

SPEAKER 1: Please join me in welcoming mayor Andrew Gillum and Aisha Moodie Mills.

[APPLAUSE]

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Greetings, everyone.

ANDREW GILLUM: Greetings, Madonna.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: I know, I love this microphone. It really suits me. It's Janet Jackson look. I'm here for it.

ANDREW GILLUM: My bad.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: I'm totally here for it. So, we are here, very excited to talk about affirming Blackness as we open up the Black Policy Conference here at the Kennedy School. And I thought that we would start from the beginning, because you were born a Black boy in Flor-- no, I'm just joking.

ANDREW GILLUM: You sure?

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Yeah. You guys didn't see The Jerk? Am I my dating myself? Is this crowd too young for this, for The Jerk? Anyway.

So, Mayor Gillum. It's an honor to be sitting here with you and having this conversation. I remember-- and I don't know if you remember this-- a couple of summers ago, we were in Martha's Vineyard. Do you remember that we had a little--

ANDREW GILLUM: Just to qualify this, when I was in Martha's Vineyard, I stayed for one day. She stayed for a week.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Well. Why would you go if you're only going to be there a day?

ANDREW GILLUM: I get it. I just want to set the expectations. I'm not-- Martha's Vineyard, I went for a day.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Well, we were in the vineyard. I was actually enjoying myself and took off one day to kind of sell my work. This gentleman just popped into work.

But one of the interesting things, there was a meeting, a conversation, strategy session, with some Black leaders who were talking about what does this look like if we run African-American candidates in the South, statewide, et cetera. And I remember as a part of this conversation, there was yourself, it was Stacey Abrams. Mayor Tubbs was there.

And I remember looking at the three of you trailblazers and just kind of listening and thinking, y'all are nuts. Like, what are you possibly thinking in Florida and in Georgia? You're really going to run statewide?

And so, I thought that it would be interesting just to back up for a minute and to understand someone who is so prolifically audacious and accomplished as you, how is it that as a young person in your early 20s do you decide that you're going to run for office and to make this life of public service? What goes through your mind when you're making those decisions?

ANDREW GILLUM: Well first, it's good to be here with my good friend Aisha. And it's good to join all of you as well. I don't know how many are Harvard students and a part of the Harvard community, and how many are from other supporting institutions. But everybody's welcome here. And more importantly, I'm hoping that we'll be able to get engaged in a level of conversation that gives you all just the preview behind the shadows of how some of this stuff works and the real world of politics.

I want to acknowledge as well that Stacey Abrams and Michael Tubbs and Ben Jealous, all of us go back over a decade of knowing each other. I met Stacey Abrams when she was organizing in the Georgia assembly. This is before she was ever thought of as speaker. I met Michael Tubbs before he ever got elected mayor out in Stockton, California. And frankly, we go back as organizers before we were ever here as Fellows, when people didn't know your name and didn't know mine quite frankly either.

And I only call that out because you never know who you're sitting next to. You don't know who you're in the company of, who you're in the space of. You don't know which one of y'all are going to be the future president.

There is one in here, or maybe more. A future attorney general, a future mayor, a future governor. And then, people who go on to do things even more amazing than that.

I call it out because Alicia Keys has this phrase that says my overnight success has been 15 years in the making. And it really pierced me, because that's exactly how it looks. You see these people and they pop in, and when the mainstream gets hooked to them, it's like, where did they come from?

And I got to tell you, I came from Miami-Dade, Florida. Born to my mother, Frances, who was a school bus driver, and my Daddy Charles, who was a construction worker. And when my dad didn't have construction work to do, he would sell fruits and vegetables on the street corner. And on Saturday morning, he would set his pickup truck in the open field across from the cemetery and sell flowers to bereaved families.

The fifth of seven children, all boys and one girl, my baby sister. Don't try her. She's completing her second year of law school in New York. I'm so proud of her. But as a fifth of seven children, I'm the first of my siblings to graduate from high school and the first to graduate from college.

To have my little brother and my little sister come behind me to do the same thing, you can't tell us we don't know what it means to see intergenerational poverty disrupted at the hands of a good public education.

And so, for me, the motivation came really early. Because as a kid, I would observe when my older brothers would get into trouble. In fact, all four of my older siblings all have criminal background records.

And sometimes, the officer would show up at the house and knock on the door-- and I was a little kid, but I was aware enough to know what was going down. And my mother would open the door and she would hear the officer tell her she's got to come down and see about one of my siblings. And my mother would close the door and I would watch as tears would well up in her eyes. And I remember making a commitment at a very, very early age that if I was ever going to make my mother cry, it was going to be for something good and not something bad.

And that was such a powerful guiding force for me. And even though we didn't have a tradition in my family of going to college-- and I shared this with my study group here at Harvard-- my motivation was to go to Hillman college. Some of y'all are too young for Hillman. Maybe in syndication. It may be in syndication now.

There's a big H there with the African motif. It kind of reminds me like we might be at Hillman. But I imagine that stands for Harvard.

I don't know, but in all honesty, Hillman became my motivation to go to college because it was the first time I had seen Black excellence in that way on display. And that really does say something about reflective power. It's important for us to see ourselves reflected.

And all the way through, from middle school, and having to apply myself in high school, and doing AP and honors courses, all of that was about getting to Hillman. And of course, I would later learn that Hillman was fictional and that it didn't exist, except in the recesses of my mind and on television on Thursday nights after the Cosby Show.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: But you got close though, choosing an HBCU.

ANDREW GILLUM: I did, I went to the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. Shout out to the Rattlers. But FAMU became my Hillman College. And I only share that again to share that these-- you never ever, ever know who's looking up and looking at you. And you never know who, by your example, you may be motivating, even if the words are never spoken.

I later had the opportunity to tell Marcy Carsey, who produced A Different World, that I held her as one of the people responsible-- along with Dwayne Wayne, Whitley Gilbert, Jaleesa-- she could cook. But they were responsible in part for me setting the north star that I would one day go to college, and that I would one day go to an HBCU.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: You talk about being a model, at 20-something, what, 23? 24 years old? Is that when you ran for your first campaign for public office?

And there are so many students here who are considering what are they going to do when they leave this place. And I know a lot of you are feeling pulled between perhaps your passion and your purpose in the world, and also your purse, and trying to determine if you're going to go work at say, Goldman-Sachs, or if you're going to go into a life of public service. And so I would love for you to share with folks how you got there at such a young age where you said, you know what? I could go off and make money, but I'm going to try to also do some real good in the world. And at 23, I'm going to go ahead and run for office.

ANDREW GILLUM: Yeah, well my wife and I disagree on this path, in some ways. No, in all seriousness, my wife was student body vice president at Florida A&M University before I was student body president. We didn't really-- we were of different parties, whatever. It didn't mean nothing. One threw a better party than the other.

But the truth is, my wife is her own amazing talent and inspired me. She's a couple of years older than me. And when I decided to run for public office, I was 23 years old.

And I just want to backtrack for a moment and say, like life-- I know there's a lot of pressure, particularly for graduating seniors, what's next, this next decision is so pivotal. If I don't get this right, it's the end of my life. It is so not true. You are 22, 23, 21.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: 30. Doesn't matter.

ANDREW GILLUM: You may be 30, about to encroach on the rest of your life. But you've got so, so, much time, room, space ahead of you. Do something big, courageous, different. Challenge yourself, expand yourself.

This is the Academy that you're in. And the beauty about the Academy is money. But I did believe in myself and I felt like I had something to contribute to my community. And so, I ran. And I raised \$6,000, and with that \$6,000 I did what any 23-year-old would do when I bought t-shirts for everybody I know.

Not a TV ad, not all this other stuff that they tell you to do. And you know this, because you've worked on campaigns, that's the one thing consultants tell you don't waste your money on, right, is a t-shirt, or a campaign lawn sign. But anybody who has ever been around a campaign, you will go crazy if you don't get lawn signs and t-shirts because your supporters will eat you alive. They determine whether you're winning or losing by how often they see your name on the drive to and from wherever it is that they're going.

But I ran for the city commission at 23. Raised \$6,000, ended up making it into the run-off. My foremost opponent had \$49,000 against mine, and then went forward to raise \$130,000-something. I raised \$30,000, and we ended up winning that race with 54% of the vote. I went

on to win a number of successive races there, and then ran for mayor in a four way race and won with 78% of the vote in my city.

And I didn't wait to be invited to the table. As I have shared before, I was always taught that if you're not at the table, it means you're on the menu.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Yes.

ANDREW GILLUM: And it was very true for a lot of us in our city that we weren't represented there. At the time that I joined the commission, there was not an African-American on the Tallahassee city commission. In spite of the fact that we were an important part of the constituency there. So I ran.

And you didn't ask this part, but I'll share it. When I got there, I didn't talk on the commission for probably a couple of months, not like really engaged in the debate. And I went to this church, visiting churches on Sunday, and this older well put together Black woman came up to me and she says, you're Andrew Gillum. I said yes ma'am. And she said, I am disappointed in you. And of course I'm thinking--

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: That just hurt my heart the way you said it.

ANDREW GILLUM: Oh well, she said it just like that. It hurt me too. I was caught off guard by it.

And I said, you know, what did I do? And she said, every Wednesday, I turn on the television-- the public access TV-- to watch and see what you're going to say and see what you're going to do. She said, I got out there and I told my friends in spite of their objections about your age that we ought to give you a shot. And I gave you a shot, and you got up there, and you don't say nothing. And it was like flipping on the light.

And I will tell you what was happening with me in that period of time. My closest peer was 50 years old. Everybody there had lived really great careers, and some of them were approaching retirement. And I honestly told myself, what could I contribute with all these people who have done such amazing things in their lives?

And she told me that she put me there for a reason, right? And it was like the light came on, the switch came on. My colleagues wish it never had, I'm certain. Because I started weighing in on everything, and I started to realize that I had differing opinions and a different belief system and different ideas. And that, if I wasn't going to contribute it, then it would never get brought to the table.

A good friend of mine, Alicia Thomas Morgan out of Georgia, who served in the House of Representatives there, used to have this saying. She said, each of us was put on this earth to do a particular job, a particular way, at a particular time. And if we do not do it, that job will never be done. And what it spoke to me was purpose, just sort of pierced me in that.

And so, I have ever since not really held my tongue on the things that I believe, the opinions that I feel strongly about, in spite of whose presence we may be in. And I think that's all of our jobs. The biggest barrier I had to get over was the one in my head. Once I got over it, I had agency and I could be my true and authentic self and bring a perspective to the table that would have otherwise been missing. And I'm sure we all experience that in our own lives.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Yeah, I mean imposter syndrome is real, right? Like I would imagine that so many of us here, and certainly at the Kennedy School, I've talked to so many of the Black students-- and by so many, I can probably count y'all. I see you. I see you.

But what is interesting-- and I feel this every day in life-- is this idea that if you are a person of color, if you're a woman, if you're a queer person, you often sit in spaces-- and especially if you're young-- and feel a bit like an impostor and don't quite know how to shake that. And then the reminder that you're here for a reason and your voice matters is everything. I want to kind of move in to talking about that a little bit.

But first, I don't want to lose the comment that you started with about your wife. My wife was actually just here, for those of you who came to my study group and met Danielle. She is fierce and fabulous as well. And one other piece of advice I would give you all is a happy wife, happy life.

ANDREW GILLUM: Amen. Happy partner. Y'all got to come up with the--

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Exactly. Choosing your partners wisely. I would also offer, don't necessarily try to choose them too early. Like, live your life. But, choose them wisely, because I think that so much of this education, so much of this ability to navigate through the world, is about who all you surround yourself with. And the power and presence of those people is absolutely a reflection of you and you will manifest with that energy.

ANDREW GILLUM: On that line, I was told-- I forget who's saying this is, and I'm robbing it from the, but-- it was the same basically wit. Don't let people take up real estate in your head who don't pay rent. Right?

Which I love. And I wish I could credit-- I said it. I wish I could credit whoever said it, but there's so many haters out there.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Haters going to hate.

ANDREW GILLUM: There are so many people who think that they can do what you're doing better than you can do it 10 times, 10-fold. Ain't never showed up to do it now, but got a lot of noise, a lot of chatter. Will sit, whisper about you in your own face, and then smile right back at you. They are not cheering for you.

And I say suspend with trying to allow these people to dictate your activity in such a way that you end up trying to perform for them and living completely off your mission, completely off your path. They don't intend for you to succeed. You let them hate from the sidelines.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: So let's talk about how this showed up for you. So you ran this little race, 2018 that all of us were glued to our televisions watching. And many of us actually went down there and were on the ground for you.

You're running this campaign and you were doing it. It just so turns out-- I don't know if anyone noticed, he's an African-American man as well, running this race through Florida. As we embark on a conversation around affirming Blackness-- and I would love for you to talk to us about how you navigate identity in this race.

This is the state of Florida. Massive state, very consequential to the nation. Very different in parts of Florida. So you've got like South Georgia, and then you've got like little Long Island, right? All kind of in the state of Florida.

And you happen to be a prolific candidate, but you also happen to be a Black man running that race. And I'm interested in how you handle that, kind of on the campaign trail, how did that come up? Was there like an Obama effect in any way?

Because what I used to hear was, oh yeah, he's the next Obama, he's the next Obama. And I'm like, how come he just can't be [? he, ?] Andrew Gillum? Why does he have to be the next anybody? So talk to us about the haters. Talk to us about how you dealt with race, because I'm just really interested in the identity politic of it.

ANDREW GILLUM: Well, I mean it's just to back it up, I was in-- obviously, I was in a five way primary for governor of the state of Florida, a state where Black people are what, 13% of the total population? From the moment I got in the race, the editorial pages and writers and other naysayers were calling it a fool's errand.

There wasn't a week that didn't go by that either somebody was saying, you should drop out because you're going to take votes away from the candidate who could be the candidate that wins. Now mind you, the going logic in my state around these primary elections-- or at least what the Democratic nominee for governor in the state of Florida was supposed to look like, sound like, where they were supposed to come from, what the parent pedigree was supposed to be-- and I didn't have any of that. We had caused ourselves to believe that you've got to be, frankly, white, moderate, male.

But if you're not male, you at least had to come from a dynasty of politics in the state. And quite frankly, run Republican lite. And I was intent on running the most authentic progressive campaign that was consistent with my values as I possibly could muster.

Now, I will tell you, in raising the resources that we raised in that race, I would go days-- eight hours a day on the phone-- calling people, asking for a contribution and end the day with nothing. I mean, I can't tell you how demoralizing it is to spend your time on the phone trying to convince people of your worth and your value and your vision, and they say, you're a nice guy, and then, I'm with candidate XYZ. First of all, I wish they would have told me at the beginning, right? I mean, there's no sense in--

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Wasting all this time.

ANDREW GILLUM: --going through all of this if you already were with somebody. But anyway.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: I was a fundraiser, I know call time all too well.

ANDREW GILLUM: Yeah, call time sucks. That's the best description I could give on this open circuit communication. But I would go days with this.

But I have to tell you from the day that I got in the race through the 19, or whatever, 21 months that I was on the trail, there was not a single day that I didn't believe I could win. In spite of that. And people think I'm crazy when I say it or that I'm making it up. I got up every single day believing I was going to be the next governor of the state of Florida and that all I was in was in the flow.

That every day I had to get up, I had to work hard. We would start our days sometimes at 3 o'clock in the morning. I didn't have money, so we literally drove my truck across the state of Florida. I would get to Orlando by time for a breakfast meeting, and then shoot over to Tampa for lunch, and then shoot down the West Coast to Sarasota, and then across Alligator Alley to Broward, and then Miami.

End the night there at maybe midnight, 1:00 AM, and we get back up, 3:00 AM and we would do it all over again. And that's what the race looked like for me for about 17 months of it. All the while reading headlines that I should drop out, that I have no place here, not raising money, so on and so forth.

The race thing, I really tried to be conscious of in the way that I conducted myself. Because I knew any time you are doing this as a first that you're not just acting for the moment, that you might be acting for the ages. I wasn't sure how the thing might turn out, but I wanted to be able to-- and I said this to a group before coming in this room-- I wanted to be able to recognize myself at the end of the race. I didn't want to look up after that was over and say that I had contorted myself so much that I didn't even know who I was. By the way, what kind of Governor would I be if at the end of the process I had betrayed so much of my belief system that I wasn't clear about who I was?

On the race part, there was this one time we were in this area called The Villages. Now, The Villages is the most Republican voting area in the state of Florida. It is a planned retirement community just north of Orlando.

Every Republican presidential candidate goes through there and they do these big rallies. I mean, we've got golf carts, Trump everywhere. I mean, it was-- I was there.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Now, tell me strategically why you were there, because that doesn't seem like a good use of time.

ANDREW GILLUM: Let me tell you, I said when you're the governor of Florida, you got to be the governor for all of Florida. And so I was prepared to go there. I was prepared to present myself. I was prepared to answer their questions.

And when I finished presenting myself, this elderly white gentleman stood up and said, I believe Andrew Gillum might be the next governor of Florida. And then he says, and I want to give you \$20 to help you along your way. And I'm like, we are in The Villages, I know you've got more than \$20 that you can give.

But then, they did this little fundraiser impromptu and we walked out of there raising like \$6,000. And The Village is the place that they told me I wasn't supposed to go. But something happened during the course of that Q&A, where an elderly white woman stood up and she says, do you think that Florida will elect a African-American governor? And the room, just, it's all white. And I think they were trying to determine whether or not this was an appropriate thing to say aloud.

I was buoyant on the inside. Because you know how you have a friend where you insult them, but you're not sure how good of friends you might be and so you're not sure you're going to survive the insult? And then they punch back at you and you feel like you're a little closer? Like you've broken through something?

I felt like we were in an elevator shaft and we just went a layer below. Like, OK, if you can say that to my face, then we can start to have this conversation. Because the last thing I wanted was the question of race to sit in the recesses of the minds of voters, where they did that Make a Nation by themselves without my input. And then they went in and they voted in a biased way, because they had resolved the conclusion of that when we could have talked about it out loud. Right?

So I was like oh yes, I think that Florida's ready. And Florida elected Barack Obama. And she did follow up, well, Barack Obama-- So I was like, ma'am, I am not comparing myself to Bara-- I'm Andrew Gillum. I get that, I'm just trying to make the point that it is possible for a Black man to win the state of Florida.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Well look, I personally-- and I say this all the time-- first of all, thank you so much for running. Thank you for running.

[APPLAUSE]

I believe that you won, even though you didn't technically--

ANDREW GILLUM: You and my mother believe I won.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: But look, look here, [? bruh. ?] You came closer in that race for governor than any other Democrat in what?

ANDREW GILLUM: 24 years.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: In 24 years. That, to me, is advancing the ball in a really meaningful way. And I want to turn to that conversation.

You have spent your entire career, I would imagine just in me knowing you, kind of building the plane and flying it at the same time. So you've been building infrastructure to support people and candidates like you and to create the political conditions in your state that would open up the space for someone like you to be elected.

So for example, the YEO network, the Young Elected Officials Network that you helped to found, or actually founded, that you actually found. That's like, hey, I'm a young person, I'm an elected official, maybe we should have a resource or a network of other young elected officials. And now, you are turning your sights on, OK, how do we boost registration in this state to really continue to boost our democracy? So I would love for you to take a couple of minutes to talk about what democracy looks like as you talk about in your study group and the work that you have been doing from an infrastructure building. But then also, to share perhaps the outside of the box ways that you are helping to boost democracy and that others can be involved in strengthening our democracy.

ANDREW GILLUM: Yeah, so we just announced a goal to register and engage a million voters in the state of Florida, a million new voters in the state of Florida. Now, that may sound like a big number, but I want you to--

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: You can do it.

ANDREW GILLUM: I appreciate it. We ain't do it, we about to get this thing started here. But in the state of Florida, we have four million people that are eligible to register and are unregistered. Four million.

That doesn't include the 1.4 million former felons who had their rights restored as a result of Amendment IV's passage. And y'all should give it up for Amendment IV. I think Desmond's been here to talk about it before. That was an incredible feat.

And I want you to know right now the Florida legislature is working overtime to basically nullify what 64% of the people of the state of Florida thought was right. We declared that Florida is a forgiving state. We declared that in the state of Florida, we believe that you should not be judged forever by your worst day. And 64% of the people decided that that was going to be in the Constitution of the State of Florida, and then the Republicans are right now working to pull that back.

So Florida took its eye off the ball. And frankly, I don't think we're the only state. There are other states that took their eye off the registration ball, the organizing ball. We somehow convinced ourselves that we could win these elections by taking the shortcut. By showing up a couple of weeks and a couple of months out and then blitzing the airwaves with Black celebrity X and Hispanic celebrity Y and that that was going to be enough to then pierce our communities and motivate them to turn out and vote.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: But tell the people a little-- because you speak so eloquently about this-- tell the people a little bit about how we got there, where there was a divestment if you will in voter registration because of the policies that ended up being put on the books that made it difficult.

ANDREW GILLUM: For sure. So, 2008 Obama won the state of Florida by-- I think it may have been 174,000, something along those lines. In 2012, he won again, but I think by 76,000. So the margins begin to come down.

And a couple of things happened. One, I think Republicans were surprised that the state of Florida went the way that it went in 2008 for Barack Obama. The Obama team wasn't surprised because they had put in the work of going out and registering voters and adding new voters to the voter rolls. So here's a couple of numbers. In 2008 when Barack Obama is on the ballot in Florida, Democrats had a registration advantage-- meaning more registered Democrats over Republicans-- of almost 800,000 more registered Democrats than Republicans.

When I was on the ballot this last November, that 800,000 advantage shrank to fewer than 250,000. A very precipitous decline. And it didn't happen by accident.

After Obama was elected in 2008, the Republicans in Washington D.C. went after a group called ACORN. ACORN was largely known as a community building organization and a voter registration operation, building deeper roots and larger communities of color and underrepresented constituencies. So they took ACORN out.

And then in Florida, the Republican-led legislature passed a statute that criminalized voter registration. And what I mean by that is they required any group that was conducting voter

registration in the state to go down to the Secretary of State's office and register. Your effort, your group, your committee, your friends who were going to be doing voter registration, they would give you a number that every form that you collected, you would have to apply that number onto the form. And that if you didn't turn that form in within a certain number of hours, you could be criminally prosecuted. In a county not so far from Tallahassee, there were four women-- Black women-- who actually got prosecuted under that law for doing voter registration in the state of Florida.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Ain't that crazy?

ANDREW GILLUM: By the way, this is still the law of the land in the state of Florida. These folks are unabashed about changing the regulatory and the systematic environment to ensure to their survival, their reelections, and they do it in broad daylight. After Democrats won the legislature in Wisconsin and in Michigan, they went and then they changed the laws during the lame duck session to make it harder for people to be able to register to vote.

In Stacey's case, y'all know the issue of the referee being the opponent, shutting down polling precincts, [? in ?] majority African-American neighborhoods purging voter rolls. The threat to democracy is real, and they're doing it out loud. They don't make apologies for it.

And so, the reason why I decided the best thing that I could do coming off of the race for governor of Florida-- and I want you to be aware that even though I didn't win that race, the turnout was expected to be 6.1 million or so if it had kept with traditional trends. 6.1 million voters. In presidential elections, we come close to turning out nearly 9 million people. In my race, 8 and 1/2 million people turned out to vote. We reached near presidential level.

And our race, for the first time in the history of the state of Florida, Black voters voted their share of the population. They didn't do it in '08 and they didn't do it in '12, but they did it this time. Young voters doubled their participation in the electorate. And we saw other wins-- not my own-- but other wins that were, I think, a byproduct of energizing the base.

So my simple theory is that if we start the work right now to register and engage-- registration is the beginning of the conversation not the end of the conversation. Deeply engaging community building, building relationships and social networks that then become social influencers. Buttress that on-the-ground effort with a very robust, digital effort to move our voters.

Even if I get a quarter of what we plan, my race was decided by 32,000 votes. Obama's re-election in the 70,000 range. We're talking about 250,000 new people into the process. It could be transformational to the outcome of the presidential election.

And you may not be a Floridian, but everybody ought to care about where Florida's 29 electoral votes go in the race for president of the United States. So my goal is very simple. It is to [? evict ?] Donald Trump in 2020.

In the process of doing it, build some lasting infrastructure that won't collapse after the election, but will continue that work, continue that community building to 2022 and beyond. And I think that that's how we got to get. We got to get back to our basics of community organizing, talking to people again, building strong community structures, letting people know at the very community-based level that they can make change.

For those returning citizens, having the right to vote is one thing. But what would it mean to have a city council pass local ordinances that say, we're going to ban the box so we don't ask about your criminal background history. That when you come and you apply for a job in our government, we're going to measure you on your merit.

Are you qualified? Will you be a good employee? Will you contribute mightily to this organization? And if the answer is yes, then welcome aboard.

I was proud as the mayor of the city of Tallahassee to pass that policy as a mayor, but now we got to organize communities to go out and do the same thing. We got the power. Right?

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: So speaking of power and organizing communities, 2020 is coming. And there are a lot of people on the Democratic ticket who are vying for that gig. Given how consequential that Florida is, given how critical it is that we have a grassroots approach to bring people to the table--

ANDREW GILLUM: We need Stacey Abrams to help us to bring this out.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Stacey Abrams, that's your pick? All right.

ANDREW GILLUM: First of all, Stacey's a very, very good friend and if she decided to run for president, I think she would immediately be a top tier candidate. And I think the process could be improved by having that kind of a voice in it. We got a lot of choices in this race and I'm going to escape wherever you are going with this to simply say my job is to deliver the state of Florida for whoever the Democratic nominee is for President of the United States. That's what we're going to organize ourselves around.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: It's also fair to say I think that you and I agree that the way you win Florida and that the way the Democrats win is not to necessarily run Republican lite.

ANDREW GILLUM: Yeah I'm a big enemy of Republican lite. I don't even know that the people who run Republican lite believe that that's a--

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Winning strategy?

ANDREW GILLUM: No, that that's what they believe. That in the core that the policies that they believe and that they promulgate are ones that they believe in or ones that they have had to moderate themselves into for electoral benefit.

I ran the most unapologetic progressive campaign for governor in the modern history of our state. And that upset the apple cart because it upset what the going wisdom was of how you're supposed to run in a state like Florida. Everyone thought we'd get obliterated by running on a platform that said, you ought to pay teachers what they're worth for the job that they do. By running on a platform that said that people ought to have expectancy around health care and that we ought to expand Medicaid to bring more people into the fold.

That we should ban assault rifles and that weapons of war don't have a place on city streets. But not just that, but that we have to attack the everyday gun violence that pervades far too many of our communities. I ran on repealing stand your ground law in the state of Florida, because it has no place. It's vigilante policy that makes an individual the judge, jury, and executioner in the public square.

We've always had castle doctrine, which means you can protect yourself on your property. What stand your ground does is it takes castle doctrine into the middle of the street and says, if I feel threatened by you, if you present so much as a threat to me, based off of my own assessment, that I can even go in and agitate a situation. And then be able to claim stand your ground when I pull out a gun and take your life. That's law in the state of Florida.

So we ran on all those things and we were unafraid. And we got closer than any Democrat had in 24 years and blew the roof off of a turnout. So I think we're trying to model something different, which is, maybe everybody didn't agree with me on every hook, line, and sinker, on every one of my policies, but they knew that I believed in it. And I think that they were willing to give me a chance, a shot, even if they couldn't check yes on every one of my policy prescriptions, because I think they trusted the intention behind what we were trying to do.

And if I had advice to 2020 candidates or anybody else who may be running or considering it, run as yourself. Run as whoever it is that you are. Give voters the ability to choose whether or not they agree with you.

But when we allow polls to tell us on what issues we're supposed to be running on and what we're supposed to care about-- polls are, as my pastor puts it, they're clearly snapshots in time. But my pastor preaches on this topic of the thermometer versus the thermostat. And the difference between the two, right? The thermometer can tell the temperature, but the thermostat sets it.

And what I want is an elected official, a candidate for president, and a president who's not prepared to sit back and say, you know, I'm a delegate here, go tell me what to do. But rather, I'm a trustee, and it's my job to set some vision and some leadership and some guidance and a

north star for where we ought to go. And even if you think this is a moon shot, if you aim for it, maybe you land on the stars, right?

And unfortunately, in the body politic I think that we right now find ourselves, it's very, very difficult for big, bold ideas to sort of make their way through it. And I'm just hoping in the course of this primary race, that that is what will seep to the top. Bold, courageous unapologetic thinking. And even if I can't agree with you every step of the way, I certainly want to be convinced that you believe in what it is you're selling.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: I hear you. So, this is a JFK forum, which means that you get to ask questions, too. And we expect you to. So, go ahead and line up. There are microphones here and here, and also up there.

So, there are some rules, and I'll try to remember those rules. I believe it is one, brevity. Be quick. If you are not quick, I will cut you off and move you along.

And your question does need to end in a question as well. Am I missing a third rule? Oh, and please say who you are and how you are affiliated or where you're from. All right? I will start here with you.

MARISSA ALBERTI: Wonderful. Hi, my name is Marissa Alberti. I'm an education leadership doctoral student at the education school here at Harvard. And so, you spoke a lot about how education transformed your life and enabled you to do the work that you do now.

So I'm curious, as you're talking about what our generation needs to know and learn about and understand in terms of systemic oppression for our people. How do you see the role of education in that?

ANDREW GILLUM: Well, it's fundamental. Unfortunately, we have too many classrooms, too many teaching facilities, where those who are standing at the top of the classroom have no cultural competency for the students and the environments in which they're working in. My wife and I are going through this discussion now because our twins turn five and so they'll be starting school. And I have to admit, I was going through the school that they're assigned to, looking at the teachers and reading about them because they put them all online. And there was not a single Black teacher in the school, except for one vice principal, and then the rest of the Black staff were janitorial support and cafeteria.

And what concerned me about that, because we've run into this even at their childcare center, my daughter didn't like people playing in her hair. And it's become a little bit of an issue of her being aggressive, because she has some hair autonomy and she knows it. And her mom would talk to her about it. Which I told Jai not to make the girls so worked up over this thing, but she's worked up about it.

And I want to make sure that the classrooms that they're in and the teachers who are standing at the top of that in the pedagogy that exists largely within the educational system-- not in my state alone, but I think across the country-- frankly is updated and comes to terms with the changing student that they have in the classroom. That in the way that not only they're taught, but also in the subject matter that is wide and that is expansive. And I think for those of you in the education space, particularly those of you here, you all get to stand at the vanguard of a lot of change. I mean, what you do here, people emulate.

And so I'm hoping that there is vast research going on here around how we change school pedagogy. I am extremely interested in seeing people like you come to teach in my state and my city, more specifically. Maybe at my kids' school--

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Job offer.

ANDREW GILLUM: --in that way. And then, I just got to put a plug-in for early childhood education. Zero to five is where it's at.

The Abecedarian Study, which is a 40 year long longitudinal study that streamlined research conditions and made various corrections forward and it was very clear the difference that a child who gets access to high quality, early childhood education, their future trajectory: earning, health, mental, or otherwise. I mean, it just shoots off the chart. And for those without access to high quality early learning, they make marginal gains. And then, at a certain grade level, that chart then starts to take a deep dive down.

And so, what I know for sure-- and this is one of the things that I wanted to see us do in the state of Florida-- is that early learning, where over 90% of brain development takes place over the course of human life-- not over the course of the child, but between the ages of zero and three, 80%, 90%. By the time they get to the age of five, their brain is developed. They are mimicking us, they are exhibiting-- I mean, kids are sponges, right? And I think the best thing we can do to help level some of the later conditions that we find, the inequality that exists in the system that shows up later, actually begins much, much earlier.

If I had a stroke of a pen, my resources would go first and foremost into early childhood education. As the, frankly, best impact on changing a kid's future trajectory. And I'm hopeful that folks like you will help to mainstream that conversation in academic environments and centers around the country, so that we're not having this conversation 20 years from now.

MARISSA ALBERTI: Thank you. I agree with your daughter by the way, about the hair thing.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: I'm conscious of time, so I'm going to ask the mayor to be brief in his remarks.

ANDREW GILLUM: Sorry about that.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Thank you, yes?

CHARLES: Hi, my name is Charles, I'm a student here at HKS. Thank you, Mayor Gillum. Right now, there's a movement of people here asking Harvard to divest from companies that profit off of people in prison. What would you say is Harvard's obligation to our fellow citizens who are incarcerated?

ANDREW GILLUM: Well, y'all are a leader. I mean, it's similar here. I mean, people watch what you do. You probably hear this enough, but y'all are in rare air.

And I think this is an exhibition, this is a demonstration of your power to convene people around a set of ideas. And so, my contract here I guess is almost up. I don't want to walk into any kind of a situation here.

But I will tell you, I am in alignment with your broader goal and vision to divest from the private prison system. It's my belief that private prisons have no place in society, none whatsoever. And I also think that we have to go a little bit deeper around reform, around what is actually happening in these incarceration complexes, right, these centers.

What is the learning? What's the rehabilitative nature of it? Are we preparing people to be reintroduced to society with a skill? To be made whole again?

And unfortunately, it is a unforgiving system that rapes us of a lot of resources, a lot of money, a lot of talent. Rapes neighborhoods of the potential of parents, adults, and other examples, who are really, really critical, in my opinion, to the life, the breath, the ecology in the communities where many of these-- frankly, Black men-- but even beyond that, are being taken. But the effects are felt significantly in our communities. And I wish y'all radical success in your effort to move this institution to the Vanguard of divestment and the prison system. And I'll say that, and I'm out of here in three weeks.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Stirring it up, stir up the pot.

ANDREW GILLUM: Good luck.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Yes?

ANDREW GILLUM: I ain't got tenure, I ain't got nothing. No protections to me.

DEMARQUIN JOHNSON: Hello, my name is Demarquin Johnson. I am a joint degree student here at the Kennedy School and at the law school a little bit down the ways. And I wanted to first say, thank you both for having this conversation and thank you to the organizers of the Black Policy Conference for facilitating and putting this together.

ANDREW GILLUM: Here, here.

DEMARQUIN JOHNSON: My question is about 2020, but not the election. I'm interested in your thoughts around the census. We know that racial gerrymandering, partisan gerrymandering-- which is usually a cover for racial gerrymandering-- and even the way that incarcerated people are counted, all has negative implications for Black political power. So I'm interested to know, what are your views on what I can do, people in this room, what anyone can do to make sure that we have a fair census and a fair Democratic process?

ANDREW GILLUM: Totally agree with you. And you probably also saw that for the first time this administration is adding the question of legal status to the census, right?

So, as to what it is that you can do. I'm not sure how you plan on spending your summer. But a number of-- I know in Georgia, same in Florida, but across the country, people are really seriously and intentionally engaging and trying to get a complete count. And that means going into many of our communities and making sure that we can get as accurate a reflection of who's there so that as resources are apportioned, as these seats are designed-- congressional, legislative, House, Senate, and so on and so forth-- that we don't lose ground, frankly, from where we find ourselves today.

In Florida, one of the things that is always interesting about the census and the prison count particularly is that many of the prisons in our state are in rural areas. So you got population centers that are being counted in these rural more conservative areas who vote more conservatively and it is impacting their political leadership and their access to political leadership that is often disproportional--

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Are you telling folks that the prison populations count in the census for the districts?

ANDREW GILLUM: Yeah. I'm sorry, if we didn't-- Yes, that absolutely happens. In most of these places, these people aren't voting. And in some cases, they're even legally allowed to vote, they just happen to be incarcerated.

The same thing with jails, right? By the way, we got people sitting in jails who have not been-- for extended periods of time-- who have not been found guilty of a crime. They're there because they couldn't pay the money bail system, right? Which also is in dire need of reform in our country.

So I would encourage you to volunteer. Eric Holder is doing a great work on this. There's a lot of funding that's now coming to bear. We're going to co-locate within our registration effort and effort around complete count as well. We are doors, we might as well be trying to make sure that we're doing our part to reflect an accurate census.

And when it comes to redistricting-- and you probably already know this-- we have a situation in this country where elected officials are choosing their voters rather than voters choosing

their elected officials to preserve power. And by the way, Democrats and Republicans are equally complicit in this, depending upon what state you find yourself in. And so, again, these are systems and these are structures that are deserving of deconstruction. And unfortunately, it's going to take us a couple of election cycles in order to get that done.

2020 is not only important, y'all, for the presidential election, it is important because the decennial census and most of these redistricting lines are being drawn in legislative houses around the country. And so, the need to flip houses and senates for states like mine, where the legislature draws their seats is absolutely critically important to gaining power. So yes, we got to get rid of Trump. That's my belief, you may have others. Yes, that has to be done, but we also have to win back houses, senates, so that you get control over the redistricting and the long drawn process.

DEMARQUIN JOHNSON: Thank you.

ANDREW GILLUM: Appreciate it.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Last question. You got it.

KATE TRAVIS: Hi, my name is Kate Travis, I'm a first year at the college. And I know that a lot of people here and across the country were inspired by your voter registration efforts, both in the state of Florida and kind of as a leader on the national stage. So my question is, what can people outside of Florida-- particularly students, for example, here in Massachusetts-- do to help that effort?

ANDREW GILLUM: Yeah, so if you don't want to come to Florida this summer-- I'm not subtle about my asks. It's hot, though. And humid.

I would welcome, obviously, folks who have the ability to spend a summer assisting. Because the state of Florida isn't the only state that needs to rally on this voter registration tip. We need this effort in Michigan, we need it in Pennsylvania, we need it in Wisconsin. Obviously, Florida. I'm going to through Georgia in there as well, because I think we have potential in Georgia even in 2020 to potentially flip the state.

The other thing that people did-- and I got the benefit of this in my campaign-- is a lot of-- even students here, they Hustle for me. Not the hustling. But there's an app, Hustle, that folks went on and they communicated with voters and potential voters.

And so, what we're trying to do-- and we're working with a group called ACRONYM on this-- is we want to make sure we have as robust in online, in a digital-- because in Florida, my state, you can register to vote online now. And so, pushing this information out via text message, joining us on Hustle. When you're standing in line sending out those messages. Hey, I recognize you're not registered to vote, tap this link, get registered. That kind of thing, that is a huge help.

We got a lot of ground to cover in our state. And if you're interested in doing that, another shameless plug: please visit us at Forward Florida, Forward FL. There's an option on there to volunteer. You can indicate whether you want to do it remotely or in person, or however it is that you want to volunteer. And I'm not selfish, I know that there are other states that are doing this as well.

But Florida has 29 electoral votes. And if we are successful in our state at this effort, it will not only have the impact of flipping Florida, it has consequences for the nation, and frankly, I believe the world. So I want to invite your help and your friend's help in doing that. Thank you.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Well, Mayor Gillum, I think that a takeaway for today is that this is what democracy looks like.

ANDREW GILLUM: Absolutely.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: So all of you, as long as you're engaged, hopefully are going to lead us to some promised land that doesn't involve Donald Trump. But oh, wait a minute. One more question. Last one.

ANDRE PENN: Hello. I'm Andre Penn, I'm a middle schooler in Princeton, New Jersey. And my question for you was, what's your advice for someone like me being able to make an impact in our country going forward in the future?

ANDREW GILLUM: Well, you're here. We may have found our future president right here in the room. But honestly, I want to applaud you for-- you're in middle school? What grade?

ANDRE PENN: Eighth.

ANDREW GILLUM: Eighth Grade. Man, that's incredible. I want to applaud you for being here. This is an important step.

And I imagine that if you're here, you probably did something back in New Jersey and are involved in some aspect of trying to make things better back where you live that probably deserved you a spot to be here. I just want to encourage you. One, age ain't nothing but a number. Except, when it comes to vote, you will have to be 18 to vote.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: Working on 16. [INAUDIBLE] got a bill.

ANDREW GILLUM: Yeah. You probably don't pay bills yet. So this is some things you want to hold off on. But you inspire me by your presence. And what my hope would be and my challenge would be to you is to go back and recruit some of your friends to join you in this effort of consciousness.

The same way you were engaging in this conversation and the way that I imagine you're going to engage over the next couple of days in this conference, don't be selfish about what you learn. Don't hoard it to yourself. Go back and be the trainer of trainers. And then, empower some other people to do what it is that you're doing.

Your future is extremely bright. I know it, and I just met you. What I want to encourage you to do though, is that we got to bring a couple more people along with us, right? We've got to expand our base, we've got to expand the number of people who care, like you do, enough to be here, to want to engage in this process.

Because the truth is that this is not as much my future, as it is yours. If we don't deal with the systemic issues today, I know in my state of Florida where we're surrounded by water on three sides, if we don't deal with climate and climate change today, then God help you when you come of age. So brother, I just want to encourage you.

I want to applaud you for being here and ask you to go back out and bring a couple more people right along with you. And together, we can actually, in my opinion, I believe we can make some real change. And if you want to come to Florida I would be happy to host you at any point this summer. All right? Good luck.

AISHA MOODIE MILLS: So we look forward to seeing you all at the Black Policy Conference all weekends. Thank you all for joining us. Thank you, Mayor Gillum.

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