

REMARKS

OF

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AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BLAKE: Good morning. Happy Father's Day. And that goes also to the women as well because we know many times they -- you know, in a lot of our communities, they're also the fathers as well.

MR. BLAKE: So I know you've given me quite a task right now because lovely weather last night, people might have been out on a Saturday night in Chicago, and then you have to wake up early this morning. You have me follow an international superstar from Brazil. You had your International President, Jerry McEntee, yesterday. So no pressure. No pressure at all.

But I want to first start off by saying thank you. Thank you to obviously Philip for the introduction. To President McEntee, to Lee Saunders. I saw Elissa walking in the back. To everyone that helped put this conference together and to all of you stepping up and stepping out I say thank you. And you should give yourselves a round of applause.

MR. BLAKE: You can do better than that. You can do better than that.

MR. BLAKE: So the name of your efforts, Next Wave, I don't know about you, but it creates a vision in my head. Because next acknowledges something happened in the past, that some great things happened before, I accept the good and the bad, I realize that there are some special moments before me. But I realize there are greater things ahead.

When I think about a wave I envision a flow. I envision a curve. I envision a movement like a labor movement. You know about that, don't you? I envision where energy seems to spark inside a room where someone can yell out solidarity, someone can say out AFSCME, and there's this feeling that happens, there's this wave that happens. Is someone with me this morning?

When you think about a wave you can think about a water wave crashing to the shore. You can think about a sound wave where it just kind of invokes something special in the air. You can maybe even think about a microwave in which sometimes you don't realize it provides you the nourishment that you need to keep on going, to create more energy to create another Next Wave. You can think about all the other waves. Maybe it's an electric wave that provides the power to sustain us. There's something special about a wave, something special about this Next Wave.

MR. BLAKE: So as we think about -- that's just -- I'm just setting a foundation right now -- that Next Wave, and thinking about that spirit that you are leaders. I don't look at you as young leaders. I look at you as leaders who are ready, who are able, who are smart enough, who are capable, who are qualified to do something not just down the line but right

now, when AFSCME and America and this country needs you.

So the title of this is "Our Moment to Move Is Now." Say that with me. Our moment to move is now.

So why do we need to be leaders in this moment right now? Why do we need to move? Why do we need this Next Wave? Well, maybe you haven't seen that there's just a few challenges going on. Internally 52 percent of your membership, from what I read, they're eligible to retire in the next 10 years, creating an immediate void potentially for leadership, meaning that there's a need for training and mentorship and development, slowly but surely passing the torch. And I think we can attest sometimes it's a little difficult to pass the torch.

In 2005 -- think about this -- three governors, in Indiana, Kentucky and Missouri had bargaining rights removed for state employees. As this has happened -- I was telling someone

before, just a point of personal privilege.

Although I wasn't raised AFSCME, I was raised in SEIU. My family is 1199, but we're all in this together.

MR. BLAKE: As this is happening there are other issues going on. So like health care, where your people are trying to decide if they're going to pay their rent or pay for prescription drugs. Energy costs are going up where you don't know from time to time if the gas price is going to be \$1.20 or \$2.10. People are afraid -- or \$5, as you said.

People are afraid about education costs in which you have students -- think about this, down in Morehouse and Spelman, more than 500 students who are down there who have the grades and have the smarts but are not going back because they just can't afford tuition for the next year.

Financial systems haven't been safeguarded. There's greed and corruption. And

we all know that there's been a disrespect upon the labor movement, but not upon this administration. We respect, we love, we empower the labor movement. Issues are running rampant from Iowa to North Korea, from Iowa to North Dakota. There seems to be something going on internationally and nationally every single day. Some see this as a crisis. They see that the water is calm.

But I see this is a time for a Next Wave. I see this as a time where these tough times may seem too high, that some may be fearful, but you are here to say that you want to start a movement, a moment of change, a moment and a movement of hope. See, our moment to move is now. For the Next Wave of leaders our moment to move is now on health care. Lower these individual costs to allow you to keep what you like, keep your doctors, keep being empowered so that we have quality and affordable health care for every single American in this country.

MR. BLAKE: Our moment to move is now on energy, where you can't just talk about green energy, it's also about green jobs. And as I think about these colors that you have -- see, AFSCME, you can feel this. I get frustrated when people talk about innovation and sometimes think that jobs don't come with that. You can't weatherize a home unless someone does something on that home. You can't create a smart grid unless someone builds that smart grid. And I seem to enjoy -- I think you're with me on this -- when we can create jobs that can't be outsourced to someone else.

On education our moment to move is now, so that we can race to the top and we can actually see this goal implemented from President Obama where he said by 2020 we want the U.S. to have the highest proportion of college graduates than any country in this world.

MR. BLAKE: Where there's a world class early childhood system, there's a K through 12

system where you don't just have people just picking up their jeans on the corners, but actually walking into classrooms and graduating on time, where you can have teachers that are getting paid more and getting the respect that they deserve and getting professional development that they need.

MR. BLAKE: You see our future can't wait until the future. Our children need us now. Our moment to move is now on financial fairness. Think about what the president just announced last week, so that there are safeguards in place so that people are not afraid that they can retire with dignity but lose everything. So we've created a consumer financial protection agency. Why? So that you have someone that's looking out for everyday Americans, so that people aren't getting tricked and people aren't getting confused so that if you have a credit card bill or a mortgage and you just don't understand that, one signature should not sign

your life away.

MR. BLAKE: And as we are here in this labor setting, our moment to move is now on that thing -- maybe you've heard about it -- the Employee Free Choice Act.

MR. BLAKE: See, this side of the room is giving me some energy. I've got to work on this one right here. But the President supports -- the outline supports the President's point. He doesn't buy this argument where the economy gets weaker from it being signed. See, you can't have someone who came from the south side and was standing out on picket lines not understand the call and the cause of the moment.

MR. BLAKE: For all of you that are here on this Next Wave remember what I said next means I acknowledge the past but I've got to keep on moving. And the wave means that there's some forward progress. So that means I must move now

on political and policy engagement. See, you remember what President McEntee said yesterday. You can have all these great elected officials, but if you're not doing something what's the point. See, we need to ensure that good people are helping good people.

MR. BLAKE: Now is the time for the Next Wave of leadership, that Next Wave of entrepreneurship, this Next Wave of visionaries, that Next Wave of prosperity, that Next Wave of happiness, that Next Wave of AFSCME being AFSCME, being at the forefront of leadership. Now is the time for that Next Wave where great things are happening for great people, where great things are what you and I do because you and I are in this together.

What do we do? We do special things at special moments. When others see crisis, we see opportunity.

MR. BLAKE: We are in this together.

We are leaders, we are powerful, we are united, we are growing from 400 to 85,000 now to 1.7 million. We are labor. We are workers. We are the public speakers and we are the quiet ones in the back. For you you can say we are AFSCME. We are the Next Wave. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are waiting for this moment because our moment to move is now.

MR. BLAKE: In a moment things can change. In a moment things can get better. In a moment you can vote. In a moment you can voice your voice. In a moment with a move we can change the world. But what gives us the audacity to actually think that we can be the Next Wave?

Well, President McEntee shared yesterday that there were previous waves before and there were previous moments that we have to acknowledge and we need to support and we need to realize that that history is what's got us here. But we also need to realize that if you really want to see the beauty of the shore, waves have

got to keep crashing on in.

See, I acknowledge everything from Rosie to Pullman porters, from Emma Gorman to Lily Ledbetter, from the Knights of Labor to the Memphis sanitation workers, from AFL to AFSCME, from all these things of the past mean to the Next Wave of the future. The Next Wave stepping up to the mantel of leadership and a higher purpose, working for the working class. Isn't it time that someone steps up for this working and middle class?

MR. BLAKE: Like a wave we are moving at the right speed at the right time at the right pace, right now. This Next Wave means that we need to do something special. Hello, somebody. I know it's Sunday morning. I'm not a preacher, but we can get excited right now. And yes, we are younger, but we're stronger. And think about this. There's been a precedent that has been laid out of young leaders who were told before don't step up and don't step out. There was this

guy named Martin Luther King. Maybe you've heard of him. Or Dorothy Day or maybe even the Kennedys or even that young fellow named McEntee.

See, young have emerged before and young are emerging right now. There was this guy, maybe you've heard of him, his name is Barak Obama. I believe just two years ago they were telling him that he was too young. They were telling him that he wasn't ready. They were telling him that his wave, that his Next Wave needed to just settle on down on the shore. They said that it wasn't his time. But I think his time was right now.

MR. BLAKE: So who am I to start before you and start trying to say something positive? Why am I here right now? You're looking at me like who is this brother trying to get up here, be all joyful. Let me tell you briefly about my story. See, my name has been said, but as I said, you can call me a child of labor. My daddy, 75 years old, still working at St. Barnabas Hospital cleaning up emergency rooms.

MR. BLAKE: My mother, Hillary Lawrence, we grew up in The Bronx, New York. Is New York in the house today?

MR. BLAKE: You notice I was paying attention. I knew exactly where to look for New York right there. Dewitt Clinton High School. My mother, born and raised in Jamaica, decided St. Ann's and St. Andrew's. Watch out, now. She had moments where she would tell us that -- my older brother, Donovan, there were points where we weren't sure what was going to happen. And no one would really look out for my mom when they were in Jamaica before I was born and my mom would have my brother on her chest and they would go to sleep at night. And then there was this moment for a personal privilege.

She first saw when I brought this booklet home and she said one day -- it says White House. She said, baby, and she just kind

of stopped for a second. And I said "What is it?"  
She said "From no house to the White House."

MR. BLAKE: I appreciate that.  
Hopefully I get you to do that at the end too.

MR. BLAKE: Going back to me for a second, my name is Michael Alexander Blake. I was born on Christmas Day of 1982. But you know what? I almost wasn't born. My mother was too sick to have me. They had me with C-section. I was born with a heart murmur. For those of you in the health care system you know what that means. That means there was a hole in my heart when I was born.

I survived four car crashes. Once when I fell asleep at the wheel on the last day of my freshman year going back from Chicago to New York. I've seen a lot of things that have happened along the way. My mother tells us a story about how in Jamaica -- and those from the Caribbean realize this. That in order to take

exams -- think about this. In order to take exams from time to time to get advanced you have to prove that you are that person and you have to bring not just an ID, but a birth certificate.

And she wanted to be a nurse and couldn't become a nurse when she wanted to be because someone got there too late to bring the birth certificate. And she tells us the story of her sitting by the tree looking on the inside and just crying because she couldn't fulfill her dreams. She couldn't have her Next Wave happen because someone else held her back.

I remember there was a point when I used to be here in Chicago. I went to Northwestern, just up the road in Evanston and I worked just down the street at Merchandise Mart. I used to be a sports producer and for the guys in the room it was essentially a dream job. I got paid to watch sports. Sisters, you enjoy that too.

But there was a point where I realized I wasn't doing enough. And there was another

great labor man in this city. His name is Henry Tamarind from Unite Here. And I was just trying to figure out what was I doing with my life and he gave me a chance to potentially be political director at UNITE Here but for whatever reason it didn't come together. But yet he still said, you know, my son Nate is helping with this program called "Yes We Can" for this guy named Barak Obama that a lot of people don't believe in just yet. And I turned down the job and then two days later, after not taking the job, they called me back and said, you know, I really want you to look at this program.

Now, think about this. As we talk about mentorship and leadership and training. That someone had my interest -- didn't really know me, but cared for me enough to say despite his personal disappointment he didn't want to see my future held back. And what did that lead to? That led to just about in a three year span going from being a sports producer here to now having an office at the Eisenhower Executive Office

Building right next to the White House.

MR. BLAKE: But I want to make it clear that this journey wasn't easy. So when I was in New York all of you that are from the Bronx knows there's this big old structure called the Kingsbridge Armory. And I used to -- my first organizing job was with a group called the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition up in New York. And the armory was just kind of sitting there. No one was really using it.

We kept fighting and fighting and saying we wanted to turn the top into an educational facility so that all these students that are running around -- if you're familiar with the city, you have all these schools that are going on in kind of this vicinity, Roseville, Clinton, Bronx Science, all these different places all around. But around Kingsbridge there's just this void. And we said let's try to do something. And it took a while for people to start paying attention, but finally people

started paying attention. But it was hard to get through this journey.

I was over at Davidson Community Center at The Bronx right by Davidson and Burnside where we went out block to block in 10453, in that zip code, and said, you know what, you can be educated, teens, if you decide to have sex we can't stop you from that but be responsible at least. And we would educate them about the practicalities of what would happen if you just make these inappropriate and too early decisions.

This Next Wave that we talk about, it's not just you. It's about those that follow you.

MR. BLAKE: It's about understanding that we are humble servants, understanding that something gets us to this point. And what it got me to was a point when I got to Iowa. Now, I'll be honest. A young brother from the Bronx going to Iowa wasn't exactly the thing I was planning on. But we kept going and we kept going and we just kept going. And we talk about this wave and

we talk about a vision. There was this point at the JJ Steak Fry -- I'm sorry -- at the Harkin Steak Fry. And we got all these people assembled and we said, you know, just believe in us, just believe in what we're about to do.

And for anyone that was in Iowa for the Harkin Steak Fry, you have to take this dip down the hill and then come up the hill before you can go inside. And when you think about the motion of a wave think about 2500 people who are all gathered by this belief in hope and change, who decided just to come on together and made this wave.

It was the same thing like at JJ where we had 4,000 people come together just behind this belief that we can do something different, that yes we can can go beyond just a slogan. It can mean action. It's surreal for me to stand here today and for you to look at me and realize that this 26 year old skinny kid from the Bronx is now working for this 46 year old skinny kid from Chicago.

MR. BLAKE: Seeing so many faces as this Next Wave, as this next generation, empowering to show me what we can do when we unite. AFSCME, realize this, realize the power when we unite. Realize the power when we don't trip over each other and don't try to trip somebody else. Realize the power that happens when you impact not just your wave but the Next Wave. Realize that this campaign, this election, this moment taught me something special great things that we can accomplish together, not just in technology, but with people.

And I don't want you to just look out for someone because you think it's right. Look out for someone because you know it's right.

MR. BLAKE: You and I are the same. We may have different stories, but we have the same calling. It's to help people. It's to stand up for those needing a leader. It's to wipe away a tear. It's to tear down the walls of injustice.

It's to unite and it's to fight for what's right. See, my pastor, Dr. Bell, told us this real quick anecdote. He said, you know, there was this couple going into a store one day and the father was watching as the mom was getting all these things that seemed to be a little too big for the son. And he said, "You know, Baby, please explain this to me. He's only this size. Why are we getting all these sizes so much larger?" And she said "Because we can't just think about the size and where he's at right now. We've got to realize where he's going to grow to."

See, we are leaders, young leaders but leaders nonetheless. And as I shared in the beginning -- and I'm coming to a close -- that this Next Wave means that there's a moment that happening and it's happening now. It's like a great chess game. Anyone play chess in the room? You want to be at that point where you make strategic decisions. We're at a moment you can move and at a moment you can be like that great queen where if you just give her just a little

bit of space she could conquer anything on the board.

AFSCME, the Next Wave, we can't wait, we won't wait, because if we wait it will be too late. Look at Obama. They wanted him to wait. Imagine what this country and this world would have been if he would have waited. Because if we wait things won't change. We can't wait. Because for health care reform and for energy independence our moment to move is now. For education reform and financial stability our moment to move is now. For equal pay for equal work our moment to move is now.

For labor rights for people's rights for American's rights our moment to move is now. For unions united that will not be divided our moment to move is now. For leaders to rise up regardless of their age our move to move is now. For dreams to be realized, for dreams to be fulfilled our moment to move is now. Next Wave, if you stand up, if you stand tall, if you stand proud and you stand out, our country, our world will say our moment to move is now. God bless you.