

It Is Time to Reorder National Priorities

An Inner Revolution Is Necessary for Justice to Prevail in the New Millennium



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Coretta Scott King

For justice to flourish in the new millennium, there must be a reordering of national priorities and spending and a revolution within individual hearts, declared **Coretta Scott King** in the Flanagan Lecture.

Healthcare, she said, is an urgent need, the number-one priority of our national security. "There is something wrong with a system that requires telethons for sick people, but always has unlimited funds for military spending. We could provide basic healthcare coverage for half a million people for what taxpayers are going to pay" for a B-2 bomber.

Her vision for a just system would affirm healthcare as a fundamental right. It would be a system that leaves no person behind, even for a catastrophic illness. Any proposal for reform must incorporate three principles: coverage of catastrophic illness, portability, and affordability.

While acknowledging the role of institutions in advancing the healthcare reform agenda, King also called for greater individual responsibility in lifestyle habits, consumer choices, lobbying, and attitudes. She exhorted individuals especially to do more to clean up the "toxic culture"

that predominates today by turning off the television and celebrating those people whose stories give life meaning and purpose.

"Justice is not only about the issues we face in the legal system, it also has to do with what my husband, Martin Luther King Jr., called 'unenforceable obligations,'" she said. Such obligations "are beyond the reach of the laws of society. They concern inner attitudes, genuine person-to-person relations, and expressions of compassion that law books cannot regulate and jails cannot rectify. Such obligations are met by one's commitment to an inner law, written on the heart."

A revolution in hearts, as well as institutions, will be needed for justice to truly prevail, King said. "This involves making a commitment to rigorous self-analysis and self-criticism about the way we treat other people.

"This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concerns beyond one's tribe, race, class, and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all. If we allow the love ethic to drive public policy with respect to the development of a comprehensive national healthcare system, we will find a balanced approach that provides quality, affordable health security for everyone."



Issues and Opinions This year's assembly offered a number of informal networking opportunities, including tabletop discussions during Wednesday's continental breakfast and Leadership Breakfast Forums for groups to discuss topics of special interest.