

Kevin de León Swearing-In Remarks

10/15/2020

Good Morning.

My name is Kevin de León.

Even though the pandemic continues to keep us from celebrating together - it was an honor to be sworn-in today as *your* Councilmember representing the 14th District of Los Angeles.

More than anything else - I am glad that we are in this together.

Because this unprecedented moment in our city's history requires us to collaborate with each other, support one another, and be there for each other on building a healthier and more equitable community.

Whether it's building housing for our unhoused neighbors, cleaning the dirty air we breathe, planting trees, or picking up the trash –

I believe *we* can build a better future...because *we* are from L.A.

We face adversity every single day...and every. single. day. we wake up with more resolve to overcome our challenges than we had the day before.

Just a few years back, I was born in Downtown Los Angeles – in the heart of this district – to a single, immigrant mother with a 3rd grade education who worked her fingers to the bone to raise her family.

She taught me the value of hard work, and why it's so important to stand up and speak out for what's right in our community.

I got my start at the corner of Whittier Blvd and Esperanza in CD 14 with One Stop Immigration Center, teaching English as a second language and U.S. history...

...I cut my political teeth organizing one of the biggest marches in state history against Prop 187 *right here in CD 14 as well - what was Brooklyn, now Cesar Chavez and Lorena, at Cinco Puntos...*

...and for the last 12 years – I've been representing you in *your* State Capitol.

During that time, we worked together to improve the quality of life for every single Angeleno, and for Californians across the state...

.....and we've taken a lot of heat for having the courage of our convictions to do what's right.

From the President's attacks on our progress in cleaning our air...

...To Jeff Sessions suing us all the way to the United States Supreme Court, trying to strike down our Sanctuary State law because we won't spend a single cent or lift a single finger to be a cog in the Trump deportation machine, tearing families apart –

...Even Wall Street came after us when we expanded retirement security - giving hardworking Angelenos a chance to retire with dignity.

Protecting families and fighting for everyone to have a fair shot at achieving their dreams is not a choice.

This is who we are. *These* are our values. As Angelenos. As Californians. As *Americans*.

Today we are facing a confluence of crises: the worst economic depression in our living memory, powered by a global pandemic that - on most days - feels endless.

Our city - and this district - has become ground zero for homelessness in America; where our neighbors, increasingly single mothers and children, live in tents and cardboard boxes –

– languishing in the shadows of skyscrapers and luxury high-rises.

Latino families and the poorest among us in every community are suffering disproportionately from COVID-19, experiencing extreme unemployment, displacement, and death.

The unfair and unjust enforcement of our laws is causing a great deal of unnecessary suffering; forcing us to reimagine the way we approach investments in our communities and in law enforcement.

Freeways cut through our backyards - more freeways than any other district in the city of Los Angeles: The 2, the 5, the 10 and the 60, the 101 the 110, the 134, the 210 and the 710...

...a hydra-headed serpent choking the air out of our childrens' lungs.

Children in impoverished homes are falling behind in school because they don't have access to the internet or a laptop computer - making it even more difficult to thrive with their own peers.

So the times are challenging, yes! But I believe we will use these great challenges to forge transformational change.

Before I go any further, let me share *this* with you:

Like many of you, I am a life-long renter.

As a child and teenager, my family rented rooms in other peoples' homes - basement apartments with padlocks on the door and landlords who would shout at my mother, demanding the rent.

Like many of you, we were just one stroke of bad luck away from living on the street.

We took nothing for granted, because we didn't always know where the next paycheck would come from.

So when I say I understand the challenges before us in a very personal way, and when I call for action to address these challenges with a sense of urgency and intentionality –

– I *mean* it.

Now when it comes to homelessness and housing affordability - what we are seeing in Los Angeles today is a modern-day human catastrophe. A dystopian nightmare – unlike anything we've seen before.

It's shocking. It's shameful.

We have a moral and human obligation to do better; to improve our collective quality of life - ensuring that everyone can afford to keep a roof over their head.

We must act *now*, which is why today I am announcing:

Homelessness Motions:

That at my first council meeting next week, I will introduce a motion instructing the City to partner with the County on the construction of more than 200 beds for unhoused Angelenos right here in Downtown LA.

Also on day one, I will instruct City departments to begin work on hundreds of transitional housing units across CD 14.

As we continue to use our authority as elected leaders to shape development in Los Angeles, we must recognize and address serious flaws in our current system.

Our current system lacks transparency, predictability and has created a breeding ground for consultants and others to abuse the system and inflate costs.

It's time to revamp our entire planning process to prioritize, accelerate and expand affordable housing throughout Los Angeles.

To get our planning back on track, I have already begun working with the City's Planning Department to trim away over 800 pages of convoluted and unnecessary code written decades ago.

We know the homelessness crisis is fueled by the lack of affordable housing in our communities; and the reason we're struggling to build enough of it, is because we're stuck using mid-century rules to build 21st century affordable housing.

By replacing cumbersome and outdated rules with clear guidelines that everyday Angelenos can understand, we will significantly increase transparency while reducing the cost of new construction.

It's time to do the hard work to prioritize affordable housing by introducing a resolution to create a pre-approval process that will accelerate the delivery of affordable housing at a fraction of the cost.

For too long, good projects have languished under the City's review, which adds months - if not *years* - to the process; inflating costs and delaying the promise of affordable housing.

Addressing our affordable housing crisis will help bolster diversity in our communities that we value so highly, protecting our neighbors from the threat of gentrification.

Latino, Black, and Asian Pacific Islander communities have always faced the threat of displacement, but this pandemic has only accelerated that process – highlighting the glaring inequalities built into our economy.

Since COVID-19 struck, the rich have gotten richer, and the poor have been forced to bear the brunt of the economic devastation, making impossible choices to risk their lives at work...risk eviction by staying home...leaving their city entirely...or worse - becoming homeless.

Essential workers are treated like expendable workers.

As we climb out of this historic recession we must build a better, cleaner, and most importantly equitable economy.

One starting point for building a just economy is to dramatically expand broadband access here in CD 14 to make sure every child has a chance to succeed alongside their classmates.

We can build a better future for all of us by making Los Angeles the epicenter of the clean energy revolution - investing in innovation to clean up the air we breathe - and create good-paying jobs in the process.

Our economy has always been dependent upon our incredible capacity for innovation and ingenuity - and getting Angelenos back to work during this incredibly difficult time will be no different.

But we've never been afraid of doing things on our own, and we are not about to start today.

We are here today because we've never accepted the status quo.

We don't normalize mediocrity, and we don't settle for half-measures to full-blown crises.

From Downtown to Boyle Heights, from Highland Park to Eagle Rock and El Sereno – we are going to re-imagine our communities in a way that benefits us *and* the rest of Los Angeles.

Six years ago today, not more than a stone's throw away from here at the Walt Disney Concert Hall, I had just been sworn in as the first Latino President of *your* California State Senate in more than 133 years.

Standing on that stage, with my left hand raised and my right hand on the Bible...I felt the great weight of responsibility settle on my shoulders;

responsibility for the lives and livelihoods of those I had been elected to represent.

But I was also struck by an overwhelming sense of hope for the future.

That no matter how rocky the path would become - we as a community would be able to achieve great progress –

– to transform the California dream from some unattainable aspiration into something all of us could reach out and take for ourselves.

Today - I feel that same, familiar combination of responsibility and hope as we look forward together into a future that only you and I have the power to shape.

My promise to you is this: starting on day one, my sole focus is to be a voice for the voiceless. To be the fighter you need to improve the human condition of all individuals - regardless of who you are and where you come from.

Regardless of who you love, regardless of the color of your skin, which God you pray to, and yes - your legal status.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for giving me the opportunity to work for each and every one of you, and I cannot wait to see what we will accomplish together.