

>> ALL RISE.

>> HEAR YE, HEAR YE, HEAR YE,
THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA IS
NOW IN CEREMONIAL SESSION.

THE HONORABLE CHIEF JUSTICE
RICKY POLSTON PRESIDING.

DRAW NEAR, YOU SHALL BE HEARD.
GOD SAVE THESE UNITED STATES,
THE GREAT STATE OF FLORIDA AND
THIS HONORABLE COURT.

[BACKGROUND SOUNDS]

>> PLEASE REMAIN STANDING FOR
THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE WHICH
WILL BE GIVEN BY UP TO -- GIVEN
BY TOWNSEND AND ELLA PORCHER.

>> I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO THE
FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA AND TO THE REPUBLIC FOR
WHICH IT STANDS.

ONE NATION, UNDER GOD,
INDIVISIBLE, WITH LIBERTY AND
JUSTICE FOR ALL.

>> YOU MAY BE SEATED.

I CALL THE FLORIDA SUPREME COURT
INTO CEREMONIAL SESSION FOR THE
PASSING OF THE GAVEL TO THE
HONORABLE JORGE LABARGA AS THE
56TH CHIEF JUSTICE OF FLORIDA.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

LOPEZ-CANTERA, CHIEF FINANCIAL
OFFICER ATWATER, PRESIDENT
GAETZ, SPEAKER WEATHERFORD,
MEMBERS OF THE BAR,

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND
GENTLEMEN, WELCOME TO THE
SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA.

TODAY MARKS ANOTHER MILESTONE IN
THE HISTORY OF OUR INSTITUTION
WHICH HAS HEADED THE THIRD
BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT SINCE ITS
CREATION UPON STATEHOOD IN 1845.

FIFTY-FIVE WOMEN AND MEN HAVE
SAT IN THE CHAIR I NOW OCCUPY.
TODAY WE WILL INSTALL THE 56TH
CHIEF JUSTICE, A MAN WHOSE
BACKGROUND UNDERSCORES THIS
STATE'S DIVERSITY, ITS
COMMITMENT TO REPRESENTATION OF
ALL ITS CITIZENS AND ITS

ENDURING FAITH IN THE PRINCIPLES
OF LIBERTY AND EQUAL JUSTICE
ENSHRINED IN OUR STATE AND
FEDERAL CONSTITUTIONS.

TODAY A MAN BORN IN 1952 IN CUBA
BECOMES THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF
THIS STATE.

HE ARRIVED HERE AT THE AGE OF 11
SPEAKING ONLY SPANISH AND WENT
ON TO EXCEL IN SCHOOL AND
COLLEGE DESPITE THE LANGUAGE
HURDLE HE SOON SUCCESSFULLY
LEAPED.

IT IS MY GREAT HONOR TO
ADMINISTER THE OATH OF OFFICE TO
JORGE LABARGA TODAY, MAKING HIM
THE FIRST CUBAN-AMERICAN TO HEAD
THE JUDICIAL BRANCH OF
GOVERNMENT.

[APPLAUSE]

>> IT IS MY HONOR TO RECOGNIZE
REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE OTHER
BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT AND FROM
THE FLORIDA BAR SO THAT THEY MAY
MAKE REMARKS ABOUT TODAY'S
TRANSITION OF POWER HERE IN THE
COURTS.

FIRST, IT IS MY HONOR TO
RECOGNIZE RICARDO MARTINEZ-CID,
PRESIDENT OF THE CUBAN-AMERICAN
BAR ASSOCIATION, TO PROCEED TO
THE PODIUM FOR COMMENTS.

>> THANK YOU, MR. CHIEF JUSTICE.
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE
COURT AND ALL OF YOU HERE TODAY,
IF IT PLEASE THE COURT, IT'S AN
HONOR TO BE HERE BEFORE YOU, AND
BECAUSE I'M SPEAKING FIRST, I
HOPE YOU'LL UNDERSTAND AND
FORGIVE ME FOR SETTING THE BAR
LOW IN AN EFFORT TO CURRY FAVOR
WITH ALL THESE OTHER GOOD
SPEAKERS.

[LAUGHTER]

IN TRUTH, I AM QUITE NERVOUS TO
BE HERE THIS FRONT OF YOU -- IN
FRONT OF YOU AND TO BE
REPRESENTING THE CUBAN-AMERICAN
BAR ASSOCIATION.

IT'S AN AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY

TO SEEK TO CONVEY TO ALL OF YOU
THE INCREDIBLE PRIDE THAT OUR
THOUSAND OR SO MEMBERS FEEL AT
HAVING JUSTICE LABARGA RISE TO
THE OFFICE OF CHIEF JUSTICE
TODAY.

AND FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO KNOW
OUR MEMBERS, THEY KNOW THEY
WON'T BE SHY IF I DON'T DO A
GOOD JOB.

[LAUGHTER]

AND IT IS AN IMPORTANT OCCASION,
BECAUSE ALL OF US EITHER BY THE
ACCIDENT OF OUR BIRTH OR BY THE
JOURNEY WE'VE TAKEN OR THE
SACRIFICE OF OUR PARENTS OR
FOREFATHERS ARE BLESSED TO BE
LIVING IN THE GREATEST COUNTRY
ON EARTH AND HERE IN THE STATE
OF FLORIDA.

AND WHEN DISCUSSING WHAT MAKES
THIS PLACE SO SPECIAL, WHAT HAS
TO BE RECOGNIZED IS ITS
DIVERSITY.

AND YOU CAN TALK ABOUT IT BEING
A MELTING POT OR A BEAUTIFUL
TAPESTRY OR MOSAIC, BUT WHATEVER
YOU ALLUDE TO IT AS, YOU HAVE TO
RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE ALL AT OUR
BEST WHEN WE ARE UNITED IN
CELEBRATING OUR DIVERSITY AND
THE UNIQUENESS OF OUR
DIFFERENCES.

BUT AS CHARLES de GAULLE
FAMOUSLY ASKED, HOW CAN ANYONE
GOVERN A NATION THAT HAS 246
KINDS OF CHEESE?

WELL, I BELIEVE IT MUST BE BY
HAVING THE GOVERNMENT REFLECT
THE DIVERSITY OF THE GOVERNED.
NOT ONLY WITH RESPECT TO RACE
AND GENDER AND COLOR AND SEXUAL
ORIENTATION, BUT WITH RESPECT TO
DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT AND
DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCE.

TODAY WE'RE PRIVILEGED TO HAVE
SOMEONE OF JUSTICE LABARGA'S
EXPERIENCE, DEDICATION AND
COMPASSION BECOME CHIEF JUSTICE
OF THIS IMPORTANT BRANCH OF

GOVERNMENT.

JUSTICE LABARGA, WHO ARRIVED AT THIS COUNTRY AS AN 11-YEAR-OLD, OVERCAME EXILE AND A UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA EDUCATION --

[LAUGHTER]

SORRY, DEAN.

[LAUGHTER]

[APPLAUSE]

HI DAD'S A DOUBLE GATOR --

[LAUGHTER]

TO GET TO WHERE HE IS TODAY. HE UNDERSTANDS THE RIGHTS OF THE ACCUSED HAVING SERVED AS A PUBLIC DEFENDER, HE UNDERSTANDS THE AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY OF A PROSECUTOR, HAVING SERVED IN THAT OFFICE.

AS A TRIAL LAWYER, HE CHAMPIONED THE RIGHTS OF THE WEAKEST MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY.

HE KNOWS BETTER THAN ANYBODY HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR SOMEONE WHO COMES TO PETITION THIS COURT AND ALL THE COURTS IN FLORIDA TO HAVE ACCESS TO A STRONG AND INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY.

AND ALTHOUGH WE RECOGNIZE THAT WE HAVE FURTHER TO GO, THAT WE STILL DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MINORITY MEMBERS OF OUR BAR, THAT ALTHOUGH WE'RE GRADUATING GREATER NUMBERS OF WOMEN, THEY'RE STILL WOEFULLY UNDERREPRESENTED IN THE UPPER ECHELONS OF OUR PROFESSION.

WE CAN STILL CELEBRATE TODAY THIS IMPORTANT MILESTONE, AND WE CAN THINK ABOUT HOW FAR WE'VE COME.

AND WHEN I THINK ABOUT 40 YEARS AGO WHEN A FEW LAWYERS CAME TOGETHER TO FORM THE CUBAN-AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION AND WERE DISCUSSING PRACTICAL ISSUES LIKE HOW TO DEAL WITH A JUDGE SUGGESTING THAT YOU, THE LAWYER, SHOULD USE A TRANSLATOR, HERE WE ARE TODAY WITH THE FIRST CUBAN-AMERICAN CHIEF JUSTICE OF

THE FLORIDA SUPREME COURT.
JUSTICE LABARGA, YOU'RE A
WONDERFUL EXAMPLE TO US ALL.
WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE,
WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR TERM.
FELICIDADES.

[APPLAUSE]

>> I NOW RECOGNIZE GREGORY
COLEMAN, PRESIDENT OF THE
FLORIDA BAR, FOR REMARKS.
>> MAY IT PLEASE THE COURT,
CHIEF JUSTICE POLSTON, FELLOW
SUPREME COURT JUSTICES, HONORED
GUESTS, FAMILY, FRIENDS AND
SOON-TO-BE CHIEF JUSTICE LA
LABARGA, I'D LIKE TO FIRST
RECOGNIZE AND THANK CHIEF
JUSTICE POLSTON FOR ALL OF HIS
HARD WORK AND RECOGNIZE HIS MANY
ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING HIS
TENURE AS CHIEF JUSTICE.
THE STATE'S VERY FORTUNATE.
THE FLORIDA BAR AND THE SUPREME
COURT HAVE A VERY CLOSE
RELATIONSHIP, AND THIS IS NOT
TRUE IN ALL AREAS OF THE
COUNTRY.

TRUST ME, I SAID TO JUSTICE
POLSTON AT ONE OF OUR LUNCHESES,
N., IN SOME STATES THE PRESIDENT
OF THE BAR AND THE CHIEF JUSTICE
WOULDN'T EVEN SIT AT THE SAME
TABLE, SO WE'RE VERY GRATEFUL
AND LUCKY TO HAVE THAT
RELATIONSHIP.

SO ON BEHALF OF CLOSE TO 100,000
MEMBERS NOW THAT WE HAVE OF THE
FLORIDA BAR, I'D LIKE TO THANK
YOU, CHIEF JUSTICE POLSTON, AND
I'D LIKE TO THANK THE REST OF
THE COURT FOR ALL THAT YOU DO ON
THE COURT AND OFF THE COURT.
SO THANK YOU.

[APPLAUSE]

IT'S HI DISTINCT -- MY DISTINCT
HONOR TO SPEAK ON BEHALF OF
JUSTICE LABARGA, A GREAT FRIEND.
WHEN I BAN BEGAN WORKING FOR
DAVID BLOODWORTH AS A STATE
ATTORNEY -- AND HE IS HERE

TODAY, HE'S STILL AROUND --
JUSTICE LABARGA WAS ON HIS WAY
OUT AS I I WAS COMING IN.
THE STORIES OF HIS TENURE
REMAINED, OF COURSE, WE WOULD
LEAVE THOSE FOR ANOTHER DAY.
BUT I'VE BEEN FORTUNATE ENOUGH
TO BE FRIENDS AND TO FOLLOW HIS
CAREER SINCE THE DEPARTURE FROM
THE STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE AS
HE TRANSITIONED INTO PRIVATE
PRACTICE.

THEREAFTER I FOLLOWED HIS
PROGRESS AS A VERY
WELL-RESPECTED CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE.

I OBSERVED HIS ONE DAY AS A
FOURTH DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL
JUDGE --

[LAUGHTER]

AND, OF COURSE, HIS TENURE WITH
THIS HONORABLE COURT.

AS A CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE,
JUSTICE LABARGA IS PROBABLY BEST
KNOWN FOR THE COURAGEOUS WAY HE
HANDLED THE BUSH V. GORE
ELECTION RECOUNT CASE.

SO AFTER BASICALLY EVERY OTHER
JUDGE IN OUR COUNTY HAD RECUSED
THEMSELVES, JUSTICE LABARGA WAS
WALKING BACK FROM LUNCH ONE DAY,
AND HE SAW THEN-CHIEF JUDGE
WALTER COBATH, AND HE WAS
HOLDING A PRESS CONFERENCE, AND
HE WAS ANNOUNCING THE RECOUNT
CASES BEING ASSIGNED TO THAT GUY
RIGHT THERE.

[LAUGHTER]

JUDGE LABARGA.

ONE OF THE FIRST HEARINGS HE
CONDUCTED IN THIS EXTREMELY HIGH
PROFILE CASE TOOK PLACE IN ONE
OF THE LARGEST COURTROOMS IN OUR
COURTHOUSE, THEN-JUDGE PETER
EVANS' COUNTY COURTROOM.

THE ENTIRE COUNTRY SIZED UP THIS
CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE WHO LIKELY
DETERMINED WHO OUR NEXT
PRESIDENT WOULD BE.

THERE'S A FAMOUS PICTURE ON THE

FRONT PAGE OF THE PALM BEACH
POST SHOWING JUSTICE LABARGA
THAT FIRST DAY ON THE BENCH
SITTING NEXT TO A BANANA TREE
AND A PROMINENTLY-DISPLAYED BOOK
ENTITLED SMALL CLAIMS SURVIVAL
GUIDE.

[LAUGHTER]

THIS, OF COURSE, LED TO AN
OUTPOURING OF SUPPORT FROM OUR
LATE NIGHT TALK SHOW HOSTS --

[LAUGHTER]

WHO STATED HOW COMFORTABLE THEY
WERE THAT JUDGE LABARGA WOULD
DECIDE WHO OUR NEXT PRESIDENT
WOULD BE UTILIZING THE RULES OF
SMALL CLAIMS COURT.

[LAUGHTER]

HE TOOK THE GOOD NATURED RIBBING
IN STRIDE.

OF COURSE, THAT'S ONE OF HIS
BEST TRAITS.

AS EXPERIENCE GOES, HAVING THE
BENEFIT OF BEING BOTH A PUBLIC
DEFENDER ASK IS A STATE ATTORNEY
HAVING RACKED IN THE CIVIL ARENA
ASK HAVING EXTENSIVE TRIAL
EXPERIENCE HAS MADE HIM
WONDERFULLY FIT FOR THIS COURT,
AND HE HAS, OF COURSE, MET AND
EXCEEDED ALL OF OUR
EXPECTATIONS.

I'M TRULY LOOKING FORWARD TO
WORKING WITH JUSTICE LABARGA FOR
MY YEAR AS PRESIDENT OF THE BAR
BECAUSE EACH JUSTICE GENERALLY
HAS A PARTICULAR CAUSE OR
PROJECT THAT THEY WORK ON AND
PURSUE.

AND JUSTICE LABARGA, I BELIEVE,
IS GOING TO SET AN EXAMPLE
THROUGHOUT THE NATION AND THE
WORLD IN THE FORM OF LOOKING TO
INCREASE IS ACCESS TO JUSTICE.
IS ACCESS TO JUSTICE IS A MUCH
BIGGER PROBLEM THAN TRYING TO
PROVIDE REPRESENTATION TO THE
INDIGENT AND THE POOREST OF OUR
STATE'S CITIZENS.

60% OF OUR STATE POPULATION

CANNOT AFFORD A LAWYER AND DO NOT QUALIFY FOR LEGAL AID. THIS IS A PROBLEM.

IT'S NOT ONLY A LEGAL PROBLEM, IT IS A SOCIETAL PROBLEM.

AS MY GOOD FRIEND AND FLORIDA BAR IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT SAID, YOU DON'T LOOK TO THE GROCERY STORES TO SOLVE WORLD HUNGER.

SIMILARLY, ALTHOUGH THE BAR, THE COURT AND THE LAWYERS OF THE STATE HAVE TO HAVE INTEGRAL INVOLVEMENT IN THIS PROBLEM, THE PROBLEM IS BIGGER THAN WE ARE.

SO CHIEF JUSTICE LABARGA WILL FORM IMMEDIATELY AFTER HE TAKES HIS PLACE AS CHIEF A SUMMIT OF STATE LEADERS THAT WILL INCLUDE ALL OF THE IMPORTANT STAKEHOLDERS.

THERE'LL BE FLORIDA BAR REPRESENTATION, FLORIDA BAR FOUNDATION, EXING TIFF BRANCH -- EXECUTIVE BRANCH PARTICIPATION THROUGH THE ATTORNEY GENERAL PAM BONDI IS PERSONALLY GOING TO SIT ON THIS, GOVERNOR SCOTT'S OFFICE, LEGISLATIVE PARTICIPATION AND MOST IMPORTANTLY AND SIGNIFICANTLY, WE ARE ENGAGING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY.

AND WE ARE BRINGING SIX OR SEVEN OF THE HIGHEST RANKING STATEWIDE BUSINESS LEADERS TO THE TABLE TO HELP US THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX IN TERMS OF TRYING TO SOLVE THIS SOCIETAL PROBLEM.

I BELIEVE THAT WHEN THIS GROUP COMPLETES ITS WORK UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF JUSTICE LABARGA, YOU'RE GOING TO SEE A DIFFERENT MODEL IN THIS STATE FOR YEARS TO COME TO ASSIST THOSE IN NEED TO FIND TRUE ACCESS TO OUR COURTS. WITHOUT HINDERING THE COURT'S ABILITY TO FUNCTION EFFICIENTLY. SO, JUSTICE LABARGA, I CONGRATULATE YOU ON YOUR

APPOINTMENT TO CHIEF JUSTICE, I
LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU
CLOSELY AND, OF COURSE, THE REST
OF THIS COURT ON THIS AND OTHER
IMPORTANT ISSUES, AND I WISH YOU
GODSPEED.

THANK YOU, JUSTICE.

[APPLAUSE]

>> I'M HONOR TODAY ASK WILL
WEATHERFORD, SPEAKER OF THE
FLORIDA HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES, FOR REMARKS.
WELCOME, MR. SPEAKER.

>> THANK YOU, CHIEF JUSTICE.
THANK YOU ALL FOR ALLOWING ME TO
BE A PART OF THIS WONDERFUL
CEREMONY.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO
TRANSITION THE GAVEL FROM ONE
PERSON TO THE NEXT YET AND GIVE
IT UP, BUT MY DAY IS COMING,
MR. CHIEF.

AND SO I'M MENTALLY PREPARING
MYSELF FOR THAT.

>> I'LL TELL YOU HOW IT GOES.

>> PLEASE DO.

[LAUGHTER]

PLEASE DO.

BUT I WILL, I WILL SAY THAT MANY
OF THE JUSTICES HAVE COME AND
ENJOYED AND BEEN A PART OF THE
HISTORIC DAY OF OUR
ORGANIZATIONAL SESSIONS, BOTH
DURING MINE IN THE HOUSE, THE
SENATE PRESIDENT'S AND HAVE
SHOWN A GREAT DEAL OF RESPECT BY
COMING IN AND JOINING THAT DAY
WITH US, AND I WANT TO THANK YOU
FOR THAT.

IT WAS A DEEP HONOR TO BE ASKED
TO BE HERE TODAY TO BE A PART OF
THE PASSING OF THE GAVEL TO
JUSTICE LABARGA.

I BELIEVE THAT THE JUSTICE HAS A
GREAT AMERICAN STORY, AND I'VE
READ ABOUT HIS STORY, AND I'VE
LEARNED A LOT ABOUT HIS STORY.
FRANKLY, I'VE ALSO JUST BEEN
IMPRESSED IN THE SHORT INSTANCES
WHERE I'VE HAD INTERACTION WITH

THE JUSTICE.

MANY PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THIS, BUT HE'S ACTUALLY MY NEIGHBOR.

AND WE FROM TIME TO TIME HAVE THE AWKWARD OPPORTUNITY OF SEEING EACH OTHER IN JOGGING SHORTS.

[LAUGHTER]

BUT JUST A PERSON OF, CLEARLY, GREAT INTEGRITY, A JUSTICE THAT DOES FIGHT FOR OUR CONSTITUTION AND SOMEONE THAT I'M LOOKING VERY FORWARD TO SEEING BE CHIEF.

I'VE LEARNED THIS MY TENURE IN THE LEGISLATURE THAT THERE ARE THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT --

[LAUGHTER]

AND, FRANKLY, WHAT I'VE COME TO UNDERSTAND IS THAT WE ALL, AS EACH BRANCH, HAVE A RESPONDENT WITHIN OUR CONSTITUTION, WE REPRESENT A LARGER INSTITUTION WHICH IS THE GREAT STATE OF FLORIDA.

AND TO REPRESENT FLORIDA AS A JUSTICE, AS A CHIEF JUSTICE, AS A SPEAKER, AS A LEGISLATOR, AS A COUNTY COMMISSIONER IS A HUGE HONOR.

AND OUR ROLE TO FIGHT FOR JUSTICE, TO FIGHT FOR EQUALITY, TO FIGHT FOR FAIRNESS TOGETHER IS ONE THAT I THINK WE ALL TAKE VERY SERIOUS.

ASK SO I'M GRATEFUL FOR THE -- AND SO I'M GRATEFUL FOR THE HONOR TO BE HERE TODAY.

I WANT TO WISH OUR NEW CHIEF JUSTICE ALL THE LUCK AND GODSPEED AS THE PROTECTOR, THE LEAD PROTECTOR OF OUR GREAT CONSTITUTION, BOTH THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

[APPLAUSE]

>> I NOW RECOGNIZE DON GAETZ, PRESIDENT OF THE FLORIDA SENATE, AND FROM THE PANHANDLE OF IT'LL FOR REMARKS -- OF FLORIDA FOR REMARKS.

>> MAY IT PLEASE THE COURT --
I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SAY THAT.

[LAUGHTER]

SPEAKER LEANED OVER TO ME AND
SAID ARE WE SEWED TO SAY, MAY IT
PLEASE THE COURT?

I SAID, I DON'T KNOW, WE'RE NOT
LAWYERS.

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SAY IT.
IN THE LAST FEW DAYS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE SESSION,
EVERYTHING'S BUSY, A LITTLE
HECTIC, AND THE PERSON WHO RUNS
OUR OFFICE STUCK HER HEAD IN THE
DOOR AND SAID, SPEAKER
WEATHERFORD AND YOU ARE SUPPOSED
TO BE AT THE SUPREME COURT ON
JUNE 30TH AT 2 P.M..

I SAID, IS THIS A SUMMONS?

[LAUGHTER]

IT COULD HAVE GONE EITHER WAY.

[LAUGHTER]

AND THEN LAST NIGHT I HAPPENED
TO MENTION TO MY WIFE VICKI THAT
I WAS DRIVING OVER TO
TALLAHASSEE, AND I SAID, HONEY,
THE SPEAKER AND I ARE SUPPOSED
TO BE OVER AT THE SUPREME COURT
TOMORROW AFTERNOON, AND SHE SAID
WHAT HAVE YOU TWO GONE AND DONE
NOW?

[LAUGHTER]

BUT I'M PRIVILEGED TO BE HERE,
AND I KNOW THE SPEAKER IS,
ESPECIALLY UNDER THESE
CIRCUMSTANCES.

[LAUGHTER]

TO THANK AND PAY TRIBUTE TO
CHIEF JUSTICE POLSTON AND TO
CONGRATULATE AND WELCOME CHIEF
JUSTICE LA LABARGA.

JUSTICE OLD SON AND I BOTH COME
FROM NORTH FLORIDA, HE GAVE ME
THE PANHANDLE HEADS UP THERE A
MINUTE AGO, AND IN JACKSON
COUNTY AND WASHINGTON COUNTY AND
HOLMES COUNTY, THOSE SMALL,
RURAL COUNTIES OF NORTHWEST
FLORIDA, YOU CAN DINE OUT ALL
YEAR LONG JUST BY SAYING YOU

KNOW JUSTICE POLSTON.

[LAUGHTER]

AND, MR. CHIEF JUSTICE, WE REVERE YOU.

WE REVERE YOU IN NORTHWEST FLORIDA FOR THE WISDOM, THE FAIRNESS AND THE HONOR, THE HONOR THAT YOU HAVE BROUGHT TO THE OFFICE OF CHIEF JUSTICE. ALL OF FLORIDA IS GRATEFUL TO YOU, SIR.

YOU MAKE US PROUD TO BE FLORIDIANS.

[APPLAUSE]

SPEAKER WEATHERFORD AND I BOTH SHARE A STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM. SPEAKER'S WIFE, COURTNEY, IS A GUARDIAN AD LITEM, AND I'M PLEASED TO REPORT THAT THE RAM RECEIVED MORE LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT THIS YEAR THAN EVER BEFORE IN THE STATE'S HISTORY AND THAT BY THIS TIME NEXT YEAR, EVERY SINGLE CHILD WHO'S CAUGHT UP IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM OF OUR STATE AND THE COURT SYSTEM OF OUR STATE, THAT'S COLLATERAL DAMAGE TO SOMEBODY ELSE'S ISSUE, EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM WILL HAVE A GUARDIAN AD LITEM SPEAKING TO THEM BEFORE THE COURT AND BEING RESPONSIVE TO THE COURT.

[APPLAUSE]

I WAS AT A GUARDIAN AD LITEM EVENT A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO, AND I SAT NEXT TO ONE OF OUR NEWLY-ELECTED JUDGES IN OUR AREA, AND I MENTIONED TO HER THAT I WOULD BE AT THE SUPREME COURT TODAY, AND I ASKED HER FOR SOME ADVICE AS TO WHAT YOU WOULD DO.

WHAT SHOULD I SAY AT THE PASSING OF THE GAVEL TO JUSTICE LABARGA? AND SHE SAID, WELL, SHE HAD AN EXPERIENCE WITH JUSTICE LABARGA.

[LAUGHTER]

WHEN SHE WAS NEWLY ELECTED, JUST

RECENTLY, SHE HAD TO GO TO JUDGE
CAMP, NEW JUDGE CAMP.

WE HAVE A SENATOR CAMP WHERE YOU
GO AND WE LEARN HOW TO BE
SELF-IMPORTANT.

[LAUGHTER]

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU LEARN AT
JUDGE CAMP, MAYBE HOW TO RUN A
COURTROOM.

HOW TO RUN A COURTROOM.

SO THIS NEW FEMALE JUDGE, FINE
PERSON, GOOD FRIEND OF MINE, WAS
LEARNING HOW TO BE A JUDGE,
LEARNING HOW TO MANAGE A
COURTROOM.

SO THEY SET UP A COURTROOM, AND
THEY HAD SITTING YOUNGS AS THE
PROSECUTE -- JUDGES AS THE
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY AND THEY
HAD A FULL JURY BOX.

SHE WAS PREPARED FOR THAT.

SHE WALKED INTO THIS COURTROOM
AND LOOKED OVER AT THE JURY BOX,
AND THERE SITTING IN THE FRONT
ROW WAS JUSTICE LABARGA.

AND THAT SORT OF THREW HER OFF
HER GAME.

SHE DIDN'T EXACTLY KNOW WHAT TO
DO, BUT SHE GOT HER PRESENCE OF
MIND BACK, AND SHE BEGAN, YOU
KNOW, THE PROCEEDING.

AND THEN SHE LOOKED OVER AGAIN,
AND JUSTICE LABARGA HAD PULLED
OUT A KNIFE.

[LAUGHTER]

AND WAS PLAYING WITH THE KNIFE.
AND SHE WASN'T REALLY ABLE TO
CONCENTRATE ON HER GAME BECAUSE
THERE SHE WAS LOOKING AT A
JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT
PLAYING WITH A KNIFE, JUST TO
THROW HER OFF.

JUST TO THROW HER OFF.

[LAUGHTER]

SHE DIDN'T TELL ME HOW SHE GOT
THROUGH THAT, BUT SHE DID SAY,
WILL JUSTICE, THAT FOR THE REST
OF THE TRAINING YOU WERE VERY
KIND, YOU OFFERED TO HELP, YOU
WERE VERY APPROACHABLE, BUT SHE

COULDN'T GET THE KNIFE OUT OF
HER MIND.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. SPEAKER, THIS MAY BE A
TAKEAWAY FOR US.

[LAUGHTER]

AS THE SPEAKER SAID, WHEN WE
WERE SWORN IN, MEMBERS OF THE
SUPREME COURT CAME TO THE HOUSE
AND SENATE CHAMBERS.

I WOULD EXPECT TO SHOW RESPECT
FOR THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH, YES,
BUT ALSO AS A VISIBLE REMINDER
OF THE CHECKS AND BALANCES IN
OUR CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM.

THAT IT ISN'T ENOUGH TO PASS A
BILL, IT ISN'T ENOUGH FOR THE
GOVERNOR TO SIGN A BILL INTO
LAW.

THE ACTIONS OF THE LEGISLATIVE
AND EXECUTIVE BRANCHES, HOWEVER
WELL CONCEIVED OR WELL
INTENTIONED, MUST BE FOUND TO BE
CONSTITUTIONAL.

AND SO THE SPEAKER AND I ARE
HERE TODAY TO SHOW RESPECT AND
SUPPORT, CERTAINLY, BUT ALSO AS
A VISIBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT BY THE
SENATE AND HOUSE OF THE COURT'S
AUTHORITY AS OUR CO-EQUAL
PARTNERS IN A CONSTITUTIONAL
SYSTEM THAT HOLDS EACH OF US AND
ALL OF US ACCOUNTABLE TO THE
CONSTITUTION AND TO THE PEOPLE
OF FLORIDA.

OF AND IT IS IN THAT SPIRIT OF
RESPECT AND DEFERENCE AND
PARTNERSHIP THAT I THANK CHIEF
JUSTICE POLSTON, AND I
CONGRATULATE CHIEF JUSTICE
LABARGA, AND I PRAY GOD'S
BLESSINGS ON THIS HONORABLE
COURT.

[APPLAUSE]

>> IT'S MY PLEASURE TO CALL UPON
JEFF ATWATER, CHIEF FINANCIAL
OFFICER OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA
FOR REMARKS.

>> I, TOO, CHIEF JUSTICE, HAD
ALWAYS WANTED TO SAY THOSE

WORDS, "MAY IT PLEASE THE COURT."

AND FOR TWO YEARS AS PRESIDENT OF THE FLORIDA SENATE, I TRIED TO PLEASE THE COURT.

[LAUGHTER]

MAYBE THIS TIME I MAY PLEASE THE COURT.

[LAUGHTER]

I AM DELIGHTED TO BE HERE TODAY TO RECOGNIZE BOTH THE EXEMPLARY CHARACTER OF THE STORIED CAREER OF MY DEAR FRIEND AND THE PRIDE OF PALM BEACH COUNTY, JUSTICE JORGE LABARGA, AS HE BECOMES THE 56TH CHIEF JUSTICE OF OUR SUPREME COURT.

OCCASION THIS AFTERNOON AFFORDS US THE OPPORTUNITY TO CELEBRATE THE CONFLUENCE OF TWO EXCEPTIONAL THEMES THAT HAVE INFORMED THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE SINCE ITS EARLIEST COLONIAL STIRRINGS.

ONE SPEAKS TO THE COURAGE, WISDOM AND VISION OF THE BOLD POLITICAL EXPERIMENT.

THE OTHER OF THE COURAGE AND THE WISDOM AND THE VISION OF INDIVIDUAL SACRIFICE AND SELF-DETERMINATION.

ONE THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES -- WHEN THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES WAS BEING GATHERED AND PUT AND SCRIPTED TOGETHER, MANY, INCLUDING MANY OF THOSE WHO WERE THERE AND WOULD PASS A VOTE ON ITS ADOPTION, GAVE IT MUCH CHANCE TO SUCCEED, BUT SUCCEEDED IT DID THROUGH THE SACRIFICE AND THE GRIT OF OUR FOREBEARERS.

CENTRAL TO OUR CONSTITUTION'S ENDURING VALUE AND THE SUCCESS OF THIS AMERICAN EXPERIMENT IS THE REEL OF A SEPARATE -- IS THE PRINCIPLE OF A SEPARATE AND INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY.

AND WHILE THE CONCEPT HAD BEEN THE SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION AND

DEBATE FOR CENTURIES, IT WAS ONLY WHEN THE AMERICANS HAD THE GALL TO ENSHRINE THE IDEA OF AN INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY IN OUR POLITICAL CANON THAT POLITICAL THEORY BECAME A VITAL AND ANIMATING REALITY.

THE INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY IS THE CORE TENET OF AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM.

THAT THE POWER TO JUDGE DOES NOT RESIDE IN THE BODY OF THE MONARCH, IN THE DICTATOR OR THE TYRANT, BUT IN THE DULY-ESTABLISHED JUDICIARY CONSTRUCTED BY THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE.

WHICH BRINGS US TO THE PERSON AND THE CHARACTER OF JUSTICE LABARGA WHOSE FAMILY RISKED EVERYTHING TO LEAVE THE HOMELAND OF CUBA AND RELOCATE TO FLORIDA IN 1963.

NOW, THE OUTLINES OF HIS LIFE AND CAREER HAVE BEEN WELL DOCUMENTED AND COVERED HERE TODAY, BUT WHAT YOU CANNOT SHARE ON A RESUM... OR THE BRIEF BIO IS THE PASSION OF THE MAN OR THE VALUES OF HIS FAIRNESS, HIS HUMILITY, HIS INTEGRITY AND HIS HON IS CITY -- HONESTY HAVE BEEN DEARLY EXHIBITED IN EVERY WORK IN EVERY DAY OF HIS LIFE.

AND I CAN THINK OF NO BETTER AN INDIVIDUAL TO SPEAK TO THE IMPORTANCE AND PRESIDE OVER THE DUTIES OF AN IMPARTIAL JUDICIARY BLIND TO POWERFUL INTERESTS OR POPULAR FERVOR THAN ONE TO WHOM IT WAS DENIED.

AND, JUSTICE LA LABARGA, THE EXCEPTIONALISM OF AMERICA MEETS THE EXCEPTIONALISM OF THE INDIVIDUAL.

THE INTEGRITY OF OUR SYSTEM IS IN THE HANDS OF SOME WHO FELT THE DESTRUCTIVE INTENT OF A SYSTEM VOID OF INTEGRITY. A NATION AND A STATE BUILT UPON

SELF-RELIANCE AND
SELF-DETERMINATION HAS FOUND ITS
JUDICIAL EMBODIMENT IN AN
INDIVIDUAL WHO LITERALLY RELIED
ON THOSE VALUES TO CHART AND
PURSUE A CELEBRATED CAREER.
ASKING AT THE OUTSET FOR NOTHING
MORE THAN OPPORTUNITY AND
OFFERED AT OUTSET NOTHING MORE
THAN A FAIR CHANCE, JUSTICE
LABARGA NOW ASCENDS TO ONE OF
THE MOST REVERED POSITIONS IN
OUR STATE.

IN 1776 THOMAS PAINE HAD NO
OTHER TOOLS THAN A SHARP MIND
AND A SHARP PEN TO ASSIST
FREEDOM-LOVING PEOPLE IN THEIR
ENDEAVOR TO STARE DOWN THE MOST
FORMIDABLE NATION OF THE WORLD,
AND HE USED BOTH FOR GOOD
PURPOSE.

AND HE SCRIBED WORDS THAT ARE SO
FITTING A REMINDER FOR US TODAY,
THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW AS FAR
AS WE APPROVE OF MONARCHY, THAT
IN AMERICA THE LAW IS KING.

JUSTICE LABARGA, ZULMA, THANK
YOU FOR YOUR ONGOING SERVICE TO
THE PEOPLE OF FLORIDA AND THIS
WELL-DESERVED HONOR AND
RECOGNITION TODAY.

THANK YOU.

[APPLAUSE]

>> NOW IT'S MY GREAT HONOR TO
ASK CARLOS LOPEZ-CANTERA, THE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF FLORIDA,
FOR REMARKS.

>> THANK YOU, CHIEF JUSTICE.
MEMBERS OF THE SUPREME COURT,
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE.
CHIEF JUSTICE POLSTON, THANK YOU
FOR YOUR SERVICE AS CHIEF
JUSTICE FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS.
I, I'M VERY PROUD TO BE STANDING
AMONGST YOU.

FIRST TIME I'VE STEPPED FOOT IN
THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA.
IT'S AN AWEING EXPERIENCE, AND
ON SUCH A HISTORIC DAY.
BEING A CUBAN-AMERICAN OR A

CHILD OF IMMIGRANTS, I HAVE HEARD THOUSANDS OF STORIES OF SACRIFICE, OF MEMBERS OF MY COMMUNITY WHO HAVE GIVEN SO MUCH TO MAKE IT TO WHERE THEY ARE TODAY.

AND IT WAS NOT EASY FOR MANY TO GIVE UP EVERYTHING AND HAVE TO LEAVE THEIR COUNTRY BEHIND, LEAVE ALL THEIR POSSESSIONS BEHIND, LEAVE THEIR LIFE BEHIND AND COME TO THE UNITED STATES TO START OVER.

AND START OVER IN A NEW LANGUAGE.

AND READING ABOUT JUSTICE LABARGA'S HISTORY, HIS IS LIKE SO MANY OTHERS.

THE ONLY DEVIATION IS HIS FAMILY CAME AND SETTLED TO TO --

[INAUDIBLE]

WHICH I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR THE STORY ABOUT THAT ONE --

[LAUGHTER]

AT A LATER DATE.

BUT IT IS, THE NATURE OF THE HISTORIC DAY IS NOT LOST ON ME HAVING LIVED SO MANY OF THE SACRIFICES THROUGH MY OWN FAMILY, THROUGH MY GRANDPARENTS. MY GRANDFATHER CAME OVER AS AN ATTORNEY FROM CUBA AND HAVING TO START OVER IN HIS 40s, GOING TO LAW SCHOOL, LEARNING ENGLISH WHILE IN LAW SCHOOL AND THEN BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE FLORIDA BAR.

IT WAS ALWAYS HIS GREATEST PRIDE TO PULL OUT HIS BAR CARD AND SAY THAT HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE FLORIDA BAR AND THAT HE PASSED HIS BAR EXAM ON HIS FIRST TRY. AND SO BEING THE GRANDSON OF THAT MAN, BEING HERE TODAY AS JUSTICE LABARGA ASCENDS TO THE CHIEF JUSTICE POSITION IS SO VERY, VERY SPECIAL TO ME NOT ONLY AS LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF FLORIDA, BUT AS A SON OF CUBAN IMMIGRANTS.

AND, JUSTICE LABARGA, I'M SO
VERY, VERY HAPPY AND SO VERY
PROUD TO BE STANDING HERE TODAY
AND TO --

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

AND YOUR FAMILY ON THIS HISTORIC
DAY.

AND FROM ONE CUBAN-AMERICAN WHO
HAS ACHIEVED A FIRST TO ANOTHER
CUBAN-AMERICAN WHO'S ABOUT TO
ACHIEVE A FIRST, LET ME JUST
SAY --

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

[APPLAUSE]

>> ALL OF OUR PRIOR CEREMONIES
INAUGURATING THE ADMINISTRATION
OF A NEW CHIEF JUSTICE HAVE
INCLUDED COMMENTS FROM
HIGH-RANKING JURISTS OF FLORIDA.
AT THIS TIME I HAVE THE HONOR TO
ASK THAT MY COLLEAGUE, JUSTICE
BARBARA PARIENTE -- DEAN OF THE
COURT -- MAKE REMARKS BEFORE THE
OATH IS ADMINISTERED TO OUR NEW
CHIEF JUSTICE.

>> THANK YOU.

MAY IT PLEASE THE COURT --

[LAUGHTER]

TODAY I JOIN IN WELCOMING 1,000
OF SO OF JUSTICE LABARGA'S
CLOSEST FRIENDS --

[LAUGHTER]

BE AS WE SWEAR IN ON THIS
HISTORIC OCCASION MY GOOD FRIEND
AND VALUED COLLEAGUE, GEORGE
LABARGA.

GREGARIOUS, GORGEOUS, RUGGED
GOOD LOOKS --

[LAUGHTER]

BRILLIANT AND BRAVE.

[LAUGHTER]

THESE ARE SOME OF THE ADJECTIVES
THAT MANY HAVE USED TO DESCRIBE
HIM, INCLUDING JUSTICE LABARGA
HIMSELF.

[LAUGHTER]

AND I CONCUR, BUT I WOULD ADD
WITHOUT DISSENT FROM MY
COLLEAGUES THAT JUSTICE LABARGA
HAS A WONDERFUL SENSE OF HUMOR

AND A TRUE TALENT FOR
STORYTELLING.
HIS STORIES RANGE FROM THE TRUE
TO THE ALMOST TRUE TO THE
SOMEWHAT TRUE.

[LAUGHTER]

AND IF HE REALLY LIKES A STORY,
HE'LL CONTINUE TO TELL THAT
STORY OVER AND OVER AND OVER
AGAIN.

[LAUGHTER]

SO STARTING IN PALM BEACH
COUNTY, AND IT SPREAD TO THE
DINNER TABLE AT THE LABARGA
HOUSEHOLD, WE DEVELOPED A
HAND-RAISING STRATEGY.
THAT IS, WE WOULD RAISE OUR
HANDS IF WE HAD ALREADY HEARD A
STORY.

[LAUGHTER]

HOW MANY HERE HAVE HEARD THE
STORY OF JUSTICE LABARGA BEING
MISTAKEN FOR MARCO RUBIO?

[LAUGHTER]

HOW MANY HAVE HEARD THE STORY
MORE THAN ONCE?

[LAUGHTER]

TWICE?

ENOUGH SAID.

[LAUGHTER]

BUT ALL JOKES ASIDE, IN THE FIVE
AND A HALF YEARS --

[LAUGHTER]

THAT I HAVE SERVED WITH JUSTICE
LABARGA ON THIS COURT, I HAVE
COME TO KNOW HIM AS AN
INCREDIBLY HARD WORKING, WELL
PREPARED, FOCUSED AND WISE
COLLEAGUE, AND I PREDICT THAT
THESE ATTRIBUTES OF HARD WORK,
METICULOUS PREPARATION, KEEN
INTELLECT, GREAT INTEGRITY AND A
LASER FOCUS ON THE TASK AT HAND
ALONG WITH JUST THE RIGHT TOUCH
OF HUMOR AND LOVE OF HIS FELLOW
HUMAN BEINGS WILL SERVE HIM AND
OUR STATE WELL AS HE ASSUMES THE
IMPORTANT ROLE OF CHIEF JUSTICE
OF FLORIDA.

IN ADDITION, AS EVERYONE HAS

MENTIONED, AS A CUBAN-AMERICAN WHO WAS BORN AND RAISED IN CUBA DURING A TUMULTUOUS TIME IN THAT COUNTRY'S HISTORY -- COUNTRY'S HISTORY, AND IT IS A STORY THAT BEARS REPEATING OVER AND OVER AGAIN, JUSTICE LABARGA BRINGS A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE TO OUR COURT AS WELL AS AN ABIDING PASSION FOR THE ROLE OF THE JUDICIAL BRANCH IN THIS COUNTRY IN PROTECTING THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF ALL FLORIDIANS. JUSTICE LABARGA'S VOICE WAS NEVER MORE ELOQUENT THAN IN HIS CONCURRENCE IN THE RECENT UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS CASE. JUSTICE LABARGA, THREW HIS CONCURRENCE, OBSERVED HOW THE APPLICANTS' LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES HAD PARALLELED HIS OWN AS BOTH HAD BEEN BROUGHT TO THIS GREAT NATION AS YOUNG CHILDREN BY THEIR HARD WORKING, IMMIGRANT PARENTS WHO LEARNED TO READ, WRITE AND SPEAK THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE WITHIN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME, AND BOTH EXCELLED SCHOLASTICALLY AND GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE AND LAW SCHOOL. HE WENT ON TO SAY BOTH OF US WERE DRIVEN BY THE OPPORTUNITIES THIS GREAT NATION OFFERED TO REALIZE THE AMERICAN DREAM. SADLY, HOWEVER, HERE THE SIMILARITIES ENDED. WHEN I ARRIVED IN THE UNITED STATES FROM CUBA IN 1963, MY PARENTS AND I WERE PERCEIVED AS DEFECTORS FROM A TYRANNICAL COMMUNIST REGIME. THUS, WE WERE RECEIVED WITH OPEN ARMS, OUR ARRIVAL CELEBRATED, AND MY PATH TO CITIZENSHIP AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION UNIMPEDED BY PUBLIC POLICY DECISIONS. THE APPLICANT, HOWEVER, WHO IS PERCEIVED TO BE A DEFECTOR FROM POVERTY IS VIEWED NEGATIVELY BECAUSE HIS FAMILY SOUGHT AN

OPPORTUNITY FOR ECONOMIC
PROSPERITY.

IT IS THIS DISTINCTION OF
PERCEPTION, A DISTINCTION THAT I
CANNOT JUSTIFY REGARDING
ADMISSION TO THE FLORIDA BAR
THAT IS AT THE ROOT OF THE AP
APPLICANT'S SITUATION.

I WAS SO PROUD OF YOU, JUSTICE
LABARGA, FOR SEEKING SO
DIRECTLY -- SPEAKING SO DIRECTLY
AND POWERFULLY, AND I WAS PROUD
TO STAND WITH YOU.

YOU KNEW, HOWEVER, THAT AS
STRONGLY AS YOU FELT, THIS COURT
WAS BOUND BY THE LAW NOT TO LET
OUR PERSONAL PREFERENCES AFFECT
OUR DECISION, SO YOU RELUCTANTLY
CONCURRED WITH THE MAJORITY.
BUT THE LEGISLATURE HEARD YOUR
WORDS AND PASSED LEGISLATION
THAT IS DESIGNED TO ALLOW THIS
APPLICANT TO BE ADMITTED TO THE
FLORIDA BAR.

[APPLAUSE]

OF COURSE, AS YOU ALL KNOW,
JUSTICE LABARGA IS NOT ONLY
PROUD OF HIS CUBAN-AMERICAN
HERITAGE, BUT HE'S VERY PROUD TO
BE A DOUBLE GATOR.

THE FINE EDUCATION HE RECEIVED
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA HAS
NO DOUBT PREPARED HIM TO BE
CHIEF JUSTICE.

IN FACT, THE WORD AROUND THE
COURTHOUSE TODAY IS THAT JUSTICE
LABARGA IS PLANNING TO DECLARE
THAT EVERYTHING IN THE SUPREME
COURT BUILDING WITH THE COLORS
RE MOTELY RESEMBLING GARNET AND
GOLD --

[LAUGHTER]

MUST BE CHANGED TO ORANGE AND
BLUE.

>> I DISSENSE.

>> WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

[LAUGHTER]

DIRECT THE MARSHAL TO ANNOUNCE
THE ENTRANCE OF THE JUSTICES
INTO THE COURTROOM BY SAYING IN

HIS DEEPEST BARITONE VOICE, TWO BLITZES, FOUR BITS, SIX BITS A DOLLAR, ALL FOR THE GATOR CHIEF JUSTICE, STAND UP AND HOLLER.

[LAUGHTER]

AND DIRECT PETITIONERS AND RESPONDENTS TO NO LONGER SAY "MAY IT PLEASE THE COURT," BUT TO INSTEAD BEGIN ORAL ARGUMENTS WITH "GO GATORS."

[LAUGHTER]

BUT THERE ARE OTHER SPECIFIED DUTIES OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE TO GREAT STATE OF FLORIDA, ONES THAT, BELIEVE IT OR NOT, GO BEYOND THE COOL TITLE AND THE FACT THAT PEOPLE CALL YOU CHIEF. THERE'S ALSO SITTING IN THE CENTER OF THE BENCH AND GETTING TO ENTER AND EXIT THE COURTROOM FIRST AND THE PRIVILEGE OF CONTROLLING ORAL ARGUMENT. YET WE ALL KNOW THAT REALLY THERE IS SO MUCH MORE.

THE CHIEF JUSTICE IS FIRST AMONG EQUALS, AND PRESIDENT GAETZ, WITH ALMOST A THOUSAND JUDGES WHO HAVE SOME AMPLE EGOS, THAT'S NOT AN EASY JOB.

BUT THE CHIEF JUSTICE IS THE COMMUNICATOR THIS CHIEF FOR THE JUDICIAL BRANCH.

HE LEADS THE JUDICIAL BRANCH AS THE SPOKESBE PERSON AND -- SPOKESPERSON AND REPRESENT THETIVE OF THE BRANCH IN OUR DEALINGS WITH THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES SEEKING TO FOSTER COOPERATION BETWEEN THE BRANCHES IN MATTERS AFFECTING THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE TO ALL FLORIDIANS, AND I CAN IMAGINE, SPEAKER WEATHERFORD, IN YOUR RUNNING SHORTS WITH JUSTICE LABARGA THAT YOU PROBABLY ACCOMPLISHED MUCH IN THE WAY OF COMMON GROUND.

BUT THE FACT THAT WE HAVE THE OTHER BRANCHES REPRESENTED HERE TODAY SPEAKS VOLUMES OF THE

MUTUAL RESPECT THAT EXISTS AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE FOSTERED DURING JUSTICE LABARGA'S TENURE AS CHIEF JUSTICE.

AND DON'T BE AFRAID TO RAISE YOUR HAND IF HE REPEATS A STORY.

LAUGH --

[LAUGHTER]

THE CHIEF JUSTICE MUST ALSO WITH READY TO SPEAK FOR THE JUDICIAL BRANCH ON ISSUES THAT AFFECT JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND PAY EQUITY FOR OUR EMPLOYEES, AND WE THANK THE LEGISLATURE FOR RECOGNIZING THE PAY EQUITY ISSUE IN THIS VERY HISTORIC SESSION.

[APPLAUSE]

AND TO GIVE SUPPORT FOR OUR SOON-TO-BE 992 JUDGES AND 3300 EMPLOYEES OF THE STATE COURT SYSTEM THROUGHOUT THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

BUT ABOVE ALL, THE CHIEF JUSTICE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CHAMPIONING OUR COURT SYSTEM OF WHICH WE ARE SO PROUD HERE IN FLORIDA THAT PROTECTS THE RIGHTS OF ALL FLORIDIANS, ADJUDICATES THEIR DISPUTES AND INSURES THEIR LIBERTIES.

IN ALL RESPECTS, I GIVE MY MOST EFFUSIVE ACCOLADES TO OUR OUTGOING CHIEF JUSTICE, RICKY POLSTON, WHO PERFORMED EACH OF THESE FUNCTIONS --

[APPLAUSE]

IN AN OUTSTANDING WAY, ALWAYS PUTTING THE WELL BEING OF OUR BRANCH ABOVE ALL AND ALWAYS INSURING THAT OUR BRANCH SPEAKS WITH ONE VOICE WITH RESPECT TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE. MY FRIEND, MY COLLEAGUE, JUSTICE LABARGA, IT HAS BEEN A LONG, LONG JOURNEY FROM FLEEING CUBA AS A BOY TO THE SUGARCANE FIELDS TO THE HALLS OF THE SUPREME COURT TO THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM'S HIGHEST POSITION.

AS YOU TAKE ON THE MANTLE OF

LEADERSHIP, I HAVE EVERY FAITH THAT YOU WILL BE AN EXCEPTIONAL CHIEF JUSTICE AS LEADER OF OUR JUDGES AND JUSTICES AND COURT EMPLOYEES, AS THE UNIFIED VOICE OF OUR BRANCH IN OUR DEALINGS WITH THE TWO OTHER BRANCHES AND THE MILLIONS OF FLORIDIANS WHO DEPEND ON OUR STATE COURTS EVERY DAY TO HANDLE THEIR CASES EFFICIENTLY, FAIRLY AND EVENHANDEDLY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I PRESENT TO YOU OUR NEXT CHIEF JUSTICE, GEORGE LABARGA.

[APPLAUSE]

>> THE TRANSITION OF POWER IN OUR REPUBLIC HAS LONG BEEN NOTED FOR THE PEACEFUL MANNER IN WHICH IT IS ACCOMPLISHED.

WE MARK THESE TRANSITIONS WITH CEREMONIES SUCH AS THE ONE YOU'RE WITNESSING HERE TODAY. THOUGH THE CEREMONIES THEMSELVES ARE ONLY EVENTS ORGANIZED BY PEOPLE, THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO US BECAUSE OF THE LOFTIER IDEALS THEY SYMBOLIZE.

THEY ALSO REMIND US THAT WE WHO HOLD THESE OFFICES ARE SERVANTS OF THE PEOPLE OF IT'LL AND TO RULE OF LAW THEY HAVE ESTABLISHED.

IT IS THE PEOPLE OF FLORIDA, ALL OF THEM, WHO HAVE GIVEN THE SUPREME COURT ITS JUDICIAL POWER AND TO THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT THE POWER TO BE THE HIGHEST RANKING ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER OF THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM OF OUR STATE. MY TENURE AS CHIEF JUSTICE HAS COME TO ITS END.

I RESPECTFULLY ASK THAT THE HONORABLE JUSTICE LABARGA RISE TO ASCEND TO THE WELL FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE OATH, AND I CAN ASK THAT MRS. ZULMA LABARGA JOIN HIM THERE.

[BACKGROUND SOUNDS]

>> JUSTICE LABARGA, PLEASE PLACE YOUR LEFT HAND ON THE BIBLE, RAISE YOUR RIGHT HAND AND REPEAT AFTER ME.

I, JORGE LABARGA TO SOLEMNLY SWEAR THAT I WILL SUPPORT, PROTECT AND DEFEND THE CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT OF UNITED STATES AND OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

THAT I'M DULY QUALIFIED TO HOLD OFFICE UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE STATE, AND THAT I WILL WELL AND FAITHFULLY PERFORM THE DUTIES OF CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA ON WHICH I AM NOW ABOUT TO ENTER. SO HELP ME GOD.

CONGRATULATIONS.

[APPLAUSE]

[BACKGROUND SOUNDS]

>> ALL RISE.

HEAR YE, HEAR YE, HEAR YE, THE HONORABLE CHIEF JUSTICE, JORGE LABARGA, PRESIDING OVER CEREMONIAL SESSION.

PLEASE BE SEATED.

>> THAT GET GOOD.

[LAUGHTER]

THAT FELT GOOD.

THAT'S THE MARCO RUBIO STORY.

[LAUGHTER]

[APPLAUSE]

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR CARLOS LOPEZ CANTERO, I SEE THE GENERAL COUNSEL FOR GOVERNOR SCOTT, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER JEFF ATWATER, SENATOR DON GAETZ, PRESIDENT OF THE FLORIDA SENATE, REPRESENTATIVE WILL WEATHERFORD, SPEAKER OF THE FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND MY NEIGHBOR, GREG COLEMAN, PRESIDENT OF THE FLORIDA BAR, RAY ABERDEEN WHO'S BACK HERE SOMEWHERE, PRESIDENT-ELECT OF THE FLORIDA BAR, RICARDO MARTINEZ-CID, PRESIDENT OF THE CUBAN-AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION, MEMBERS OF THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE, FELLOW

MEMBERS OF THE JEWISH --
JUDICIARY, HONORED GUESTS ASK
MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY, I CANNOT
BEGIN TO EXPRESS HOW HONORED I
AM BY YOUR PRESENCE HERE TODAY.
MANY OF YOU TRAVELED LONG
DISTANCES AND TOOK VALUABLE TIME
OFF THERE YOUR BUSY LIVES AND
SCHEDULES TO BE HERE TODAY.
NOT EASY GETTING INTO
TALLAHASSEE FROM SOUTH FLORIDA.
YOUR PRESENCE MAKES THIS EVENT
THAT MUCH MORE SPECIAL TO MY
FAMILY AND TO MYSELF, AND WE
THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE.
TO HI SIX COLLEAGUES AND GOOD
FRIENDS, IT IS -- TO MY SIX
COLLEAGUES AND GOOD FRIENDS, IT
IS WITH A GREAT SENSE OF HONOR,
HUMILITY AND RESPECT THAT I
ACCEPT YOUR VET OF CONFIDENCE AS
THE 56TH CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE
FLORIDA SUPREME COURT.

[APPLAUSE]

I AM DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR
CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN ELECTING
ME TO THIS HISTORICAL AND
IMPORTANT POSITION.

I HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF THIS
HISTORIC INSTITUTION FOR FIVE
AND A HALF YEARS, THOUGH IN THAT
TIME I'VE COME TO KNOW MY
COLLEAGUES QUITE WELL.

I HAVE EVEN PICKED UP SOME OF
JUSTICE CANADY'S MANNERISMS.

[LAUGHTER]

I HAVE DEVELOPED THE GREATEST
RESPECT AND ADD HI RATION FOR
ALL -- ADMIRATION FOR ALL SIX.
THEY ARE SOME OF THE BRIGHTEST
PEOPLE I HAVE EVER WORKED WITH.
WHILE WE DISAGREE FROM TIME TO
TIME, AND YOU WOULD NOT KNOW
THAT, WE DO SO WITH A GREAT DEAL
OF RESPECT AND ONLY AFTER
HEARING AND CAREFULLY
CONSIDERING EACH OTHER'S
POSITION.

I AM EXTREMELY IMPRESSED WITH
THE EFFORT THAT IS DEVOTED BACK

WILL IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM TO GETTING IT RIGHT.

I THANK PRESIDENT GAETZ AND SPEAKER WEATHERFORD FOR THEIR KIND REMARKS, AND MY FELLOW PALM BEACH COUNTY NEIGHBOR, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER JEFF ATWATER FOR HIS KIND REMARKS.

I ALSO THANK MY FRIEND GREG COLEMAN, ALSO FROM PALM BEACH COUNTY, FOR HIS KIND REMARKS, AND RICARDO MARTINEZ-CID, I THANK YOU FOR YOUR REMARKS AND FOR THE --

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

YOU BROUGHT FROM I'M.

[LAUGHTER]

BY THE WAY, GREG COLEMAN AND I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO INFORM JACK HARTNESS, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE FLORIDA BAR, THAT WE HAVE DECIDED TO MOVE THE FLORIDA BAR HEADQUARTERS TO A MORE CENTRAL LOCATION IN THIS OUR STATE -- IN OUR STATE, PALM BEACH COUNTY.

[LAUGHTER]

YOU LEGISLATORS DON'T LAUGH, YOU'RE NEXT.

[LAUGHTER]

I ALSO WANT TO THANK MY COLLEAGUE AND GOOD FRIEND BARBARA PARIENTE FOR HER REMARKS, AND I THANK YOU, ABOVE ALL, FOR THE ENDLESS DEVOTION AND ENERGY THAT YOU DEDICATE TOWARDS THE FURTHERANCE OF OUR CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES AND TO THE ADHERENCE TO THE RULE OF LAW.

[APPLAUSE]

LASTLY, I THANK MY GOOD FRIEND AND FORMER SUPREME COURT JUSTICE RAU ALL CANTERO WHO WILL SPEAK IN A LITTLE BIT FOR BEING HERE TODAY.

AND SINCE LEAVING THE BENCH, DESPITE HIS VERY BUSY PRACTICE, YOU KNOW, I MESSED UP. YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO GO BEFORE ME.

YOU'LL GO AFTER ME.

YOU GO AFTER ME.

WELL, MR. CANTERO HAS DEDICATED AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF HIS TIME TO THE PRESERVATION OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIAL BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT.

AND IN DOING SO, THE PRESERVATION OF OUR CONSTITUTIONAL IDEALS.

AND I DO THANK YOU, AND I THINK THE COURT THANKS YOU DEEPLY FOR THE WORK YOU HAVE DONE IN THAT REGARD.

[APPLAUSE]

PERHAPS NOW THAT I'VE BEEN LIVING IN TALLAHASSEE FOR OVER FIVE AND A HALF YEARS, PEOPLE WILL STOP CALLING ME RAOUL CANTERO AS I WALK AROUND THE STREETS.

[LAUGHTER]

MOST IMPORTANTLY, I WANT TO THANK TOWNSEND AND ELLA PORCHER FOR STARTING US OFF WITH THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

YOU GUYS DID A GREAT JOB.

[APPLAUSE]

ABOUT 34 YEARS AGO, I WAS BLESSED WITH MEETING THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN WHO WAS KIND ENOUGH TO BOMB MY WIFE. -- TO BECOME MY WIFE.

WE HAVE WITHIN MARRIED FOR 34 YEARS, AND THOSE OF YOU WHO KNOW ME WELL KNOW I MARRIED WELL ABOVE MY PAY GRADE, AND THAT MY FAMILY MUST HAVE PAID HER FAMILY A LOT OF MONEY.

[LAUGHTER]

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MY WIFE, ZULMA LABARGA.

[APPLAUSE]

ZULMA AND I WERE BLESSED WITH TWO BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS. MY OLDEST, STEPHANIE MARIE, A GRADUATE OF FAU AND THE OPERATIONS MANAGER OF A HOTEL IN ALL BEACH AND HER BOYFRIEND, ISAAC.

CAN YOU STAND UP, PLEASE?

[APPLAUSE]

AND MY YOUNGEST ONE, CAROLINE
ASHLEY, A GRADUATE OF, YEAH,
FSU.

[LAUGHTER]

[APPLAUSE]

I DID WHAT I COULD.

[LAUGHTER]

CAROLINE IS AN ART THERAPIST AT
A TALLAHASSEE NONPROFIT, AND HER
BOYFRIEND, TAYLOR IRWIN.

PLEASE STAND.

[APPLAUSE]

I AM VERY PROUD OF BOTH OF YOU,
AND THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE
TIME OUT OF YOUR BUSY LIVES TO
BE -- LIVES TO BE HERE WITH ME
TODAY.

MY NEPHEW, GEORGE LABARGA --
YES, THERE IS ANOTHER ONE.

[LAUGHTER]

EVEN WORSE, HE PLANS TO BE A
LAWYER, SO I THINK JACK HARTNESS
JUST PASSED OUT.

AND GEORGE IS HERE TODAY WITH
ME.

WOULD YOU STAND, PLEASE?

[APPLAUSE]

THANK YOU.

UNFORTUNATELY, DUE TO HEALTH
REASONS MY FATHER, WHO IS NOW
96, MY MOTHER WHO IS 85 COULD
NOT BE HERE TODAY.

MY FATHER, WHO IS EXPERIENCING
MEMORY PROBLEMS FIRMLY BELIEVES
THAT I AM THE MANAGER OF A SEARS
STORE IN TALLAHASSEE.

[LAUGHTER]

AND HE IS EXTREMELY PROUD OF MY
ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

[LAUGHTER]

SO YOU KNOW WHAT?

I'LL TAKE IT WHERE I CAN FIND
IT.

MY MOTHER IS, OF COURSE, AT HOME
IN WEST PALM TAKING CARE OF MY
DAD.

AND I WANT TO INTRODUCE TO YOU
THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT POSSIBLE

FOR ME TO DO MY JOB, THE PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY MAKE ME LOOK GOOD, MY STAFF.

LET ME BEGIN WITH MY JUDICIAL ASSISTANT, B.J. VICKERS.

IN THE 34 YEARS THAT I HAVE WORKED AS A LAWYER IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR, I HAVE NEVER WORKED WITH A MORE EFFICIENT, MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE AND COMPETENT ASSISTANT THAN B.J. VICKERS.

SHE CAME TO ME WITH A WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE IN AND OUT OF GOVERNMENT, AND ASIDE FROM HER PROFESSIONAL ABILITIES, SHE IS A DELIGHT TO WORK WITH.

IF YOU HAVE EVER SPOKEN TO HER ON THE PHONE, YOU KNOW THAT.

LEADS MEET B.J. VICKERS.

[APPLAUSE]

MY CAREER STAFF ATTORNEY, JAN SCOTT.

JAN HAS SPENT THE BULK OF HER LEGAL CAREER HERE IN TALLAHASSEE, AND MANY OF YOU KNOW HER VERY WELL.

WE HAVE VERY SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE ISSUES BEFORE US, AND SHE IS ONE OF THE MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE LAWYERS I'VE EVER MET ON CONSTITUTIONAL LAW.

JAN, IF YOU WOULD, PLEASE.

[APPLAUSE]

LANA DAVIS HAS BEEN WITH ME SINCE MY FIRST DAY ON THE COURT. AN AMAZINGLY GIFTED WRITER WITH GREAT ANALYTICAL SKILLS WHOSE JUDGMENT AND ADVICE I CHERISH.

VALENCIA, IF YOU WOULD?

[APPLAUSE]

AND JORGE SANTIAGO -- THERE'S A LOT OF JORGES IN MY LIFE.

MY THIRD STAFF ATTORNEY WHO HAS BEEN WITH ME FOR THREE YEARS AND IS ABOUT TO LEAVE TO ENTER PRIVATE PRACTICE WITH CARLTON FIELDS IN MIAMI.

JORGE HAS A KEEN ANALYTICAL MIND WITH GREAT WRITING SKILLS, AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR WILL BE VERY

LUCKY TO GET HIM.

GEORGE, IF YOU WOULD.

[APPLAUSE]

BEFORE GEORGE I HAD ONLY THREE
OTHER STAFF ATTORNEYS.

I'VE ONLY BEEN ON THE COURT FIVE
AND A HALF YEARS, RANDY PORCHER
WHO PROVIDED ME WITH GREAT
ADVICE AND ONE OF OF THE MOST
KNOWLEDGEABLE LAWYERS ABOUT
WORKER'S COMPENSATION THAT I'VE
EVER MET, PROBABLY THE MOST
KNOWLEDGEABLE LAWYER ABOUT IT IN
THE ENTIRE STATE.

IF YOU WOULD STAND?

[APPLAUSE]

RANDY IS NOW A CAREER STAFF
ATTORNEY WITH THE FIRST DISTRICT
COURT OF APPEALS.

ALSO HERE TODAY IS STEPHANIE
BARELLA, A BRILLIANT LAWYER NOW
IN PRIVATE PRACTICE WITH
GREENBERG IN MIAMI.

SHE WAS A STAFF ATTORNEY IN MY
OFFICE FOR TWO YEARS AND WORKED
TOEN A NUMBER OF -- WORKED ON A
NUMBER OF COMPLICATED AND HIGH
PROFILE CASES.

I FIRMLY BELIEVE AND EXPECT THAT
STEPHANIE WILL DO GREAT THINGS
IN LIFE.

STEPHANIE, IF YOU WOULD, PLEASE.

[APPLAUSE]

AND BARBARA --

[INAUDIBLE]

WHO WAS WITH ME FOR A SHORT TIME
WHO WORKED FOR ME EARLY ON AND
IS NOW WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF
CORRECTIONS.

BARBARA, GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

[APPLAUSE]

THERE IS NO WAY I COULD HAVE
MADE IT TO THIS POINT WITHOUT
THE CARING AND DEDICATED
ASSISTANCE OF THESE FOLKS, AND
THEY ALL ARE COMPLETELY ANGRY
WITH ME RIGHT NOW, BECAUSE I
HAVE COMPLETELY EMBARRASSED
THEM.

I ALSO WANT TO RECOGNIZE LISA

GOODNER, OUR OUTGOING COURT ADMINISTRATOR.

[LAUGHTER]

AND LISA HAS BEEN WITH US FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, AND THERE ISN'T ANYONE IN THIS ROOM WHO HAS NOT AT LEAST TALKED TO HER ONCE S. AND SHE NEVER TOLD THE MARCO RUBIO STORY.

[LAUGHTER]

[APPLAUSE]

THE BAD NEWS IS THAT LISA'S LEAVING AS I AM TAKING OFFICE. THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT I'M GETTING P.K. JAMISON, WHERE IS -- THERE SHE IS.

P.K., IF YOU WOULD STAND, PLEASE.

EVERYONE HERE KNOWS P.K.

[APPLAUSE]

SHE CAME WITH A GREAT WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE IN THE LEGISLATURE, AND SHE WORKED FOR MY GOOD FRIEND JEFF ATWATER.

HE'S STILL MAD AT ME.

[LAUGHTER]

BUT I THINK HE'LL FORGIVE ME. I ALSO WANT TO RECOGNIZE A NUMBER OF FORMER JUSTICES OF THE FLORIDA SUPREME COURT PRESENT HERE TODAY.

WE HAVE STARTING OVER HERE, LET ME GET MY GLASSES ON SO I DON'T MISS ANYBODY, JUSTICE BELL --

[APPLAUSE]

JUSTICE McDONALD.

[APPLAUSE]

JUSTICE GRIMES.

[APPLAUSE]

JUSTICE HARDING.

[APPLAUSE]

JUSTICE ANSTEAD.

[APPLAUSE]

AND, OF COURSE, THE ONE I FORGOT ALREADY IS JUSTICE CANTERO.

[APPLAUSE]

YOU WILL HEAR FROM HIM IN A SECOND.

THESE FOLKS HAVE LEFT BIG SHOES TO FILL, AND I SINCERELY HOPE

THAT ONCE I RETIRE FROM THIS INSTITUTION THAT I WILL HAVE A FRACTION OF THE RESPECT AND ADMIRATION THAT THEY POSSESS. ALSO PRESENT TODAY IS FORMER LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR JEFF KOTTKAMP WHO PARTICIPATED IN MY INTERVIEW WITH THE GOVERNOR AND WHEN I WAS UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR THE FLORIDA SUPREME COURT. HE, LIKE RAOUL CANTERO, HAS ALSO BEEN INSTRUMENTAL AND IS A STRONG SUPPORTER OF AN INDEPENDENT JUDICIAL BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT.

GOVERNOR KOTTKAMP?

[APPLAUSE]

AND, OF COURSE, SANDY DELA ACCELERATE WHO IS A STRONG PRESENCE IN THIS COURT.

I THINK HE'S ARGUED BEFORE US SINCE I'VE BEEN HERE AT LEAST FIVE OR SIX TIMES, AND EVERYBODY KNOWS SANDY DELLA COURT, SO WITHOUT FURTHER INTRODUCTION, SANDY, IF YOU WOULD.

[APPLAUSE]

I WOULD BE REMISS IF I DID NOT THANK JACK HARTNESS AND THE FLORIDA BAR FOR ORGANIZING THE BIG --

[INAUDIBLE]

YESTERDAY AT THE FLORIDA BAR HEADQUARTERS.

THE PIG WAS ROASTED BY RAY ABERDEEN AND BY MY GOOD FRIEND, DAVID RATER, WHO WILL FOLLOW, HOPEFULLY, RAY AS PRESIDENT OF THE BAR.

IT WAS A WONDERFUL TIME THAT I WILL NEVER FORGET.

THANK YOU, GUYS.

[APPLAUSE]

THE WUTY OF IT WAS CONCERN THE BEAUTY OF IT WAS WAS IT ALL HAPPENED WITHOUT BURNING DOWN A SINGLE FLORIDA BAR BUILDING.

[LAUGHTER]

CLARENCE DARROW ONCE SAID THAT YOU CAN ONLY PROTECT YOUR

LIBERTIES IN THIS WORLD BY
PROTECTING THE OTHER MAN'S
FREEDOM.

IN A SENSE, THESE SIMPLISTIC
WORDS DEFINE THE ROAD THAT THIS
GREAT NATION HAS TAKEN DURING
THE COURSE OF ITS EXISTENCE.

AS A YOUNG CHILD, I WATCHED MY
PARENTS DREAM OF AN
AMERICAN-STYLE DEMOCRACY FOR
THEIR BELOVED COUNTRY TURN INTO
A MARXIST NIGHTMARE.

MARXIST NIGHTMARE.
THANKS TO THEIR FORESIGHT, MY
BROTHERS AND I ARRIVED IN THIS
GREAT NATION OVER 50 YEARS AGO
WHEN I WAS ABOUT 11 YEARS OLD.
IT WAS A PERIOD IN THE EARLY
'60s WHEN OUR COUNTRY WAS
STILL STRUGGLING WITH THE
QUESTION OF RACIAL JUSTICE, WHEN
WOMEN WERE NOT PROVIDED WITH THE
SAME OPPORTUNITIES AS MEN, AND
WHEN A YOUNG AND INSPIRING
PRESIDENT ALMOST FAILED TO GET
ELECTED SIMPLY BECAUSE HE WAS
CATHOLIC.

WHILE IT CAN BE SAID THAT WE
STILL HAVE A WAYS TO GO, WE HAVE
CERTAINLY COME A LONG WAY SINCE
THOSE DARK DAYS, AND IT IS
ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE THAT WE
CONTINUE TO STRIVE TO BE A
COUNTRY AND A STATE OF INCLUSION
AND NOT EXCLUSION.

AS ONE LOOKS AT THE PRESENT
COMPOSITION OF THE UNITED STATES
SUPREME COURT AND THE PRESENT
COMPOSITION OF THE FLORIDA
SUPREME COURT, IT CAN BE READILY
SEEN THAT BOTH INSTITUTIONS LOOK
LIKE THE FACE OF AMERICA.

IT IS ALSO IMPERATIVE THAT EVERY
EFFORT IS MADE TO INSURE THAT
THIS COURT'S MEMBERS, THE TRUE
FACE OF AMERICA, APPEARS AT
EVERY LEVEL OF OUR JUDICIAL
SYSTEM.

THIS IS THE WAY OUR JUDICIAL
SYSTEM SHOULD LOOK THROUGHOUT

FROM COUNTY COURT, CIRCUIT
COUNT, THE APPELLATE COURTS,
EVERY OTHER COURT.

[APPLAUSE]

PRESIDENT JOHN KENNEDY ONCE SAID
THAT THE PROBLEMS OF THE WORLD
CANNOT BE POSSIBLY SOLVED BY
SKEPTICS OR CYNICS WHOSE
HORIZONS ARE LIMITED BY THE
OBVIOUS REALITIES.

HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT WE -- ON
TO SAY THAT WE NEED MEN, AND
WOMEN, WHO CAN DREAM OF THINGS
THAT NEVER WERE.

OUR DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE
AND BRILLIANT CONSTITUTION WERE
WRITTEN BY COURAGEOUS, VISIONARY
MEN WHO CONSIDERED AND DESIRED
LIFE WITHOUT TYRANNY AND SIMPLY
ASKED, WHY NOT?

MY PARENTS, LIKE THE PARENTS OF
SO MANY CUBAN-AMERICANS PRESENT
HERE TODAY, ALSO DESIRED LIFE
WITHOUT TYRANNY AND ASKED
THEMSELVES THE SAME QUESTION SO
MANY YEARS AGO.

WHILE THINGS DID NOT QUITE WORK
OUT THE SAME WAY FOR THEM, THEY
RAISED CHILDREN WHO WERE TAUGHT
THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING IN
FREEDOM, CHILDREN WHO WERE
TAUGHT FIRSTHAND THE BEAUTY OF
OUR CONSTITUTIONAL FORM OF
GOVERNMENT AND CHILDREN WHO
LEARNED THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES
OF THEIR PARENTS THAT FOR
DEMOCRACY TO WORK, THE CONCEPT
OF JUSTICE MUST BE APPLICABLE,
AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL
CITIZENS.

I AM VERY GRATEFUL TO FLORIDA
BAR PRESIDENT GREG COLEMAN FOR
SPEARHEADING A DISCUSSION
CONCERNING THE ISSUE OF ACCESS
TO THE COURTS TO THOSE WHO
CANNOT AFFORD IT.

AND FOR ASKING ME TO CHAIR A
SUMMIT THAT WILL INCLUDE
BUSINESS LEADERS FROM AROUND THE
STATE TO HOPEFULLY COME UP WITH

A SOLUTION TO THIS VERY
IMPORTANT ISSUE.

AS APTLY STATED BY IMMEDIATE
PAST PRESIDENT GENE PETTIS, IT
IS A SOCIETAL PROBLEM THAT MUST
BE RESOLVED BY SOCIETY.

AND I HOPE ALL OF YOU WILL
PARTICIPATE AND HELP ME IN THAT
ENDEAVOR.

HAVING BEEN TEMPERED BY THESE
EXPERIENCES, I HOPE TO TO BRING
MY TASK AS CHIEF JUSTICE AN
APPRECIATION FOR OUR
CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES AND
OUR WAY OF LIFE.

IT IS MY SINCERE HOPE, MY
SINCERE HOPE TO SERVE YOU WELL.
ONCE I WAS ELATED WHEN I
OVERHEARD SOMEONE SAY ABOUT ME,
QUOTE: THAT YOUNG MAN IS GOING
TO GO FAR IN LIFE, END QUOTE.
MY ELATION WAS QUICKLY SUBSIDED
WHEN HE SAID WITH THE A SECOND
BREATH, QUOTE: AND WE HOPE IT
WILL BE SOON, END QUOTE.

[LAUGHTER]

I SINCERELY HOPE TO SERVE YOU
WELL ENOUGH THAT WHEN YOU
DISAGREE WITH ME, YOU WILL
RESPECT THE EFFORT I DEVOTED THE
TRYING TO GET IT RIGHT.

AGAIN, I THANK YOU FOR BEING
HERE TODAY, AND I WANT TO
PARTICULARLY THANK THE FLORIDA
SUPREME COURT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
FOR ITS ASSISTANCE IN PRESENTING
THIS PROGRAM.

AND AT THIS TIME I WILL CALL
UPON FORMER SUPREME COURT
JUSTICE, MY GREAT FRIEND, RAOUL
CANTERO, TO HOPEFULLY SAY A FEW
GOOD WORDS.

[LAUGHTER]

[APPLAUSE]

>> THANK YOU, CHIEF JUSTICE
LABARGA, AND MAY IT PLEASE THE
COURT, I KNOW AS I GET UP HERE,
EVERYBODY'S THINKING ONE THING:
HOW LONG IS HE GOING TO TAKE?

[LAUGHTER]

I WON'T TAKE VERY LONG.
CHIEF JUSTICE, YOU TALKED ABOUT
HOW IN TALLAHASSEE PEOPLE
CONFUSE YOU WITH ME, AND THEY
THINK YOU'RE RAOUL CANTERO WHERE
IN MIAMI PEOPLE THINK I'M CARLOS
LOPEZ-CANTERA, SO I KNOW YOUR
FEELINGS.

[LAUGHTER]

THIS IS A HISTORIC OCCASION.
AS PEOPLE HAVE SAID, CHIEF
JUSTICE LABARGA IS THE FIRST
CUBAN-AMERICAN TO ASCEND TO
CHIEF JUSTICE, BUT HE IS ALSO
THE FIRST JUSTICE OF HISPANIC
DESCENT TO ACHIEVE CHIEF
JUSTICE.

IT'S A VERY PROUD MOMENT FOR ALL
HISPANICS.

[APPLAUSE]

WHO, BY THE WAY, NOW CONSTITUTE
ONE OUT OF EVERY SIX RESIDENTS
OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

CHIEF JUSTICE, AS A
CUBAN-AMERICAN, YOU APPRECIATE
THE VALUE OF A DEMOCRACY AND DO
NOT TAKE FOR GRANTED THE
FREEDOMS WE ENJOY.

AND AS A CUBAN-AMERICAN, YOU
ALSO BRING A RICH TRADITION AND
HERITAGE OF CUSTOMS THAT YOU CAN
USE ON THE COURT.

FOR EXAMPLE, CUBAN-AMERICANS
LOVE FAMILY.

THEY LOVE MAKING FRIENDS.

THEY LOVE TO EAT.

SO HOPEFULLY, YOU WILL USE SOME
OF THESE CUSTOMS ON THE COURT,
MAYBE PROVIDE LUNCH FOR THE
JUSTICES AT CONFERENCE.

[APPLAUSE]

AS YOU CAN SEE, I'LL TAKE ANY
OPPORTUNITY TO INGRATIATE
MYSELF.

[LAUGHTER]

CHIEF JUSTICE, AS THE FIRST
AMONG EQUALS, YOU WILL GUIDE
YOUR COLLEAGUES THROUGH THE
PROCESS OF EVERY ISING PARTIES'
BRIEFS, SCHEDULING ORAL ARGUMENT

AND BE DECIDING CASES.
THERE WILL BE TIMES WHEN YOU
WILL BE FRUSTRATED AT THE
PROCESS OF RELEASING OPINIONS IS
TOO SLOW, AND THERE MAY WITH A
JUSTICE -- MAY BE A JUSTICE WHO
HAS NOT VOTED OR NOT ISSUED AN
OPINION, OR PERHAPS ONE OF YOUR
LAW CLERKS HAS NOT TURNED IN AN
ORAL ARGUMENT SUMMARY.
IT IS AT THESE TIMES ESPECIALLY
WHEN A PARTICULAR CUBAN
TRADITION WILL COME IN HANDY.
A CUBAN COFFEE MAKER.

[APPLAUSE]

[LAUGHTER]

WITH CUBAN COFFEE.
NOW, CHIEF JUSTICE, I KNOW I
DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU HOW
PRODUCTIVE IT CAN BE AFTER
DRINKING CUBAN COFFEE.
MY OWN EXPERIENCE ON THE COURT
IS THAT THIS LITTLE MACHINE
WORKS WONDERS FOR PRODUCTIVITY.
WHEN I WAS ON THE COURT, WE HELD
A CUBAN COFFEE BREAK EVERY
AFTERNOON AT 3 P.M., AND I CAN
TELL YOU THAT THE PRODUCTIVITY
IN MY OFFICE INCREASED
EXPONENTIALLY FROM THREE TO SIX
P.M. EVERY DAY.

[LAUGHTER]

HOWEVER, THESE MACHINES COME
WITH A WARNING LABEL.
IT CAN PRODUCE -- LABEL.
IT CAN PRODUCE EXCESSIVE
ENTHUSIASM AND TALKATIVENESS.

[LAUGHTER]

HAVE -- SO I HAVE SOME SIMPLE
RULES FOR YOU TO FOLLOW IN USING
THE CUBAN COFFEE MAKER.
NUMBER ONE, DON'T TAKE A SHOT OF
CUBAN COFFEE BEFORE STARTING TO
WRITE A DISSENT.

[LAUGHTER]

NUMBER TWO, DO NOT OFFER COFFEE
TO YOUR FELLOW JUSTICES WHO ARE
DISSENTING FROM YOUR MAJORITY
OPINION.

[LAUGHTER]

NUMBER THREE, DO NOT CIRCULATE SHOTS OF CUBAN COFFEE JUST BEFORE ORAL ARGUMENT TO ALL YOUR COLLEAGUES UNLESS YOU WANT TO HAVE ONE OF THOSE DAYS AT THE COURT WHEN ALL JUSTICES ARE ASKING QUESTIONS AT THE SAME TIME, AND THE COUNSEL HAS NO OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND. AND FINALLY, AFTER ORAL ARGUMENTS, CIRCULATE CUBAN COFFEE AT CONFERENCE ONLY TO THOSE JUSTICES WHO WILL BE VOTING WITH YOU.

[LAUGHTER]

SO THEY CAN DO ALL THE TALKING. IF YOU CAN KEEP THESE SIMPLE RULES IN MIND, YOU'LL HAVE A VERY PRODUCTIVE TWO YEARS AS CHIEF JUSTICE.

WE'RE VERY PROUD OF YOU, AND WE HOPE THAT YOU HAVE A VERY PRODUCTIVE TWO YEARS AS CHIEF JUSTICE.

THANK YOU.

[APPLAUSE]

>> I KEEP THAT?

[LAUGHTER]

>> IT'S UNDER \$100, RIGHT?

>> I HAVE TO REPORT IT.

OKAY.

WE'RE ABOUT TO ADJOURN, BUT BEFORE WE DO, I'M GOING TO ASK LIL' LEE FORBES TO -- LILILITA FORBES TO STEP FORWARD, PLEASE, AND SHE WILL SING MY FAVORITE SONG, "AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL."
o BEAUTIFUL FOR SPACIOUS SKIES, FOR AMBER WAVES OF GRAIN.
o FOR PURPLE MOUNTAINS MAJESTY, ABOVE THE FRUITED PLAINS.
o AMERICA, AMERICA, GOD SHED HIS GRACE ON THEE.
o AND CROWN THY GOOD WITH BROTHERHOOD FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA.
o BEAUTIFUL FOR HEROES PROVE AND LIBERATING STRIFE.
o WHO MORE THAN SELF, THEIR COUNTRY LOVED, HAD MERCY MORE

THAN LIFE.

o AMERICA, AMERICA, MAY GOD THY
GOLD REFINE.

o TIL ALL SUCCESS BE NOBLENESSE
AND EVERY GAIN DIVINE.

o O BEAUTIFUL FOR PATRIOT'S
DREAM THAT SEES BEYOND THE
YEARS.

o THINE ALABASTER CITIES GLEAM,
UNDIMMED BY HUMAN TEARS.

o AMERICA, AMERICA, GOD SHED HIS
GRACE ON THEE.

o AND CROWN THY GOOD WITH
BROTHERHOOD FROM SEA TO SHINING
SEA.

o AMERICA, AMERICA oo
[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

>> WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A
RECEPTION IMMEDIATELY HEREAFTER
AT THE ROTUNDA, AND IT'S BEING
PRESENTED BY THE FLORIDA SUPREME
COURT HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

AND AT THIS MOMENT, AT THIS TIME
FOR THE FIRST TIME I GET TO SAY
AND I GET TO BEAT THIS THING,
WE'RE ADJOURNED.

[LAUGHTER]

[APPLAUSE]