



Speech by Rip Rapson:

## **A tribute to Angela Blackwell, founder and president of PolicyLink**

April 12, 2018

*Remarks delivered at the PolicyLink annual conference on April 12, 2018*

In the immediate hours after the 2016 election, so many of us hoped that the vulgarity, bombastic certitude, and mean-spiritedness – indeed cruelty – of the campaign season would yield to the imperatives of shared problem-solving and mutual respect across party lines, across systems of belief, across all sectors of society.

Well, things didn't quite turn out that way.

We've instead been catapulted into an unending series of existential crises that force each of us to excavate the unalterable bedrock of our values, of our faith, of what we stand for.

It's impossible to overstate how blessed we have been to have Angela model just how that should be done.

She has helped all of us working for a just and equitable future to understand how profoundly the sonorous and diverse voices of community matter in an environment saturated with insomnia-induced tweets, bot-distributed misinformation, and troll-generated diversionary feints intended to lock our attention onto bits of data, alternative facts and other intellectual flotsam and jetsam that obscure the real issues of the day.

She has not only illuminated the power of fair and probing research and analysis, but has also constructed a machinery of amplification for stories of ordinary people working in dignity and conviction and authenticity to improve the economic, social and political conditions of community life.

She has worked tirelessly to jolt people out of a sense of defeatism to build and fortify the alliances necessary to speak and advance those truths that we know to be inviolable:

- Regional prosperity will be accomplished only through equitable, inclusive economic growth.
- Climate change is a social justice issue.
- The arts serve to refract cultural identity into a kaleidoscope of community-building possibilities.
- Moving upstream to eradicate the social, economic, and environmental determinants of health disparities is the only viable long-term approach public health.
- No city in America should tolerate the kind of investment redlining that substitutes a convenience store's soda and chips for an urban market's fresh food or a three-hour bus-ride to a minimum-wage job for a 10-minute walk to a neighborhood job that pays a living wage.

She has shown that justice doesn't, in Dr. King's phrase, roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but instead is forged by fortifying the sinews of social capital and the musculature of citizen-based problem-solving.

Passion and compassion, integrity and intellect, generosity and grace. We are so glad you aren't going far, Angela.

Thank you.