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Good evening.

Olivia, I want to thank you for those kind words. You know, it's been a pleasure working with her over the last 10 years. I've missed the work. [I] had to move on to some other work, and I'll talk to you more about that.

To the president of the NAACP, here, and the board of directors, and members, and all the others here, it is indeed a pleasure for me to be with you this evening. And I want to say to you, I am very proud to be working with the Obama Administration to help rural America's welfare. I want to do all I can to help rural communities such as yours to be a place where we can have a quality life and a comfortable life for our families and our friends.

But even before I go into what I have here, I want to second something that Olivia said. You know, I grew up on the farm and I didn't want to have anything to do with agriculture, but she was right. There are jobs at USDA, and many times there are no people of color to fill those jobs 'cause we shy away from agriculture. We hear the word "agriculture" and think only of working in the fields.

And you've heard of a lot of layoffs. Have you heard of anybody in the federal government losing their job? That's all that I need to say, okay? And I might say a little bit more to the young people. It's good to have you all here.

I want to share something with you this evening, something that's always heavy on my heart each day, but especially at this time of the year.

It was 45 years ago today that my father's funeral was held. I was a young girl at the age of 17 when my father was murdered by a white man in Baker County. In Baker County, the murder of black people occurred periodically, and in every case the white men who murdered them were never punished. It was no different in my father's case. There were three witnesses to his murder, but the grand jury refused to indict the white man who murdered him.

I should tell you a little about Baker County. In case you don't know where it is, it's located less than 20 miles southwest of Albany. Now, there were two sheriffs from Baker County that -- whose names you probably never heard but I know in the case of one, the thing he did many, many years ago still affect us today. And that sheriff was Claude Screws. Claude Screws lynched a black man. And this was at the beginning of the 40s. And the strange thing back then was an all-white federal jury convicted him not of murder but of depriving Bobby Hall -- and I should say that Bobby Hall was a relative -- depriving him of his civil rights.

So, in the opinion, when the justice wrote his opinion and justifying overturning the conviction, he said you had to prove that as the sheriff was murdering Bobby Hall he was *thinking* of depriving him of his civil rights. That's where the whole issue of proving *intent* came from and you heard it a lot. It was used a lot during the Civil Rights Movement. What you also heard a lot when Rodney King was beaten out in California. Y'all might remember that. They kept saying you had to prove intent -- and that came from *Screws vs. the U.S. Government*.

I'm told that case is studied by every law student. And usually when we have people coming into Southwest Georgia, and wanting to take some tours of things were some events happened during the Civil Rights Movement, I usually take them to the courthouse in Newton to show where Bobby's Hall's body was displayed.

During my years of growing up, the sheriff was L. Warren Johnson. He wanted to be called "The Gator," and that's how people referred to him 'cause he had a holler that would make you want to tremble. He also killed a lot of black people -- and Gator Johnson was *the law* in Baker County. And when I say that I mean no one, black or white, could ride through the County with an out-of-county tag. That means you could have a tag from anywhere else in Georgia -- you couldn't ride through Baker County without being stopped. And the *Atlanta*

[Journal]-Constitution reported at one point that his take on the road was at least $150,000 a year -- and that was during the 60s.

My father was a farmer. And growing up on the farm, my dream was to get as far away from the farm and Baker County as I could get.

And picking cotton, picking cucumbers, shaking peanuts for a little while… -- the older folk know what I'm talking about -- when you had to shake them and take them up…doing all that work on the farm, it will make you get an education more than anything else.

But I didn't want to just get an education. I wanted to leave the farm and Baker County. The older folk know what I'm talking about -- the segregation and the discrimination and the racist acts that we had to endure during those years made me just want to leave. And you know, we used to have people who'd leave and go north -- you all know how they come back talking and they come back looking. I learned later that some of those cars they drove home were rented.

But it made you want to go north, 'cause you thought they were free up there and you thought everybody was free in the North. So, my goal was not to even go to college in the South 'cause, you know, I was always you find your husband at college. So, I didn't want to find one living in the South. I wanted to go to college in the North so I could get a husband from the North, never ever come back down here and live again.

But, you know, you can never say what you'll never do. And it was during March, my senior year in high school. I mean my father was just everything to us. I had four sisters -- I'm the oldest. There are six of us. But my father wanted a son so bad. We were all girls. We all had boys' nickname[s]. I was "Bill." Now, he loved his girls but he wanted a son so bad. And when my youngest sister was eight, he convinced my mother to try one more time for this boy.

So, to my surprise -- my senior year of high school -- I thought my mother was just sick. I didn't know what was wrong with her, you know, really worried. And one day my best friend at school said, "How's your mama doing?" I said, "She just doesn't seem to be getting any better." She said, "Girl, your daddy was up at the store yesterday giving out cigars. Your mama [is] going to have a baby." He told everyone that that baby was the son. And he was, in fact, having a new home built. He was the first person to get a loan on his own to build a house. He wanted to build a brick house so bad, but they told him a black man could not borrow money to build a brick house. They had to choose blocks, you know.

So this new house that was being built -- there were five daughters -- there was this one room that was the boys' room -- his son's room. He told everybody it was a boy. And, in fact, it was painted blue. And he and my mother came to pick me up from school one day early to go to Albany with him to pick the furniture for this boys' room. He didn't live to see him. My brother was born two months after he died, in June of '65.

We started the *Movement*. But before I get there I need to tell you something, and I want to say this to the young people. You know, I told how I looked forward and I dreamt so much about moving north from the farm, especially in the South, and I knew that on the night of my father's death I had to do something. I had to do something in answer to what had happened.

My father wasn't the first black person to be killed. He was a leader in the community. He wasn't the first to be killed by white men in the county. But I couldn't just let his death go without doing something in answer to what happened.

I made the commitment on the night of my father's death, at the age of 17, that I would not leave the South, that I would stay in the South and devote my life to working for change. And I've been true to that commitment all of these 45 years.

You know, when you look at some of the things that I've done through the years and when you look at some of things that happened -- I went to school my first two years at Fort Valley -- I know there are some Fort Valley graduates here, too -- I did my first two years at Fort Valley but so much was happening back at home -- I met this man, I'll tell you a little about him -- that I transferred back to Albany State and did the last two years.

But two weeks after I went to school at Fort Valley, they called and told me that a bunch of white men had gathered outside of our home and burned the cross one night. Now, in the house was my mother, my four sisters, and my brother, who was born June 6 (and this was September.) That was all in that house that night. Well, my mother and one of my sisters went out on the porch. My mama had a gun. You know some of this stuff, it's like movies, some of the stuff that happened through the years. I won't go into everything. I'll just tell you about this. One of my sisters got on the phone 'cause we had organized the movements starting June of '65, not long after my father's death.

That's how I met my husband. He wasn't from the North. He's from up south in Virginia. But anyway my brother and my sisters got on the phone -- they called other black men in the county. And it wasn't long before they had surrounded these white men. And they had to keep one young man from actually using his gun on one of them. You probably would have read

about it had that happened that night. But they actually allowed those men to leave. They backed away and allowed them to get out of there.

But I won't go into some of the other stuff that happened that night, but do know that my mother and my sister were out on the porch with a gun, and my mother said, "I see you and I know who you are." She recognized some of them. She'll tell you that she became the first black elected official in Baker County just 11 years later, and she is still serving you all. She's chair of the board of education and she's been serving almost 34 years.

I didn't know how I would go about carrying out the commitment I made that night, but the when the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, [name of individual unclear] -- he was the one who came to Albany and started the movement there in 1961. And he stayed. You know, a lot of them went into the communities and they worked during the early part of the movement and they left.

But he continued to stay in Southwest Georgia, and we've done a lot of stuff through the years. Some of the things that have happened to us, you'd probably be on the edge of your seat if I were to tell you about some of them. We've been in some very, very dangerous situations through the years, but we continue to work.

And, you know God is so good 'cause people like me don't get appointed to positions like State Director of Rural Development. They just don't get these kinds of positions 'cause I've been out there at everywhere grassroots level and I've paid some dues.

But when I made the commitment years ago, I prayed about it that night and as our house filled with people I was back in one of the bedrooms praying and asking God to show me what I could do. The path wasn't laid out that night. I just made the decision that I would stay and work. And over the years things just happened.

And young people: I just want you to know that when you're true to what God wants you to do the path just opens up, and things just come to you, you know. God is good -- I can tell you that.

When I made that commitment, I was making that commitment to black people -- and to black people only. But, you know God will show you things and He'll put things in your path so that you realize that the struggle is really about poor people, you know.

The first time I was faced with having to help a white farmer save his farm, he took a long time talking. He was trying to show me he was superior to me. I know what he was doing. But he had come to me for help. What he didn't know -- while he was taking all that time trying to show me he was superior to me -- was I was trying to decide just how much help I was going to give him.

I was struggling with the fact that so many black people have lost their farmland, and here I was faced with having to help a white person save their land. So, I didn't give him the full force of what I could do. I did enough so that when he -- I assumed the Department of Agriculture had sent him to me; either that or the Georgia Department of Agriculture. And he needed to go back and report that I did try to help him.

So I took him to a white lawyer that we had that had attended some of the training that we had provided, 'cause Chapter 12 bankruptcy had just been enacted for the family farmer. So I figured if I take him to one of them that his own kind would take care of him.

That's when it was revealed to me that, y'all, it's about poor versus those who have, and not so much about white -- it is about white and black, but it's not -- you know, it opened my eyes, 'cause I took him to one of his own and I put him in his hand, and felt okay, I've done my job. But during that time we would have these injunctions against the Department of Agriculture so they couldn't foreclose on him.

And I want you to know that the county supervisor had done something to him that I have not seen yet done to any other farmer, black or white. And what they did to him caused him to not be able to file Chapter 12 bankruptcy.

So, everything was going along fine. I'm thinking he's being taken care of by the white lawyer and then they lifted the injunction against USDA in May of '87 for two weeks and he was one of 13 farmers in Georgia who received a foreclosure notice. He called me. I said, "Well, go on and make an appointment at the lawyer. Let me know when it is and I'll meet you there."

So we met at the lawyer's office on the day they had given him. And this lawyer sat there -- he had been paying this lawyer, y'all. That's what got me. He had been paying the lawyer since November, and this was May. And the lawyer sat there and looked at him and said, "Well, y'all are getting old. Why don't you just let the farm go?" I could not believe he said that, so I said to the lawyer, "I can't believe you said that." I said, "It's obvious to me if he cannot file a Chapter 12 bankruptcy to stop this foreclosure, you have to file an 11. And the lawyer said to me, "I'll do whatever you say…whatever you think" -- that's the way he put it.

But he's paying him. He wasn't paying me any money, you know. So he said -- the lawyer said -- he would work on it.

And then, about seven days before that land would have been sold at the courthouse steps, the farmer called me and said the lawyer wasn't doing anything. And that's when I spent time there in my office calling everybody I could think of to help me find the lawyer who would handle this. And finally, I remembered that I had gone to see one just 40 miles away in Americus with the black farmers. So, I --

[audio/video interrupted at source, duration unknown]

Well, working with him made me see that it's really about those who have versus those who don't, you know. And they could be black, and they could be white; they could be Hispanic. And it made me realize then that I needed to work to help poor people -- those who don't have access the way others have.

I want to just share something with you and I think it helps…. When I learned this, I'm like, "Oh, my goodness." You know, back in the late 17th and 18th century, there were black indentured servants and white indentured servants, and they all would work for the seven years and get their freedom. And they didn't see any difference in each other. Nobody worried about skin color. They married each other, you know. These were poor whites and poor blacks in the same boat, except they were slaves. But they were both slaves and both had their opportunity to work out on the slavery.

But then they started looking at the injustices that they faced...you know, [looking at] the people with money....[And the] poor whites and poor blacks…they married each other. They lived together. They were just like we would be.

And they started looking at what was happening to them and decided we need to do something about…this. Well, the people with money, the elite, decided, "Hey, we need to do something here to divide them."

So that's when they made black people servants for life. That's when they put laws in place forbidding them to marry each other. That's when they created the racism that we know of today. They did it to keep us divided. And…it started working so well, they said, "Gosh, looks like we've come up on something here that can last generations." And here we are over 400 years later and it's still working. What we have to do is get that out of our heads. There is no difference between us. The only difference is that the folks with money want to stay in power

and, whether it's health care or whatever it is, they'll do what they need to do to keep that power, you know. It's always about money, y'all.

You know, I haven't seen such a mean-spirited people as I've seen lately over this issue of health care. Some of the racism we thought was buried. Didn't it surface? Now, we endured eight years of the Bush's and we didn't do the stuff these Republicans are doing because you have a black President.

I wanted to give you that little history, especially the young people. I want you to know they created it, you know, not just for us. But we got the brunt of it 'cause they needed to elevate what is just a little higher than us to make them think that we're so much better, and then they would never work with us, you know, to try to change the situation that they were all in.

But where am I going with this? You know, 45 years ago I couldn't stand here and say what I'm saying -- what I will say to you tonight. Like I told you, God helped me to see that it's not just about black people -- it's about poor people. And I've come a long way. I knew that I couldn't live with hate, you know. As my mother has said to so many, "If we had tried to live with hate in our hearts, we'd probably be dead now."

But I've come to realize that we have to work together. You know, it's sad that we don't have a room full of white and blacks here tonight, 'cause we have to overcome the divisions that we have. We have to get to the point where, as Tony Morrison said, "Race exists but it doesn't matter." We have to work just as hard. I know…that division is still here, but our communities are not going to thrive. Our children won't have the communities that they need to be able to stay and live…and have a good life if we can't figure this out, you all. White people, black people, Hispanic people, we all have to do our part to make our communities a safe place, a healthy place, a good environment….

Why would a company want to locate in some of these places? It's so sad that, as I go around the State, people ask me, "Where are you from?" "Yeah, I'm living in Albany." "Oh, a lot of crime they're in." You know, nothing good you could say too much about Albany anymore, and...a lot of it is brought on by folks who live there, you know? People who live there. You read the paper -- If you read the paper and listen to the TV station there in Albany, you wouldn't want to go there and live.

You know, people are still fighting each other -- worse, I believe, now.

Least it was open during the Civil Rights Movement. It was a lick here and there -- and my husband got in the brunt of a lot of them. But now it's...really in such a way that it hurts 'cause it's going to keep the jobs away.

You know, you can go to a community and you can just about tell -- and I'm travelling all around where people work together, you know. You're not losing this many jobs. You're getting a few. You know, we have a beautiful country. We have a beautiful part of this State -- the southern part of this State -- but it's not thriving. And we need to figure out why. Well, we kind of know, but we need to work on why.

And young folks, you know when I was growing up, you had to get home from school and go to the fields. But y'all don't have to do that no more. You should be excelling, you know.

Parents, you've got to set some goals for your children, you know. You cannot allow them not to try to become the best they could be, and not study...you know. Y'all must love working in the chicken house. (I know they closed for one year.)

But change has to start with us and...somehow we've got to make the other side of town work with us. We've got to make our communities what they need to be and our young people, I'm not picking on you, but…y'all got to...step up to the plate. You've got to step up to the plate. You are capable of being very, very smart people. You are capable of being those doctors and lawyers. You're capable of running your own business….

One of things in the position I'm in...that really hurt…one of the programs we had with some of the most money in it, you know, it's with business and industry. And I sit up their and I'm signing off on six million, three million, two million -- but who is it going to? Not one so far. And when I got a report on where we are with it, we're approaching 80 million dollars since October 1st. But not one dime to a black business -- not one, you know.

And I know as a young person you're thinking good times. But, hey, don't let life pass you by having a good time. You can enjoy it, but be serious, you know. And there are jobs in agriculture. There's...a program, the 1890 Scholars Program, and…they're connected with every 1890 Land-Grant institution; and...let me tell you what that is. That's the black Land-Grant institutions, and there are about 17 and Tuskegee.

You can actually get a scholarship -- and Fort Valley State is the main grant in Georgia, the 1890; the 1862 is the white Land-Grant, that's the University of Georgia -- you can get a scholarship and every summer you work at one of those agencies while you are in school. And

when you get out, it's a automatic job. Agencies like Natural Resource and Conservation Service (that's RCS), Farm Service Agency (that's the old Farmers Home Administration), Rural Development. Those are the major three.

But there are others, so many other jobs, so many. Just in rural development nationwide, there are over 6000 employees. But you can go up there to Washington to the Department of Agriculture -- it's on both sides of the street.

In Rural Development, there are 129 employees and guess how many of them are people of color? Anybody want to take a guess -- that's in Georgia? There are 129 in my agency. How many? It's more than two. Little more than 12. There are less than 20 of us. We have six area offices in the State and subarea offices and when I look at who's coming up the line in the agency, there are not many of us, 'cause we think "agriculture" is a bad word. We think it's working in the fields. Some of the best paying jobs you ever want to have, okay?

I won't keep at you with that kind of stuff. But…just know that you can -- there's another point I want to make, though. You know, coming out of slavery black folks used to help each other. That's how they built the schools that we have. That's how they bought the land that we have -- that we have about lost all of it. You know that our people had over 15 million acres, and as black people, [we] have less than 2 million acres of farm land left. And we will sell it for nothing -- for nothing.

You know, I was helping a family here recently: 515 acres of land, never had a drop of debt on it since the grandfather bought it years ago, and he died in 1974. And two cousins up in the North, guess what they decided? They tried to force a sale of every acre of it. And they wanted that. One of their aunts spent all of her life on the land. She was 93 years old when she died. And she died after those "For Sale" signs went up out there on that farm – [the] auction sign went up on the farm. She was in the hospital. The next month she was dead. That was January -- she was dead by October.

But we kept working at it. And we found some honest lawyers -- they were white. I wish I could say that about all lawyers, especially black lawyers, but they will nickel and dime you to death. I don't have -- sorry -- I don't have two dozen pennies for most lawyers. But anyway that land has been saved, you know.

But they were trying to force a sale of all of it. They'll eventually get 62 acres of the 515. And guess what? They have a white man already lined up to buy it. And it's the man on [unclear], which is what he wanted.

But…what I want to say to you: You can do good. And y'all going to be smart. You're going to go on and get good jobs. Look, reach back and help somebody. That's what we were taught. That's what our folk did, you know. It looks like…the better we do, the more free we are, the more divided we become, you know. It looks like we don't care about each other any more, you know. That's why kids can just…. Y'all know what happened in the day. He did something wrong, everybody in the community got you, you know. Well that does happen anymore. And we have to get back to that.

If we[’re] going to rebuild our communities, if we[‘re] going to get with all of the problems we have in our communities, it will take all of us working together to solve them. We can't turn our backs. And you never know who you're helping. You could be helping the second black President of the United States.

Now, I need to tell you a little bit about Rural Development. There are at least 40 programs at Rural Development, but I'll just talk to you briefly about a couple of them. The main one is the Housing Program. We have more money for single-family housing, direct loans -- and that's loans from the agency -- than we've ever had in the history of the program.

But we having trouble getting that money out the door and guess why: credit issues. They had to send me extra help from Washington to try to help because of the stimulus money. See, we have more money for direct loans for the low -- very low -- income and moderate income individuals. And guess what? Those loans -- it's a 100% loan. You can buy the land and build a house -- 100% loan. No private mortgage insurance, those loans are directly from USDA. And folks will let a little cell phone and other stuff you don't even need keeping you from being able to acquire an asset that you really need -- which is a home. We've got to be more careful about our credit.

I was talking with a young lady that’s actually a relative in a major position, and she -- she was letting the hospital -- the hospital was getting ready to…garnish her check. She works for the city. And I said, "Do you understand that goes on your credit?" […unclear…] It was after she had her child. I said, "You could have told them 'I...can pay 25.00 dollars a month'" and they would have accepted that. But she didn't make that step. So now here they were getting ready to start taking it from her pay. And that goes on her credit. And I said, "You want a house one day -- you'll never be able to get a house." Now, she does some foolish stuff with her money. I won't go into some of the foolish stuff. But I want to say that to us.

And young people: You know, that's one of the things I remember from my father. He used to talk to us about business and credit. And what he said to us: "You need to always keep a good credit record. You may not have any money, but you can always get some." And we need to keep that in mind. We need to stop trying to get things we don't need, you know. Take the time to get the money -- you know, to save the money for what you want -- and you can do that. You can do that. You *can* do that. You don't have to have everything right now, okay?

We also have, in addition to the direct loans from the agency, the guaranteed loan program for housing; and those loans are for people with a slightly higher income. That program has been so successful that we are about to run out of money. And I'm talking about all over the country. I'm talking about billions. And in Georgia, you know in 2008, they made like 1265 guaranteed loans. Last year, we did almost 4500. And this year, if the money had not run out, if it doesn't run out -- I'm hoping they[`re] going to get some more -- we might do as many as 12,000, you know. If there was ever a time for people to become home owners, now is the time. And you can thank President Obama for that.

And I said something briefly to you about the business and industry money. We've got to get our act together. We got to start thinking about becoming entrepreneurs, you know. And young people you need to think of that as you mature. You know, get some education. Learn how to do it right and then think of going into business. Until our communities look at how we can grow our own businesses, we'll forever be at the mercy of these companies that will come in, use up the tax credits, and leave.

(Hey, didn't y'all lose the chicken in the street, here.) They will [use] up your tax credit and move on to another community and use theirs too, and leave you high and dry…. You can think of creating your businesses and making those dollars flow over and over in your own community.

There's also the Repair Loan Program for senior citizens 62 and over who are lower income. You can qualify for a grant of 7500 dollars. Or, if you have repayment ability -- and those payments...some of them are very low, 25 dollars a month -- you get a 1% loan up to 20,000 dollars. And the $7500 is only for helping safety issues, you know, like something with your bathroom or something else in the house. But if you wanted to do some renovations up to $20,000, you can get a 1% loan to be able to do that.

I won't go into the other programs because a lot of them [are] different types programs for cities. And, you know, I had a visit from the mayor and your city manager and I've thought about y'all a lot; and…my commitment is to the rural area. My commitment even more so is to south Georgia. That's were I'm from. I can't say that up in north Georgia. But they don't seem to have a problem getting the money.

Okay, I won't keep going on tonight, but just let me say there is a saying: "Life is a grindstone; but whether it grinds us down or polishes us up depends on us…."

Thank you.