

The Soul District

Portland, Sierra

At the head offices of the Urban League of Portland, hundreds of local supporters have assembled for an address by native son Hurricane, their junior senator and the former Vice President. Joining him on stage are several special guests who hail from across Oregon and Washington: a Black Lives Matter organizer from Vancouver, a disability rights attorney from Salem, a transgender activist from Seattle, and a local rabbi.

Hurricane comes out onto the stage with his guests of honor to loud applause and frantic sign-waving as a local church choir finishes singing We Shall Overcome.

Good evening, everyone.

I want to thank you all for coming out today. I also want to thank the Urban League for generously agreeing to host this event, and to acknowledge the important work that they do to advance the cause of communities of color here in Portland.

“...nor shall any state deny to any person the equal protection of the laws.”

It took nearly a century after the Founding Fathers set ink to parchment for those words to be added to our Constitution, when in our nation’s inexorable march towards progress, we finally put an end to that most odious institution: slavery.

It would take another century for the courts to give power to those words, under the weight of the hope and defiance that carried the marchers of the Civil Rights Movement to victory. Then, only then, with the fall of Jim Crow, did the tree of justice planted at the Civil War’s end finally bear its fruit.

This fruit was bitter, as it was not yet ripe. And for too many peoples in our country, even this sour nectar remained out of reach, with those who attempt the long climb pushed down by the weight of centuries of oppression and discrimination.

Yet they persist. We all persist.

We persist because this is the struggle of our forefathers, our communities and our neighbors—it is our nation’s struggle.

It is a struggle situated not in some distant past, but in the present day, all around us.

We persist because our transgender and non-binary fellow Americans are dehumanized and attacked by the very members of Congress in whom the Constitution has entrusted the enforcement of their civil rights.

We persist because the high court of Dixie arrogates to itself the power to destroy the hard-fought gains of the civil rights movement, with our chants of justice drowning out the distant echoes of *Lochner* and *Plessy*.

And we persist because a presidential candidate can tell six million American Jews that their people's ancestral homeland is the illegitimate creation of international powers that be, in ignorance of the long and dark history of this dangerous rhetoric.

Each of the events represents a setback to our quest to bring to fruition that great promise of our Republic—one of equal justice under law. Yet they are just that: a temporary setback. While our opponents will keep standing in the door, tomorrow we will come back, stronger and more united than ever before.

And I am a true believer in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

We may not succeed tomorrow, or the day after, or the day after that. It may take years for us to achieve our goals, and many decades for us to finally build a nation of equals. But we will succeed.

And the first front of our battle for the civil liberties of America will be in Congress.

The institution that our opponents have weaponized into a bastion of hatred, discrimination and exclusion can become a place of love, tolerance and understanding. Together, and with the help of like-minded Senators and Congresspeople of all parties, we can set the national agenda and move forward in a spirit of reconciliation and empowerment, giving voice to the voiceless and hope to the hopeless.

All we need is an agenda that will put channel our words into meaningful change for each and every American. Civil rights must return to Washington's agenda.

First, we must protect the Civil Rights Act from attack. In every session for five terms, Congressman Sun has attempted to destroy the foundation of our liberties that the civil rights marchers paid for in blood, sweat and tears. While this was once a fringe view within even his own party, that it is no longer. In the Senate, he would be uniquely positioned to strike a deadly blow at the law that ended Jim Crow, and that—as *Dixie Inn* shows—continues to protect Americans from discrimination every single day.

I will do everything within my power to fight back, because laissez-faire is no better for our liberties than it is for our economy. Far from turning the clock back to the era of sundown towns and “separate but equal,” what we need is a rebirth of civil rights. That's why I was proud to

introduce a fair housing bill to Congress that will erase the legacy of redlining, end the insidious practice of racial steering, and finally achieve the forgotten promises of the Great Society.

Second, we must continue to push for criminal justice. Washington can't just afford to sit around in silent judgment while millions of our fellow Americans languish behind bars or face discrimination long after they've walked out of the prison door.

While Congressman Sun may speak of his plans, I can show you what, together, we've already accomplished. In Atlantic, I wrote [a constitutional amendment](#) that has more than halved prison sentences for young offenders, while reducing the cruel and unhealthy dependence of our sentencing system on life imprisonment—reserving it only for the worst violent crimes. Here in Sierra, I pushed through [a landmark criminal justice bill](#) that abolished the evil and immoral practice of the death penalty and sentencing enhancement that prosecutors have used to throw many young black men whose only crime was standing near the site of an attack in jail.

Third, we must continue to empower the dispossessed, no matter who they are or how hard it will be. This means, for our allies with disabilities, strengthening the Americans with Disabilities Act to make it easier to sue big businesses that throw around bonuses for their executives and then turn around to claim that they can't afford to pay for even the basest accommodations. Without universal accessibility, there can be no universal justice.

For our indigenous communities that have long served as stewards of our lands and waters, this means ending centuries of colonialism and empowering their right to self-determination. The scar of centuries of oppression cannot be erased in one fell swoop, but we can begin to make amends by properly funding Native American social services to end poverty on our reservations and foster cultural and economic growth.

And it means that, for queer Americans, we must strive to push back against the attacks on their rights. With a progressive Congress, we will finally be able to pass a federal ban on conversion therapy, a harmful practice that has traumatized thousands of our children in an effort to change their unchangeable sexual orientation. And we will finally pass laws that take civil rights into the twenty-first century, by ensuring that transgender and non-binary Americans are fully protected from discrimination, whether that be in schools, the workplace or the halls of government.

But of course, the equal protection of the laws is one thing. Equality in the eyes of our fellow man is another.

Although the law can open schoolhouse gates and knock down partition walls, it cannot overcome the hatred in people's hearts. To do that, we will need a social movement. That's why I need all of you today.

Working side-by-side with our political movement, you have the opportunity today to set the stage for the rebirth of civil rights that our country so desperately needs.

Although no single person can reach the fruit from our tree of justice, together there is nothing we can't achieve. By standing on each other's shoulders, there's no tree high enough that we can't reach.

Only then will the fruit of our labors be ripe—and it will be sweet.

I quote from the fifth chapter of the Book of Ephesians: "Live as children of light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth."

Thank you, and God bless.

After exiting the stage to sustained applause, Hurricane joins local media backstage for some quick interviews. The choir returns to sing the classic Pride anthem I Will Survive.

Some of the campaign signs waved by supporters in the crowd:



A Facebook banner posted to the official campaign account after the speech:



We shall overcome!

Hurricane will fight to protect the Civil Rights Act and defend LGBTQ+ Americans from the Republicans' transphobic and homophobic agenda.