

Thank you all. Thank you all so very much. Yesterday I had the great privilege of joining [Reverend Patterson] in Anchorage at that incredible celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. And I admitted to him and the folks present, after the most incredible music and sharing and uplifting words a dream that I've had for a long, long time. I've never uttered before yesterday in public, but over the years I've had the opportunity to come to know, among others, Congressman John Lewis. I've had the opportunity to spend time with Julian Bond. I was once at a speech, in which an Undersecretary of the Department of the Interior, who happened to be an African American, was speaking to a gathering and had a typical written speech from the Department of the Interior, which began with something like: "In 1983 the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] had 500 hundred jobs in Alaska...". And we had before he began his talk, a brief conversation about his background, and he was an ordained Baptist minister. And I mentioned to him, again, how wonderful it was to hear the beauty and the cadence and the richness – and he glanced over at me, after about a paragraph that speech and tossed it aside, and began speaking to us from the depth of his soul and the nature of who he was, and by the end of that speech the entire convention was whooping and hollering. It was the best Department of the Interior speech I've ever heard. [laughter]

But I've confessed to Reverend Patterson and those gathered that I would hope, that when we've been able to live our lives such that we stand before the Lord, that maybe if there were an opportunity to personally implore, that I would ask for the opportunity to return again to Earth as an African American preacher. [laughter]. And I would have a glorious orchestra, and a glorious choir, and we would be ecumenical in all that we did, and that we would reach out to everyone who cared and shared. But that there would be those days in that special time, because this is the crucible, this is, dare I say it, the cradle in which the Reverend Martin Luther King himself was nurtured. And I would say, OK, it's time for us to do it our way, and we would gather in the church and we would close the doors and there would be just us, and we would raise the roof in music, in words, in love, in sharing, that could only come from that particular crucible. And Reverend Patterson said to me afterwards: "Byron, to ask him yourself is hopefully a very long time to wait. I'll see what I can do here on Earth." [laughter] So, I have my fingers crossed that there may be an honorary preachship, in my future. [laughter]

But I was raised in a Catholic boarding school, and graduated from high school from a Presbyterian boarding school, at a time when Alaska's Native children had no other choice but to attend much of our school lives in boarding schools. The theme yesterday was "The Color of Unity," and when I think of moments like these, the color unity to me is the color of my mother's eyes: beautiful Tlingit brown. And knowing that the life of her generation was powerfully impacted by overt racism in this very community, in this very land. And that she lived to see Governor Gruening sign after the passionate appeal by a Tlingit lady named Elizabeth Peratrovich, that it was time to accord Alaska's Native people basic human and civil rights, so that the kind of discrimination that existed would no longer be tolerated in this place.

So my mother saw a life in which, she lived with overt discrimination, where the basic human dignity of a beautiful woman seeking a life for her children and her community,

and seeking pride in her life and the life of others, was denied, except as she and her friends in their communities in their internal places, were able to keep that dream alive. And then she was able for several decades to raise my sisters and me in a different time, a time still of conscious healing, a time in which every Alaskan had to look into their hearts and soul to examine their place in this wonderful land, and make personal decisions about the kind of life that they would lead, to either reject or embrace their brothers and sisters around them.

And my mother saw, I remember, when I was a young boy, she had to take the Alaska Steamship passenger boat from Juneau to Yakutat, and it only went and returned once a month, and when she would have to go there for medical purposes, she would cry as she headed for the dock, and we would cry also, and we knew that she also cried for us, that she would miss us for that period of time. But it also dawned on me much later, that she was also crying for herself and she was crying for her brothers and sisters, because to come to [this place] was to come to a place in which she was not welcome, a place in which she was not accorded respect, a place in which her innate and wonderful dignity was not recognized.

It angered me for a very long period of time, I have to admit, and it helped to propel my life along the road I find myself on today. But her example also suggested powerfully to me that we must embrace one another. That we must come to grips with the darkness in our lives and in our society, and that we must embrace one another in such a way that we let in the most brilliant light.

And I've seen much change – I feel very young in this old body [laughter] – but I've seen much change, and as I, as an Alaska Native, as your Lieutenant Governor, look back on [this remarkable achievement], not for myself. You know running for office, was never about running for office, it was about taking another step on a journey in life for all that I care about, for all those that I care for, for the kind of life for our children that I know we can attain. And so I hope to wear this office very lightly, because for all of us, every day that we live is just another step in a life – a life that follows the arc, a history in time that the Reverend Martin Luther King stated so visually powerfully that arc of history, the arc of time, that hopefully bends towards justice. Thank you all so very much. [applause]