

## **ATTORNEY GENERAL KWAME RAOUL INAUGURATION ADDRESS**

Good afternoon. I want to first give thanks and honor to God for his mercy and generosity. I am thankful to him for sending Dr. Lisa Moore into my life at exactly the right time. God is right on time!

Thank you for providing me with two older sisters, Edwidge and Ninaj, and a wonderful son and daughter Che and Mizan, all who are unafraid to call me out when I am wrongheaded yet love me unconditionally. To my mother who could not be here for health reasons and to my dad who is here in spirit, I love you!

Thank you to all the Raouls and Bances who have travelled here to witness the son of Haitian immigrants, a birthright citizen, be sworn in as the 42nd Attorney General of Illinois.

Thank you to Judge Sharon Johnson Coleman and Reverend Tyrone McGowan, both members of Trinity United Church of Christ. To Governor Pritzker and all the constitutional officers, congratulations. And to my other brothers and sisters from the Illinois General Assembly – thank you for your willingness to step up and serve the people of the State of Illinois.

I pay tribute to the legendary service of Lisa Madigan. For 16 years she has always operated with the professionalism and integrity that we ought to expect of all our public officials.

Lisa Madigan jokes that I've been aspiring to this job for a very long time. There's a grain of truth to that, but the Attorney General's Office I thought about running for years ago is different from the one I have assumed today.

The role of state attorneys general – here and throughout the country – has evolved dramatically in recent years, as this nation and the world have looked to these previously obscure state officials to block misguided federal policies that violate our citizens' rights.

And at the same time, there remain within our boundaries problems for which we cannot blame President Trump. We must continue to ensure that Illinoisans are not unduly burdened by utility rates, that their privacy is guarded in an evolving world of smart technology, and that their health is safe from environmental threats.

We must exercise vigilance in protecting our children – whether at school, in places of worship or online.

We are morally bound not only to protect them in those places where we expect them to be safe, but to get rid of the notion that places exist in our state where they do not deserve an expectation of safety.

During the transition period, I have come to appreciate that Lisa's most praise-worthy accomplishment is her success in recruiting and retaining legal and support staff of the highest caliber.

They are attracted not by the compensation, which is insufficient for their talents, but by the work, because this work is one of protecting the most vulnerable in our state.

All of us who are in public service must ask ourselves this question: How will we use our voices? To disparage our state, or to uplift it?

Some criticisms of our state are legitimate, but we cannot move forward to correct our problems if we don't appreciate our assets and commit to protecting them.

We can be proud of our large and diverse population, which mirrors America and calls on us to take on a greater leadership role amongst other states that are stepping up together to oppose federal attacks on our values.

And we can be proud of the diversity and quality of our workforce who simply want to work for a fair wage.

The General Assembly has enacted laws that protect our greatest asset — working people — and they are there to be enforced, not to merely sit on the books.

That is why I will work in a bipartisan manner with Sen. John Curran and Rep. Jay Hoffman on legislation to create a bureau within my office to protect working people from wage theft, misclassification, workplace discrimination and other violations.

To raise our voices effectively for those we represent, we must restore public trust at all levels of government. Some elected officials have undermined this effort by way of unethical and sometimes illegal behavior.

I firmly believe, as Justice Brandeis did, that, "sunlight is... the best of disinfectants."

I will do my part to let in sunshine by adequately resourcing the Public Access Counselor and make the office work proactively to create transparency in government.

I learned through a lengthy campaign that different people have different opinions of the function of this office — prosecuting crime and political corruption, defending the State in court, providing for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, protecting healthcare (including reproductive healthcare), consumer advocacy or holding the line against leaders who ignore the law and Constitution.

They're all right. I appreciate the magnitude of the many tasks I am assuming.

But there is one function that hasn't historically been an expectation of the office, but to which I am compelled to raise my voice in advocacy as Attorney General.

The level of violence we experience within our state is unconscionable.

There should be no public official anywhere in Illinois who does not take responsibility for doing his or her part to address it.

There was a time when the opioid and heroin epidemic was perceived as being quarantined to certain areas.

In part because we accepted the abusive practices of an industry that manufactured or sought to profit from painkillers, but also in part because we ignored a street heroin problem we wrongly perceived to be isolated, the epidemic has now spread to every community in our state.

We are taking a similarly short-sighted attitude toward gun violence if we ignore those who seek to profit from the sale of illegal guns and view gun violence as quarantined within certain neighborhoods in particular cities.

And let us be clear – we cannot prosecute and incarcerate our way out of this problem. We must take a comprehensive, statewide approach that emphasizes prevention, takes on gun trafficking and responds to victims of violent crime in a trauma-informed and culturally competent manner.

This will mean expanding who we accept to be a victim.

If we ignore a class of those affected by violence because of where they live, what they look like or what mistakes they have made, we only enable victims of violence to evolve into perpetrators of the same.

Today we make new commitments to raising our voices constructively to protect and promote our greatest assets: our workers, our young people, our natural resources, our seniors, our veterans and our diverse communities.

I am honored by the trust put in me to engage in this work of advocacy as attorney general. This is truly an opportunity of a lifetime. It is the work of my life, and I am just getting started.

God Bless the State of Illinois. God Bless the United States of America, and God Bless all of his children, no matter on what side of the border they may reside.