

Langenberg Lecture

April 10, 2017

SMC Campus Center

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the 2017 Langenberg Lecture and Symposium. It's so great to have all of you here. I thank the University System of Maryland, the USM Foundation, and Chancellor Bob Caret for hosting this symposium, and for giving me what I consider a special privilege: honoring former USM chancellor Don Langenberg. Chancellor Langenberg, it's wonderful to have you back on the UMB campus.

I'm also incredibly fortunate to welcome our Langenberg Lecturer, Sen. Barbara Mikulski. The University of Maryland School of Social Work is deeply proud to call Sen. Mikulski its most distinguished and influential alumna—someone whose life and career define engaged and ethical citizenship. It's a great pleasure to welcome you home.

I'm delighted to welcome, as well, Maryland Secretary of Higher Education Jim Fielder, and USM Regent Tom Slater. We have several college and university presidents with us today. I thank you all for being here, for prioritizing this symposium and setting an example of leadership. I'm grateful to our co-sponsors: the Maryland Independent College and University Association, the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, and the Maryland State Department of Education.

That line-up of sponsors underscores the critical importance of what we're talking about today. Every segment of Maryland higher education is represented in this room. And because civic education cannot start in college—because the foundation for civic engagement is built at the youngest ages—it's particularly important to have our K–12 partners here with us. And I welcome you.

I must applaud the timeliness of this symposium. If I had to name one silver lining in our deeply divisive and polarizing presidential campaign—and in the national antagonisms that set it in motion—I would point to the fact that these divisions and disappointments have enticed many to civic engagement in a very powerful way.

We are now building a generation of public servants, community leaders, and informed and energized voters. A generation is coming up that sees—every day—the very real influence they can have through civic engagement and activism. I think our young people understand, on a personal level, that a living democracy depends most fundamentally on a civically literate population, that it doesn't—and can't—work without the voice and the will of the people.

This is the chance we have before us, to seize this unique moment; to bring our students into this civic experience and show them that if you want to “speak truth to power,” you must first find the truth. To reinforce that democracy isn't imperishable—that it dies without careful cultivation. And to show them what we hope this engagement ultimately yields—an equitable and inclusive America where opinions might differ, but our goal is the same: justice and opportunity for all.

I know some of you will want to tweet your takeaways from our conversations, and so before I welcome our co-sponsors, I need to mention that we've created a hashtag for this symposium. It's #MDCivicEd.

And now I'd like invite our partners to give greetings.