

"I can't breathe." "I can't breathe." George Floyd's last words. But they didn't die with him. They're still being heard. They're echoing across this nation. They speak to a nation where too often just the color of your skin puts your life at risk. They speak to a nation where more than 100,000 people have lost their lives to a virus -- and 40 million Americans have filed for unemployment -- with a disproportionate number of these deaths and job losses concentrated in black and brown communities.

And they speak to a nation where every day millions of people -- not at the moment of losing their life -- but in the course of living their life -- are saying to themselves, "I can't breathe." It's a wake-up call for our nation. For all of us. And I mean all of us. It's not the first time we've heard these words -- they're the same words we heard from Eric Garner when his life was taken six years ago. But it's time to listen to these words. Understand them. And respond to them -- with real action.

The country is crying out for leadership. Leadership that can unite us. Leadership that can bring us together. Leadership that can recognize the pain and deep grief of communities that have had a knee on their neck for too long. But there is no place for violence. No place for looting or destroying property or burning churches, or destroying businesses — many of them built by people of color who for the first time were beginning to realize their dreams and build wealth for their families.

Nor is it acceptable for our police — sworn to protect and serve all people — to escalate tensions or resort to excessive violence. We need to distinguish between legitimate peaceful protest — and opportunistic violent destruction. And we must be vigilant about the violence that's being done by the incumbent president to our democracy and to the pursuit of justice.

When peaceful protestors are dispersed by the order of the President from the doorstep of the people's house, the White House — using tear gas and flash grenades — in order to stage a photo op at a noble church, we can be forgiven for believing that the president is more interested in power than in principle. More interested in serving the passions of his base than the needs of the people in his care. For that's what the presidency is: a duty of care — to all of us, not just our voters, not just our donors, but all of us.

The President held up a bible at St. John's church yesterday. If he opened it instead of brandishing it, he could have learned something: That we are all called to love one another as we love ourselves. That's hard work. But it's the work of America. Donald Trump isn't interested in doing that work. Instead he's preening and sweeping away all the guardrails that have long protected our democracy. Guardrails that have helped make possible this nation's path to a more perfect union. A union that constantly requires reform and rededication -- and yes the protests from voices of those mistreated, ignored, left out and left behind. But it's a union worth fighting for and that's why I'm running for President.

In addition to the Bible, he might also want to open the U.S. Constitution. If he did, he'd find the First Amendment. It protects "the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Mr. President: That is America.

Not horses rising up on their hind legs to push back a peaceful protest. Not using the American military to move against the American people. This nation is a nation of values. Our freedom to speak is the cherished knowledge that lives inside every American. We will not allow any President to quiet our voice. We won't let those who see this as an opportunity to sow chaos throw up a smokescreen to distract us from the very real and legitimate grievances at the heart of these protests. And we can't leave this moment thinking we can once again turn away and do nothing. We can't.

The moment has come for our nation to deal with systemic racism. To deal with the growing economic inequality in our nation. And to deal with the denial of the promise of this nation — to so many. I've said from the outset of this election that we are in a battle for the soul of this nation. Who we are. What we believe. And maybe most important — who we want to be.

It's all at stake. That is truer today than ever. And it's in this urgency we can find the path forward. The history of this nation teaches us that it's in some of our darkest moments of despair that we've made some of our greatest progress. The 13th and 14th and 15th Amendments followed the Civil War. The greatest economy in the history of the world grew out of the Great Depression. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 came in the tracks of Bull Connor's vicious dogs.

To paraphrase Reverend Barber — it's in the mourning we find hope. It will take more than talk. We've had talk before. We've had protests before. Let us vow to make this, at last, an era of action to reverse systemic racism with long overdue and concrete changes. That action will not be completed in the first 100 days of my Presidency — or even an entire term. It is the work of a generation. But if this agenda will take time to complete, it should not wait for the first 100 days of my Presidency to get started. A down payment on what is long overdue should come now. Immediately.

I call on Congress to act this month on measures that would be a first step in this direction. Starting with real police reform. Congressman Jeffries has a bill to outlaw choke holds. Congress should put it on President Trump's desk in the next few days. There are other measures: to stop transferring weapons of war to police forces, to improve oversight and accountability, to create a model use of force standard — that also should be made law this month.

No more excuses. No more delays. If the Senate has time to confirm Trump's unqualified judicial nominees who will run roughshod over our Constitution, it has time to pass legislation that will give true meaning to our Constitution's promise of "equal protection of the laws."

Looking ahead, in the first 100 days of my presidency, I have committed to creating a national police oversight commission. I've long believed we need real community policing. And we need each and every police department in the country to undertake a comprehensive review of their hiring, their training, and their de-escalation practices. And the federal government should give them the tools and resources they need to implement reforms. Most cops meet the highest standards of their profession. All the more reason that bad cops should be dealt with severely

and swiftly. We all need to take a hard look at the culture that allows for these senseless tragedies to keep happening.

And we need to learn from the cities and precincts that are getting it right. We know, though, that to have true justice in America, we need economic justice, too. Here, too, there is much to be done. As an immediate step, Congress should act to rectify racial inequities in the allocation of COVID-19 recovery funds. I will be setting forth more of my agenda on economic justice and opportunity in the weeks and months ahead. But it begins with health care. It should be a right not a privilege. The quickest route to universal coverage in this country is to expand Obamacare. We could do it. We should do it.

But this president — even now — in the midst of a public health crisis with massive unemployment wants to destroy it. He doesn't care how many millions of Americans will be hurt— because he is consumed with his blinding ego when it comes to President Obama. The President should withdraw his lawsuit to strike down Obamacare, and the Congress should prepare to act on my proposal to expand Obamacare to millions more.

These last few months we have seen America's true heroes. The health care workers, the nurses, delivery truck drivers, grocery store workers. We have a new phrase for them: Essential workers. But we need to do more than praise them. We need to pay them. Because if it wasn't clear before, it's clear now. This country wasn't built by Wall Street bankers and CEOs. It was built by America's great middle class — by our essential workers.

I know there is enormous fear and uncertainty and anger in the country. I understand. And I know so many Americans are suffering. Suffering the loss of a loved one. Suffering economic hardships. Suffering under the weight of generation after generation after generation of hurt inflicted on people of color — and on black and Native communities in particular.

I know what it means to grieve. My losses are not the same as the losses felt by so many. But I know what it is to feel like you cannot go on. I know what it means to have a black hole of grief sucking at your chest. Just a few days ago marked the fifth anniversary of my son Beau's passing from cancer. There are still moments when the pain is so great it feels no different from the day he died. But I also know that the best way to bear loss and pain is to turn all that anger and anguish to purpose.

And, Americans know what our purpose is as a nation. It has guided us from the very beginning. It's been reported. That on the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated, little Yolanda King came home from school in Atlanta and jumped in her father's arms. "Oh, Daddy," she said, "now we will never get our freedom." Her daddy was reassuring, strong, and brave. "Now don't you worry, baby," said Martin Luther King, Jr. "It's going to be all right." Amid violence and fear, Dr. King persevered. He was driven by his dream of a nation where "justice runs down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream." Then, in 1968 hate would cut him down in Memphis.

A few days before Dr. King was murdered, he gave a final Sunday sermon in Washington. He told us that though the arc of a moral universe is long, it bends toward justice. And we know we can bend it — because we have. We have to believe that still. That is our purpose. It's been our

purpose from the beginning. To become the nation where all men and women are not only created equal — but treated equally. To become the nation defined — in Dr. King's words — not only by the absence of tension, but by the presence of justice.

Today in America it's hard to keep faith that justice is at hand. I know that. You know that. The pain is raw. The pain is real. A president of the United States must be part of the solution, not the problem. But our president today is part of the problem. When he tweeted the words "When the looting starts, the shooting starts" -- those weren't the words of a president. They were the words of a racist Miami police chief from the 1960s.

When he tweeted that protesters "would have been greeted with the most vicious dogs ... that's when people would have been really badly hurt." Those weren't the words of a president — those were the kind of words a Bull Connor would have used unleashing his dogs. The American story is about action and reaction. That's the way history works. We can't be naïve about that.

I wish I could say this hate began with Donald Trump and will end with him. It didn't and it won't. American history isn't a fairytale with a guaranteed happy ending. The battle for the soul of this nation has been a constant push-and-pull for more than 240 years. A tug of war between the American ideal that we are all created equal and the harsh reality that racism has long torn us apart. The honest truth is both elements are part of the American character.

At our best, the American ideal wins out. It's never a rout. It's always a fight. And the battle is never finally won. But we can't ignore the truth that we are at our best when we open our hearts, not when we clench our fists. Donald Trump has turned our country into a battlefield riven by old resentments and fresh fears. He thinks division helps him. His narcissism has become more important than the nation's well-being he leads.

I ask every American to look at where we are now, and think anew: Is this who we are? Is this who we want to be? Is this what we pass on to our kids' and grandkids' lives? Fear and finger-pointing rather than hope and the pursuit of happiness? Incompetence and anxiety? Self-absorption and selfishness? Or do we want to be the America we know we can be. The America we know in our hearts we could be and should be.

Look, the presidency is a big job. Nobody will get everything right. And I won't either. But I promise you this. I won't traffic in fear and division. I won't fan the flames of hate. I will seek to heal the racial wounds that have long plagued this country -- not use them for political gain. I'll do my job and take responsibility. I won't blame others. I'll never forget that the job isn't about me. It's about you. And I'll work to not only rebuild this nation. But to build it better than it was. To build a better future. That's what America does.

We build the future. It may in fact be the most American thing to do. We hunger for liberty the way Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass did. We thirst for the vote the way Susan B. Anthony and Ella Baker and John Lewis did. We strive to explore the stars, to cure disease, to make this imperfect Union as perfect as we can. We may come up short — but at our best we try. We are facing formidable enemies.

They include not only the coronavirus and its terrible impact on our lives and livelihoods, but also the selfishness and fear that have loomed over our national life for the last three years. Defeating those enemies requires us to do our duty — and that duty includes remembering who we should be. We should be the America of FDR and Eisenhower, of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., of Jonas Salk and Neil Armstrong.

We should be the America that cherishes life and liberty and courage. Above all, we should be the America that cherishes each other -- each and every one. We are a nation in pain, but we must not allow this pain to destroy us. We are a nation enraged, but we cannot allow our rage to consume us. We are a nation exhausted, but we will not allow our exhaustion to defeat us.

As President, it is my commitment to all of you to lead on these issues — to listen. Because I truly believe in my heart of hearts, that we can overcome. And when we stand together, finally, as One America, we will rise stronger than before. So reach out to one another. Speak out for one another. And please, please take care of each other.

This is the United States of America. And there is nothing we can't do. If we do it together.