principles and the general welfare of all Americans. I am concerned by the lack of reasonable gun control, respect for others, the assault on truth, and the perpetuation of lies. Yes, I am concerned about the banning of the teaching of historical truths about this country.

I am concerned about disinformation, conspiracy theories, the discounting of science, fear mongering, implicit and overt racism, and patently divisive rhetoric flowing from the mouths of some of our so called elected leaders. I am concerned by the display of hate, hateful rhetoric, blatant hypocrisy, contempt for women, anti-Semitism, extremism, white nationalism, white supremacy, the move towards isolation and the drift towards autocracy.

I am concerned by the flagrant use of gerrymandering, election deniers, a plethora of voter suppression bills and other systematic election tactics that have the effect of diluting voting rights for some, and those who deny the results of free and fair elections. Yes, I am concerned about the indifference to and disrespect of the values that have made this country great.

Clearly, our country is at the most dangerous crossroads that we have ever seen in our lives. On a daily basis, we are witnessing a brew of political violence, disdain, polarization, divisiveness, ignorance, a lack of civil discourse and disrespect for the rule of law-a potent concoction so toxic that it threatens the very underpinnings of our democracy. These issues are dividing us as a nation and encouraging some folks to be less tolerant and accepting of the diverse populace of our country.

As a committed public servant, I dare say, I have a responsibility, if not an obligation, to constantly reexamine my role as legal professional in a constantly changing society. We are part of a noble profession and as such, we must realize that our mission must also include an effort to make a difference by addressing those vexing issues facing our society and our profession. Yes, our voices must be heard.

I am committed to such an effort and, therefore, I accept this award this evening, as an acknowledgement of my continued efforts to make a difference, and view it as a challenge to all of us in the legal profession to "give back" to our community. At a time in which our democracy, freedom, rule of law, institutions of government, and particularly the courts, are threatened and called into doubt, it is imperative that we take necessary steps to help members of our profession to embrace public service with a strong commitment and an indomitable zeal. Yes, members of our profession should use their knowledge, talent, and skills to make a difference; and to help our profession to live up to its lofty ideals, to spread seeds of trust and confidence in our legal system. I accept this award as an acknowledgment of my commitment to reducing ethnic and racial disparity, advancing diversity and reforming Connecticut's criminal justice system.

I accept this award as an acknowledgement of my efforts to promote an understanding of the importance of implicit bias and to encourage the development of cultural competency. I accept this award as a sign of my unyielding commitment to emphasize the importance of our

democratic institutions and norms, but particularly the sanctity of voting, which is the language of American democracy. I accept this award as an acknowledgment of my belief in and history of mentoring members of our profession. Yes, I am convinced that mentoring strengthens our profession by enhancing our sense of community and elevating our standards of competence, ethics, and professionalism. It further enhances our profession by helping our protégés to develop practical skills while developing a sense of confidence, identity and effectiveness in their professional role.

Margaret Mead once said, and I quote:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

I, therefore, challenge you to never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, members of the legal profession and civic minded citizens can change our society, and bring about needed reform.

Therefore, as we attempt to respond to the noted challenges, and as we attempt to remain relevant as a profession, may we always follow the North Star because that light epitomizes hope, may we always keep in mind our obligation to make a difference, to help somebody, to touch somebody. For if we do, our lives will not be in vain, for if we do, our lives will be enriched, for if we do, we are destined to add value to the public good, for if we do, the concept of “Public Service” will become an inherent part of our mission; a mission that will highlight our calling and the noble cause of our profession to serve others.

Thank you.

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