

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS
Frederick E. Kowal, Ph.D.
fkowal@uupmail.org
Delegate Assembly, Winter 2017
Saratoga Springs, NY
January 29, 2017

Good Evening, sisters and brothers of United University Professions. To set the stage, let me start with something very different: A coyote story. In Native American Society, the Coyote is sometimes the harbinger of chaos and disorder at the personal or national level. He is referred to in many tribal nations as the Trickster. However, for the native people I know best, the Interior Salish or Squelixa, Coyote is the one who brought order out of chaos -- but also left just enough challenges to make life interesting for us. Regardless, let me tell you a common Coyote story...

There once was a boy who loved the song of the meadowlark and would try and see the bird sing at every opportunity. One day, as he sought out the birdsong, he found himself far from his village on a hill top he didn't know. As he looked to find a trail that might lead him to the bird, he suddenly saw coyote sitting and watching him. The coyote spoke, "Why are you here?" The boy was surprised and said, "I was looking for the bird whose song I love to listen to." The coyote was jealous and asked, "What about my song, don't you like it?" The boy answered, "Oh, it's okay, but the meadowlark's is more beautiful." Coyote was very angry and said, "Well, if you'd like to see this special bird, follow me...I know a quick trail." The boy hesitated, but then followed Coyote. Soon, he was lost, as the coyote had raced far, far ahead on the trail. As night began to fall, he realized he didn't hear the

meadowlark and the coyote was gone. He stumbled home, deep into the dark night, disappointed and hungry. Much later in life, he came to know that in this life, one must stay true to one's trail and always, always keep in eye out for coyote...

So, here we are. Our nation listened to the words of one who in his life has shown no deep appreciation for the truth. One who has expressed heinous statements regarding how he sees and treats women. One who sought to destroy the legitimacy of the first African American President with lies, in what I call a political hate crime. One who mocked disabled people, referred to all of those in one ethnic group as rapists, and called for the removal of those belonging to a certain religious faith from the Land of the Free. One whose ambition, narcissism and

manipulation of peoples' fears and insecurities through a masterful understanding of the shallowness of so much of the media today have resulted in the rise of a government, elected by a minority of Americans, that will pursue the most extremist agenda in our nation's history. Our nation, at least a significant part of it, has lost its way. We who are the vanguard of the progressive movement, must call our nation home. We must insure that we find our way back to our trail, and ignore the Trickster -- or our nation, our world, stands in jeopardy. The reality we face is that stark. To be silent, to avoid confronting this monstrosity, to choose silence or compliance is to reject all that our union, our movement has accomplished over nearly 50 years.

At times like these, I turn to the words of one who faced immense challenges in his struggles for justice, Madiba -- Nelson Mandela, who once said, "The greatest glory in

living lies in not never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” We may have fallen. We are also ready to rise up! We didn’t do all that was needed to defeat Donald Trump. But we are ready to rise up from this defeat. We didn’t do all that was needed to expose his terribly destructive policy proposals, but we are ready to rise up in defense of our values. We didn’t do all that was needed to defend the right to vote in all our states when that right was under attack, but we are ready to rise up to defend our democracy. We didn’t do all that was needed to teach our children of the values of equality and justice for all, but we are ready to witness to these cardinal values our nation claims to be its own. We are ready to rise up because that is what we must do, it is what we have always done as progressives and as unionists. It is time, and we are ready and so we shall rise up and reclaim our democracy and

our nation from those who would destroy all that makes it good and just and right and hopeful and a place where love and compassion rule and not hate and fear!

Democracy is fragile. As is justice. And equality. The arc of history may bend to a better world, but that arc is also easily bent back to oppression, isolation, mistrust and cynicism. We are seeing it now. A secretary of education who knows nothing about education -- certainly not higher education -- and rejects the Jeffersonian precept that a democracy demands a public education system to bring forth an enlightened population. A secretary of labor who despises labor, the work we do and the need for just wages. A secretary of energy who doesn't even know what the department is or does. A secretary of health and human services who opposes science and the right to

health care. A director of the environmental protection agency who wants to destroy the agency he would lead. This is a total rejection of the role of government, and thus a rejection of the reality that government is the creation of the people to reflect the highest aspirations of self rule. It is a rejection of democracy. It is fascism.

We see it in the unfathomable rejection of facts. The rejection of science. The rejection of critical analysis. The rejection of history. The rejection of education as a public good. The rejection of the responsibility we have for each other and for those who come after us. We see it in the rejection of the right to freedom of thought and expression for government employees. We see it in the rejection of freedom of expression for groups engaged in family planning programs in developing nations. We see it in the

behavior of one whose narcissism is so extreme that any criticism is responded to in the most immature and violent fashion. We see it in his appeals to the mob, the rejection of the legitimate institutions of our political system and the rejection of the legitimate concerns of the majority who voted against him. We see it in his declaration that only he can repair what he calls -- in some dystopian imagining -- the American Carnage. We see it in his scapegoating of Muslims, Mexicans, the press, and any and all of those who accuse him of offenses or seek to hold him to long-established moral and ethical standards. We see it in his elevation of business elites who crave for an authoritarian regime here in our nation that will sweep away any and all restrictions on their accumulation of wealth: the protections of workers, consumers, and the environment. We are living in very dangerous times and I must ask: Is

Resistance and Absolute Necessity? Is it? Are we ready to rise up?

There is no doubt that for the vast majority of us, November 9th was a day that found us numb with shock, dismay and fear. Not just simple fear of the known, but fear of the known. Many of us have faced racism, and have lived through it. Many of us have faced religious hatred, have lived through it. Many of us have faced homophobia, and have lived through it. Many of us have seen authoritarian oppression in other lands, at other times. Many of us have studied the violence that has been perpetrated in the name of hatred of the other and know its cruel debilitation of a society. And many of us recognized in Donald Trump the threat of authoritarian rule

long before voters went to the polls on November 8th. So, it was right to be fearful.

But it wasn't enough then or now to simply be fearful. It wasn't enough then or now to simply retreat into solitude and reject the reality we are now facing. It was imperative to take stock of what kind of nation we live in, and what we can do as the progressive movement and as educators to resist the rise of authoritarianism in our nation.

This past election was about fear -- and anger that was stoked into rage. Misdirected, unjustified, unreasoning and often violent, and powerful rage. Most dangerously, rage directed at institutions. The candidates who were running through the primaries and for most of the general election dwelled on fear more than anything else. This is a

monumental failure, since democracies and their institutions depend on hope and faith to flourish. Unfortunately, Donald Trump has set a new standard for how to win: Stoke fear, and promise that only one person can ameliorate those fears. When he fails, as he must, where will the fear and anger that he has stoked go? What will it lead to? This is the real, long term danger posed by the election.

The fact is, we live in a rapidly, at times violently, changing world. We and our political leaders must embrace that reality and provide the means by which our people can make honest, enlightened choices. Such a possibility seems so remote right now. But it is what we must demand if our democracy is to survive and flourish in this century. As educators in the progressive movement

nobody is better positioned to take on this nation-saving task. But, it will be immensely difficult.

For now, we face wholesale attacks on health care, which will create severe economic dislocation in our state, in our university, and in our union. We face attacks on unions, as it is inevitable that we will lose fair share payment protections either through federal legislation or through a Supreme Court Case. We face attacks on our work on behalf of women's rights, on civil rights, on the environment, and on behalf of public education. The night is dark. And dawn is far off.

Some say we should not resist this calamity. Some labor leaders, even some progressives in the Democratic Party say that we must work with Trump where we can, to get

what we can, for our constituent groups. Some say that we should simply accept reality and go about our days with the understanding that this man is now the leader of our nation. Get over it, they say. Whiners, they call us.

I'm not a whiner. And I refuse to get over it. What is the it? Donald Trump was elected by an 18th century , undemocratic, constitutional provision which southern states insisted upon to defend the racist institution of slavery. Ironic, isn't it?

He won in large part because of restrictions on voting in Wisconsin, Michigan and North Carolina swung those states to him. He is an historical accident, and one that is an emerging tragedy for our nation and potentially our world. His victory is a clarion call we must hear and must

be summoned by to follow to the battlefield of justice, where we will fight for our nation's soul. And in this fight, we need to heed the words of one of the greatest Americans, Frederick Douglass, "It is not light that we need, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake." At stake is not just our union, or public education as it is now, or our individual rights or our civil rights, or our natural world. No. What is at stake is the future. All that we dream of and hope for: a good life and better futures for us and all those who walk behind us on the trail we know and love. The trail of compassion, of courage, of wisdom, of justice.

To win, we must resist from beginning to end, strategically and consistently. We must through it all remember that we

are the majority. We have the power that Trump and his followers only dream of and wish for. We will win because hope always wins. And what will we win? We will win back not “our country,” but everyone’s country: Black, white, red, brown, gay, straight, trans, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, secular -- laborers all. This is everyone’s country and we claim it in the cause of justice!

The battle has begun. Starting in November, soon after the election I met with our officers and we began to strategize how we would resist. The first opportunity brought us to become early participants in the organizing of the Women’s March on Washington. And we were there... and in Buffalo. And in New York. And in Syracuse. And in Albany. And all over this state! We will rise up! The next action took the form of a resolution passed by the

Executive Board condemning the explosion of hate language events at numerous colleges in New York. It led to discussions with the leadership of SUNY on how to fight back against this behavior. We will rise up and call out the hate when we see it anywhere and anytime.

Next, the Executive Board passed a resolution that authorized me to communicate to the leadership of SUNY and the governor, our demand that SUNY establish itself as a collection of Sanctuary Campuses. This has led to many discussions about how we can -- practically -- help DACA students and colleagues avoid the cruel hand of the government. We will rise up and defend our sisters and brothers!

When word spread that an right-wing organization was publicizing a website called the Professor Watchlist, to which students could report their teachers if they felt those teachers were not hewing to some conservative orthodoxy. I wrote to all the activists we have in our database encouraging you to sign a petition condemning this action as an attack on intellectual freedom and the freedom of expression, and also encouraged those who were so inclined to report themselves. I was reported by an un-namable individual -- who by the way, had lots of fun with the silly questions on the website. So many activists across this country took this step that the website was overwhelmed. We will rise up and defend the principles we live by!

And when Native Americans stood their ground on the plains of North Dakota to stop an invasion of their land by oil pipeline companies, an invasion that threatened their water supply and their sacred land, UUP joined them and I was proud to write to the Tribal Chairperson to tell him that THIS union would stand for justice for our sisters and brothers and not be blinded by short term economic benefit for the few. And when Donald Trump announced that he will push for the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Keystone Pipeline to continue, despite widespread opposition, I readied myself for the inevitable trip to Dakota to stand with our sisters and brothers. We will not back down. No, we will rise up because justice does not discriminate base on race or on power. And we don't fear the words or actions of one who, in the estimation of none

other than John Lewis, a true patriot, is not a legitimate president.

And we will not be limited to simple, one time actions. We will not be limited to symbolic steps. We will take the fight to the halls of Congress when we need to, and especially to our state legislators when we have to. Let us remember: We have the power of 3 million - the popular vote margin Trump lost by to Clinton! We are on the side of right and in all that we do, we bear witness to the right and just!

When Donald Trump nominated individuals to his cabinet who are hostile to the constituents served by the agencies they would lead, we prepared the steps we could take together. At this Delegate Assembly, at the Political Action Center, you can sign a petition, or write a letter, or make a

phone call. All this is directed at our senators and senators across the country to oppose the Frightening Five: Betsy DeVoss, Education; Andrew Puzder, Labor; Jeff Sessions, Justice; Tom Price, HHS; and Scott Pruitt, EPA. These individuals represent the worst kind of political leaders: Fostering fear and distrust of government by undermining the good work government does -- and benefiting by these actions. They are political arsonists. They set fire to their own homes and then get the insurance. Except for Sessions. His racism is the most virulent imaginable. He is this generation's Bull Conner. We must rise up and stop this brazen attack on our values and our nation's better instincts.

We have also been active in standing up with fellow unionists who are on the picket line, seeking justice. In

November, the Negotiations Team took a few hours out of their evening recovery from planning to walk a picket line for Honeywell workers in nearby Green Island. The Executive Board walked the line for the Momentive workers in Waterford as part of our December meeting. And to show that none of this is just a bunch of one-offs, we -- as many of us as possible -- will be back at the gates of Momentive tomorrow evening and we will walk in the cold with our sisters and brothers because the times demand it and the clarion call of justice requires it. We will rise up!

We are in this for the long haul. We continue to work to build the strength of our membership in the face of a certain Supreme Court case that will take away the fair share fees that all pay to be served by this union. We

continue to negotiate for a contract that will enhance our professional and personal lives. We continue to fight on the issues that mean so much to our adjuncts, professionals, and academics. And we are fully engaged in the heavy work of getting a better budget out of this session than we've gotten in the past several years.

We are clear-eyed warriors. We are not easily distracted by the Trickster in his many forms. When the Governor announced a "free" tuition proposal, I was intrigued. We support the concept. We always have. But this is not a free tuition program. It is a small scale funding program for those who fall in a particular income slot. And it doesn't cover fees. Or the cost of housing. And it won't help part-time students. And any students taking less than 15 credit

hours. And campuses only get compensated IF the student completes the semester. This is a costly diversion.

We are fighting for what is urgently needed NOW: Funding to start repairing the devastation caused by the decade of cuts to SUNY. Funding to hire full time faculty and staff and to provide transition pathways for adjuncts to full time status. Fighting for much-needed funding for New York's public hospitals in SUNY. They need capital. They need to have the costs of borrowing paid by the state, like every other state entity. They need the fringe benefits paid by the state, like every other state entity.

We fight for continued expansion of support for the tremendously successful opportunity programs. We fight for a wide-ranging legislative initiative that will change the

nature of SUNY's foundations forever, removing the causes of the long parade of shakers and movers who have shaken the money tree of the foundations and moved on. And we will stop, once more, the efforts by Andrew Cuomo to bring economic harm to the elderly in New York through a series of steps that are totally unwarranted and totally inappropriate in the state where the progressive movement was born! We will rise up!

And we'll do it because it's in our blood. It's in our bones. It's who we are. We fight to win, because losing means that injustice, ignorance, division, and mistrust seize the day. We will not allow it. We will do one thing and one thing only -- what progressives have always done -- RISE UP! **[VIDEO]**

Donald Trump is going to build a wall. Well, walls are built by those who have limited vision. They don't see the beauty of and opportunity created by diversity. They don't have faith in humankind. They don't have hope. Walls are the constructs of those who live in fear, fear of the other, fear of themselves. Walls are the constructs of those who have given up living, and only wish to survive. They have abandoned humanity, the oneness of our species, all descended from a small gathering of tribal people in Africa. What has driven humanity to its best achievements and its best manifestation of being, is hope.

But, it's not easy to have hope these days. No. I have felt the pain of depression. Many of us have. I struggled with it for days after the election, but I have been to Wounded Knee. I've been to the sight of the Marias Massacre in

Montana. I've seen the land around Sand Creek. I've been in Canyon De Chelly. All sites where hundreds of innocent women, children and men were butchered so that the United States could steal the land of native nations. Those nations didn't die. They survived. They struggled. And they are alive. If they could face down genocidal hate, I can face these challenges.

More than that, I have to hope. I have no choice. I have two wonderful sons. Michael and Daniel. They have hope. And faith. They must, because totally independently of each other, last June, they each got engaged to be married. In May, Dan will take that big hopeful step. In June, Mike will. I'm their father and how can I be a loving father and not hope for their best future? And how can I not heed the clarion call and do all that I can to make the

world a better place for them, for their wives, and for their children...and grandchildren?

So let the clarion call ring forth. We hear it. We heed its call. We rise up -- in the face of the hatred we've heard directed at our sisters and brothers. We rise up -- in the face of the division we've seen sown amongst us. We rise up -- in the dawn of the new day that summons us as few times have summoned us before: To hold high the banner of Justice, Equality, and Peace. Rise up, Today...Tomorrow... and till the end of time in the name of hope and solidarity forever!