

# REMARKS OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY PROFILE IN COURAGE AWARDS CEREMONY

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

It's always very moving to be part of the Profile in Courage ceremony. These annual awards are a special tribute to President Kennedy because they honor the high ideals which inspired his own public life. He believed that public service is a noble profession, but that it often demands courage to do the right thing in the face of intense opposition. He understood that America would not be America without courageous officials willing to go against the grain, and he was constantly concerned that moral courage so often seemed absent in public life.

As Mark Twain said, "It is curious – curious – that physical courage should be so common in the world, and moral courage so rare."

I'm sure many of you watched the remarkable recent television series on one of the earliest pioneers of American democracy – John Adams. We can't help but admire his commitment and dedication to independence for America. We owe him a large debt for the sacrifice he made, the hardship he endured, and the wisdom and courage he demonstrated in the defining years of our nation's birth.

These awards are our effort to pay tribute to the very best in contemporary public service, and they mean a great deal to all of us in the Kennedy family. We salute this year's honorees, and we commend them for their courage.

California's recently elected Secretary of State, Debra Bowen, is one of the three leaders we honor today. With the best of intentions and at a cost of nearly half a billion dollars, California had acquired new electronic voting machines that newly-elected Secretary Bowen felt raised significant security and accountability concerns. When she took office in 2007, she

ordered an independent review, which quickly made clear the technology had unacceptable flaws.

Her position was highly unpopular, but she didn't hesitate. She began the daunting task of ensuring fair and accurate voting. Last August, she courageously decided that she had to do something about it herself, and she de-certified three of the most widely used electronic voting systems in the state. Her actions forced the restoration of paper ballots. It was no small task to face down the status quo and insist on reform, but Secretary Bowen had the courage to persevere, and the reforms she instituted were in place in time for the Presidential primary held in February in the state.

Our next honoree, Ohio's first woman Secretary of State, Jennifer Brunner, showed similar courage on that issue. She was well aware that the confidence of voters in Ohio had been deeply shaken by scandals and voting irregularities in several recent elections. After taking office last year, she immediately set out to correct the problems.

She began by proposing that all poll workers be recruited impartially and trained properly, so that future elections would be managed by trained professionals, not partisans.

She called for the resignation of all four members of the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections, which includes Cleveland, after two election workers in the county were imprisoned for election offenses.

She then decided full review of state ballot procedures was essential, and it found "critical security failures" that made easy tampering possible in the voting machines.

She immediately ordered the state's touch-screen voting systems to be replaced with a reliable system of paper ballots that could be optically scanned.

Her decision was met with immediate resistance from all corners of Ohio's political world. Local politicians and even newspaper editorial boards insisted that her decision was "injecting a culture of fear and intimidation" into the electorate and that there wasn't enough time to change the current system before the state's Presidential primary in March.

Despite the strong political winds against her, she kept moving forward and insisted that every vote had to be counted correctly on election day.

The results speak for themselves. Voter turnout was heavy, but the paper ballots saved the day, and restored the basic right to vote in a state that had lost confidence in its election system and its elected officials as well.

Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown says of Brunner, "I've rarely seen anyone in public life so focused and persistent in fighting for the right causes." As we honor her here, I know President Kennedy would agree.

Our third honoree, former Governor William Winter of Mississippi was a true pioneer for civil rights at a very difficult time in his state. His commitment had been born during his distinguished service in the Army's desegregated officer corps in World War II, and his public service in his state is an inspiring example of genuine courage in leadership.

He was an early supporter of equal rights for African Americans in his state in the 1960's, and paid a high price. He lost his first two races for governor, in 1967 and 1975. But he refused to give in, and in 1979 he became the first outright integrationist to win the office.

His landmark achievement was the Education Reform Act, as he called the state legislature into special session in the winter of 1982 to pass it. It guaranteed equal opportunity in education, and required state-wide kindergarten for all children in the state, including the fifty percent of public school children who were African American, and persuaded the legislature to raise taxes to pay for it.

His far-reaching legislation has often been called the Christmas miracle. It lived up to President Kennedy's ideal that all children should have the opportunity to rise up and reach their full potential.

He was not permitted to seek another term as governor, and he was defeated in his effort to challenge an incumbent Senator. But he continued his public service for many years. He was a Fellow at the Institute of Politics at Harvard in 1985. President Clinton appointed him to his Advisory Board on Race in the 1990's, and he helped lead the recovery effort for the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina three years ago.

The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi is named for him, and it's fitting that we honor him now with this Lifetime Achievement Award.

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