

REMARKS BY THE HONORABLE WILLIAM BELL, MAYOR OF THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM*

The Declaration of Independence touches upon the pursuit of happiness, the concept of liberty, the concept of what a human being was born with: inalienable rights, human rights, civil rights. Whether you were born in the U.S., whether you were born in Syria, whether you were born in Israel, Kenya, Asia—it doesn't matter. You were born with those rights. And our Declaration of Independence recognized those inalienable rights. The preamble talks about the pursuit of happiness and securing the blessing of liberty. As a human being, you are free, you have the right to do certain things and to pursue your happiness, to live your life however you deem fit, so long as it does not interfere with the rights of others.

How do you take all of that, that belief that our country was founded upon, and put that into a code form? How do you take human rights and convert that into a principle of law that protects each and every one of us? That is what our Constitution attempted to do. And down through the years it has been amended, because when some people talked about the rights of men, this did not include men and women of different colors. It did not include women in general; it only talked about men. But down through the years we have amended that Constitution to make sure that we all have the right to pursue happiness and to live in dignity.

What we discussed today are those areas that impinge upon our right to life, our right to the pursuit of happiness. We had a discussion about water: water is vital to life. If you do not have drinking water, if you don't have water to grow crops, if you don't have water to help maintain sanitation, it impinges upon your life. Therefore, we must protect the right to have water, to have breathable air, to have those things that are necessary for you to exist. We talked about the pursuit of happiness, living your truth,

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whether it is exercising your sexual identity or gender orientation, or whether it is pursuing your religious beliefs, that is part of your pursuit of happiness; what makes you happy; what makes you the human being that you are.

Today, there are things that are impinging upon that right. There are certain groups and organizations that are trying to roll back the hands of time to “make America great again.”¹ If we are true believers in protecting the right to life, the right to liberty, and the right to pursuit of happiness, we have to collaborate and work together at all levels of government.

Because of the gridlock that has existed in Washington, D.C. for the past four to eight years, we have had to rely on local governments to take up the challenge. When you look at the U.S. Conference of Mayors that is made up of Republican as well as Democratic mayors from all across the country, we have taken up the challenge: to question our federal government as it relates to immigration reform; to question our federal government as it relates to criminal justice reform; to question our federal government as it relates to environmental reforms to protect our planet.²

Mayors understand because we are at the grassroots level. We have to deal with the fallout of lead in our drinking water, of improper sewers, and things of that nature on a day-to-day basis. And we realize that if we do not have the support of the federal government, then the aftermath falls upon our shoulders. We deal with the personal impacts of human trafficking, and we realize it is an issue that has to be approached differently. When we see someone working in the fields for less than minimum wage, being treated like a work animal, we have to be concerned about that. We have to find solutions and we have to find individuals who are willing to take up the fight.

Each individual who comes to this country, either through their own volition or through forced immigration, should expect to be protected under our laws and under our Constitution. Because inalienable rights are not rights given by mankind or determined by borders. They are based upon the mere fact that you were born a human being and you deserve to be treated like a human being.

1. Donald J. Trump For President, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com> (last visited Oct. 18, 2017).

2. *About the Conference*, U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS, <https://www.usmayors.org/the-conference/about/> (last visited Oct. 7, 2017).

As defenders of human rights, we must defend each and every individual based upon that fact. You have the power within you to make a difference. Go forward and use that power for good, and I promise you you'll be blessed for it. Thank you all for being here. Let's go forward and change the world.