

Remarks of AAG Tom Perez
Department of Justice MLK Program
January 7, 2010

Good morning, and thank you for joining us today as we honor one of our nation's treasured heroes.

The legacy of Dr. King, whose unrelenting commitment to his dream helped shepherd some of our most cherished civil rights laws; and whose nonviolent activism and belief that equality was inevitable set an example for generations of Americans seeking to continue to perfect our nation, continues to be felt in the 21st century.

As we watched the inauguration of our first African American president almost one year ago, we heard echoes of Dr. King's dream that one day his children would "live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

As we watched a Latina take her seat on the Supreme Court Bench this year, we were reminded of Dr. King's unwavering belief that one day the nation's promise of equal opportunity for all would be fulfilled.

As the President this fall signed into law the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act, we saw yet again the power of persistence, and were reminded of Dr. King's famous words that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

And if Dr. King were here to witness each of our landmark achievements, he would most certainly feel proud of how far we have come as a nation. He would marvel at the long road we have traveled, and the milestones we've passed.

But he would not rest.

If he were here in 2010, he would take a moment to reflect on the advancements of the last half century, and then he would turn and set his sights on the challenges we still face. He would recognize that we continue to see violence fueled by bigotry and hate in our nation, and he would continue to react to such violence with nonviolent protest in an effort to eradicate hate from people's hearts. He would speak out against those more subtle brands of discrimination that still permeate so many of our institutions, insisting that ALL children, no matter the color of their skin, the language they speak, or the country from which they come, receive a quality education and the opportunities it brings. He would stand shoulder to shoulder with our LGBT

brothers and sisters, recognizing that for them, the promise of equal justice has not yet been fulfilled, and calling on our nation to again rise to the occasion.

In his letter from Birmingham Jail, where he was detained because of his unwavering commitment to the pursuit of freedom and equality, he famously wrote: *I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.*

If here were here today, Dr. King would call on each of us to continue the pursuit of justice. He would ask us each to give of ourselves so that his legacy can carry on, and so that all people can realize equal opportunity and the American Dream. He would ask us to serve humanity, and our communities.

This is why celebrate Dr. King's legacy, each year, with a day of service. I encourage you to take to heart the theme of this year's Martin Luther King Jr., day: "A day on, not a day off," and ask yourself how you can contribute to improving your community.

And now I would like to introduce our keynote speaker. Chaplain Barry C. Black has served as Chaplain of the United States Senate since 2003. In this capacity, he provides spiritual guidance for the Senators and their families and staff, and assists with research on theological questions. Prior to his current post, Chaplain Black served for 27 years as a Navy Chaplain, ending his distinguished career with the Navy as Chief of Navy Chaplains. A native of Baltimore, Chaplain Black holds Master of Arts degrees in Divinity, Counseling and Management, as well as a Doctorate degree in Ministry and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Psychology.

In 1995, Chaplain Black received the NAACP Renowned Service Award for his contribution to equal opportunity and civil rights. He received the 2002 Benjamin Elijah Mays Distinguished Leadership Award from the Morehouse School of Religion, and in 2004 he received the Image Award, "Reaffirming the Dream – Realizing the Vision," for military excellence from the Old Dominion University chapter of the NAACP. Chaplain Black has written an autobiography, "From the Hood to the Hill."

Please give a warm welcome to Chaplain Barry C. Black.