



NC Representative Deb Butler

Women United March Speech

January 25, 2020

Charlotte, NC

Hello Charlotte! It is my honor to be here with you today to celebrate, to re-energize and to steel ourselves for the work that lies ahead. Ladies of Charlotte...you are what make this the Queen City!

How many of you believe that now, more than ever, is the time for women to lead? How many of you believe that the future is female?

You know in 2016, I felt such pride that this country had its first major female candidate for President and she was a heavy favorite. After all, her opponent was a misogynist having spoken boldly about grabbing women by their private parts. He had called immigrants rapists and murders and he had mocked both a disabled reporter and a gold star family. Boy, I'm glad I'm not a gambler because on November 8, 2016, I would have lost the family farm.

But for me...and millions more, another thing happened that day. A movement was reignited...a women's movement, one that saw hundreds of thousands take to the streets. That movement is alive and well, and it's that movement that will change the trajectory of American politics forever if we have the courage and move to make it so.

And so, what is a movement anyway? Well, to me it's pretty simple. A movement begins when you have enough people who are just too damn uncomfortable to stay still. You feel propelled by your righteous indignation and you've just gotta move. It's that moment when you feel your spine stiffen and you say in the words of the philosopher Popeye the sailorman... I've had all I can stand and I can't stand no more! Or in the words of Deb Butler, Mr. Speaker... I WILL NOT YIELD. I will not yield because I know that if I do, I will forever be disappointed in myself. I will not yield because in this moment I feel the weight of it all and I know that this state and this country have taken a dangerous turn and are in peril and I cannot be idle any longer. I've got to move! I've got to move for myself, for my children, for everyone's children, for my environment, for my community...I've got to move!

You know, being part of a movement is a lot like restless leg syndrome, sometimes you just want to go to sleep..., you want to relax, you need your rest, but you just can't be still because you are wildly uncomfortable. There is a burr under your saddle and you just gotta move! That's how this movement feels to me....

So, ask yourself, what makes you uncomfortable? Why are you here today? Because different things move different people, but there's plenty to go around so what is it?

What is the thing, what is the moment that is going to make you move? Perhaps for you, it is the mistreatment of North Carolina educators and students. That's a good one. That one got 20,000 educators moving to protest on the Halifax Mall one day and what a sight to behold.

Likewise, maybe you are uncomfortable because our public schools are underfunded, that they are bursting at the seams without enough classroom space. There are children languishing in schools that suffer in pockets of poverty? There are teachers working second jobs to feed their own families?

They are waiting tables on the weekends. They are doing side landscaping jobs. If our children cannot read by the third grade they are statistically doomed to mediocrity?

What is happening in our North Carolina schools is **educational injustice** and that should make you uncomfortable enough to move!

The North Carolina constitution requires there be a uniform system of free public schools wherein equal opportunities are to be provided for all students. It is the province and the responsibility of government to so provide that education and I believe that privatizing that obligation, treating our children as revenue streams for someone's profit is absolutely outrageous! Creating vouchers or charter schools that certain children cannot access either because they don't provide transportation or nutrition is just plainly unfair. It should be our top priority to provide North Carolina's children with the best foundation possible, to nurture them and to arm them with the tools to succeed. There are certain things that an evolved society should never relegate to the private sector and educating our children is one of them. WE should NOT get comfortable, until NC teachers are paid at or above the national average, until masters pay is restored, until teachers don't have to pay for their substitutes or supplies, and until they don't have to work at the Pizza Hut on the weekends to make ends meet. Its time to move on education!

Or Maybe the thing that's making you uncomfortable is the lack of healthcare.

Here in North Carolina, we have the present ability without higher taxation to make healthcare available to 600,000 more people. I am not being dramatic when I tell you that People are dying in the healthcare coverage gap, they are rationing insulin, they are skipping meals, they cannot access essential mental health care for substance use disorder and therefore our opioid crisis continues. You can bet that our neighbors in the coverage gap are uncomfortable that is for sure! Are you ready to move for them?

Our rural NC hospitals are running in the red and in fact, we have seen recent legislation that would bail out a failing hospital in Albemarle using 20 million additional taxpayer dollars when simply expanding Medicaid as 38 other states have done including Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, and now Kansas. and would likely save that hospital. Our federal tax dollars are being spent in those other states while North Carolina's citizens suffer needlessly without the healthcare they deserve.

Do you know what one of the leaders in the North Carolina legislature said when asked about those who work for small business or in contract jobs with no health insurance? He said they should quit their job and then find one that offers health insurance. That is kind the tone-deaf logic that we have been dealing with. This is **Healthcare injustice** and we should not stand for it. We gotta move! We should not feel comfortable until we expand Medicaid and give people in North Carolina access to life saving medications and preventive care. Not only is it morally imperative, but people who have medical care and preventive care, don't have to use the emergency room as a clinic where costs are astronomical. Furthermore, they are more likely to lead productive lives, caring for their families themselves through the dignity of work and contributing more meaningfully to this society. Surely, surely that is the better path. It's time to Move on healthcare....

Regrettably, you don't have to look far to find other injustices that should bring you to this movement. We also know that there is a growing income disparity between the haves and the have-nots, racial injustice and white supremacy on the rise, or how about children separated from their parents at the border or how climate change that threatens our planet? Do the hellish images of Australia on fire bring you to move? Any one of these alone is enough for a movement, but together.... we have no choice; we have Got to move!

And while ALL of this has had me moving since 2016, there was one event, one moment in particular that has got me moving these days at warp speed. And that was the ambush vote of Governor Cooper's budget veto taken on 9/11/2019. That vote was called for by the speaker of the house, Tim Moore, after 60 consecutive days of an inability to override the veto. He didn't have the votes because legislators in my party stood valiantly in support of their values. Even after the Rules Chairman told our Leader that there would be no votes that morning and even after notifying the press by text, the vote was called. Only 9 Democrats were in the chamber that morning because we had been lied to. And on 9/11, too ...a sacred day in our country's history...

And in that moment, when I realized what was happening, I'm not sure precisely what happened, but I had to move! When I rose from my seat and refused to yield, I didn't have a choice. I had to move. I was so uncomfortable, things were so wrong, this was an assault, I was wildly uncomfortable alright, and I had to move.

That morning people saw me sharing what I believe is our common condition. And though it might not have seemed like it, they saw me powerless, frustrated, and fear.... conditions I think that feel very common to us all right now. But, BUT.... they also saw movement... in that moment, I didn't care about anything else except trying my best to prevent the theft of these basic fundamental values. I couldn't stand for the injustice of it all. I had to move. In that moment, I tried as hard as I could to derail an ambush, a plot, a ruse, a complete disregard of process, a maneuver designed to cheat my colleagues and to cheat all of North Carolina. In that moment, I was officially far too uncomfortable and Yes, I refused to yield.

And friends, that's what its gonna take. For all of together to refuse to yield...to become so wildly uncomfortable that we have no choice, but to move in the name of what we believe. We've got to participate in this democracy. This is no time to watch our fate unfold from the sidelines! It cannot be a spectator sport for any of us any longer. As Marc Anthony said, you've got to find that thing that makes your passion burn brighter than your fear. You've gotta find that thing, hold onto it and get moving. And you've got to take others with you. We have to engage people who have been in the bleachers...that cousin that hasn't voted since a Clinton ran the first time...she has got to vote. That college freshman has to look up from her iPad and vote. And it is our job to see to it!

It's gonna take all of us, redoubling our efforts, but now is our time. The time to fight for justice is now. You have got to feel the urgency of now! You have to find that thing that makes you so uncomfortable that you cannot stop yourself from being part of the solution. The thing that makes you MOVE.

And fear not, you won't do this by yourself. We will do it together and as long all of us move together, you see, we won't grow weary because we will be like a flock of geese going the distance in that V pattern and one of us will lead for as long as she can and then drop back to draft behind her family for as long as it takes for her to catch her breath so that she has the courage and strength to take the lead again in her turn.

And so, all of us moving together have a power we are only beginning to understand. I believe that our future is female. I believe that Women will lead. I believe that we are tired of being uncomfortable and that we are ready to move....and ours, ours is an uprising of decency, of integrity, of compromise and courage. Let us make sure that this chapter in American history comes to a swift end and in its place springs forth a hopeful and brilliant new beginning. This is our moment. I am proud to stand with you Charlotte.... I will not yield...Now, Let's get moving!!!



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