

Urban League and Lancaster Chamber Champion of Diversity Award
Remarks by Dave Smith
June 18, 2009

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said “Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle.” I think it’s only appropriate that I start my remarks with a quote from him tonight, as I accept this award for being a champion of diversity. But I also accept it on behalf of so many people in my life, who along the way, have taught me the power that hard work and love have in struggling for change.

First, I would like to thank the Urban League Board, Staff and Members and the Diversity Committee of the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce for the honor of receiving this award. My appreciation goes to Martin Dees Jr. for nominating me for this honor. Martin, Phyllis Campbell and the Urban League have been outstanding advocates and leaders for school reform.

I am grateful to the Champions of Diversity in my life, who have both inspired and challenged me.

My wife, Kim Ronald Smith, who is my champion because of her grace, beauty and her generous heart. Thank you, Kim, for the world view, humor and love you bring to my life. Kim not only works as an attorney with Hartman Underhill and Brubaker Law Firm, but also volunteers hundreds of hours in community service. Thank you, Kim.

My Mother and Father taught me to trust God, to help others and to have a strong work ethic. Although in the Smith household, it wasn’t like we had other options. My Father ran a saw mill and was up and out by 5 am every morning; my mother, for many years, walked to work to ensure that 3 children were feed, clothed and educated. To Alice and Lee Smith, I am grateful.

My sister, Minnie, who scared me into going to college.

And finally, I am thankful to the many ministers, teachers, coworker and friends in my life – there are too many to name here, but they have always been my champions.

I believe that to be a true champion, you have grow in three areas:

1) You have to make a conscience departure from ignorance: the kind of ignorance that had me going into the front door of the neighborhood movie theater, while I watched my African American friends going down the side alley and being cramped into a balcony to watch the movie.

2) You have to find your voice, a voice that speaks to injustices and works to build community. Good Schools Pennsylvania has given nearly 20,000 advocates a means of raising their voices so that every child has the chance to become a life long learner.

3) You have to take action, you have to lead, to step out and challenge the status quo. I heard a speaker on world hunger who said prayer is important but there comes a time to take action and to ONLY pray becomes the laziest thing we can do.

I am humbled to be considered and to receive this award for every Good Schools Pennsylvania Staff member and to every advocate who, for the past decade, have held vigils, marches, visits with legislators, forums and written 1,000s of letters to their state leaders; they are the advocates who stood for children and who said that the inadequacies and inequitable resources for children in public education needed to be addressed. It has truly been a continuous struggle.

Each time an advocate meets with a state leader, I see in their faces the many children that need text books, the resources to thrive in school, the teachers, tutors, and smaller classes that would help every child achieve. For every child's face found in poverty, an English Language Learner, a special needs child, and every child of different means, gender and race, who wants to succeed and to become a life long learner – these are the advocates who worked tirelessly for a Costing Out Study and a new funding formula to ensure that every single one of those children have a chance to succeed.

And it is their struggle that gave way last year to the type of meaningful, historic reform that Dr. King spoke of.

It strikes me tonight that the timing of this ceremony – where I look around and see a room full of champions for many causes – where I see so many signs of hope and change and progress – could not come at a more important time.

Our legislators are in Harrisburg this month, debating a new state budget for Pennsylvania. We know that a quality education impact families, our communities, and our vision of the world. Investing in our school districts and our students is an investment in our lives and our future. And so it's incumbent upon us all of us to return to the offices of our state leaders once again and make the case that we have an obligation to every child and to our communities, that we have a sacred trust to fulfill the responsibility to ensure a high quality education for all and to not turn a blind eye to Pennsylvania's future and our students' education and lives.

We must give them hope. We, in this room, are every child's Champion of Diversity. This award honors Good Schools Advocates who work to reform education and to make every child count and to carry out the dream that Dr. King envisioned for us all.

I close with the address Dr. King made to students of Barrett High School in Philadelphia.

“Don't allow anybody to pull you so low as to make you hate them. Don't allow anybody to cause you to lose your self-respect to the point that you do not struggle for justice—how ever young you are. You have a responsibility to seek to make your nation a better nation in which to live. You have a responsibility to seek to make life better for everybody. And so you must be involved in the struggle for freedom and justice.”

Thank you.