

Good evening! Before I begin my address, I would like to first thank Dr. David Bailey for his service over the last 2 years as our President. To honor his service, the council has a gift we wish to present to him.

I stand here today humbled by the task of serving as the next President of our organization, grateful for the trust and friendship you have all bestowed, and mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors to get us to this present moment. I can stand here boldly tonight because I stand on the shoulders of giants, people who suffered so that future generations could obtain equitable opportunities regardless of their sex, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, or mental or physical ability status. Our organization, much like the rest of the United States, has a dark past where someone who looked like me would not have been allowed membership, much less the opportunity to become President. But look how far we have come! This doesn't mean that our task is over, however. We still have much work to do to reach our mission of being a fully inclusive and accepting organization. Yet, I believe that we are armed with the tools and resources to be the ones who the poet Adrienne Rich calls to "dive into the wreck." As scholars and ethical communicators, we must take up the messiness of the human condition.

Our vision as an organization is that students will have access to participation in a wide variety of speech and debate events and formats, speech and debate programs will be well-staffed and amply funded, teachers and scholars will have access to the resources necessary to maintain and advance forensic education, and scholarship and grant opportunities will be available to support individuals and programs in need. We have made several strides on this mission. However, we cannot fully realize this vision without each of you.

We have the task of engineering our new strategic plan that provides the vision for our future that will accomplish our purpose of being THE forensic leaders. This task should not and cannot be just for the National Council, but rather for the entire membership. It is my goal that we have active engagement and input from all of our members. We want input not just through email or conversations when we gather at tournaments and conventions, but active participation in our conference calls and work meetings.

As part of my presidency, it is my vision that we continue to strengthen our partnership with the NSDA as together we can connect, support, and inspire individuals at all levels to find their voice. However, in this process, we must remember what makes Pi Kappa Delta so great: our identity and rituals.

When I was introduced to this organization by my coach, Prof. Robert Markstrom at McNeese State University at the age of 16 (yes, I was a nerd), I immediately became inspired. Going through the chapter induction ceremony, learning about our practices, and attending my first NCT at Webster University in 2002 showed me what this activity could really do and that it was more than just trophies. The following year at my first convention at Morgan State University, I became the student at large representative and met people who changed my life. Having the opportunity to sit in meetings and give input from a student perspective with Dr. Susan Millsap, Dr. Nina-Jo Moore, Dr. Glenda Treadway, Dr. Bill Hill, Prof. Scott Jensen, and a host of others showed me how much more of an impact this activity can truly have. It was through their pouring of their time and wisdom into me that I found my calling as a forensic educator and for that I am forever thankful.

There is so much power inherent in this activity and our organization has led the charge in thinking of ways to extend our reach beyond the round. I returned to the National Council as an At-Large member 6 years ago and I was blessed with the unique opportunity to join with some of my college and graduate school friends, Ryan Louis and David Bailey. During our tenure on council, we have seen the creation of Persuasion Works, Interviewing, campus events like Young Yet Political, and a host of other non competition related activities because my colleagues and I strongly believe in the real world impacts of forensics. It is my goal to continue to innovate ways to better serve our students and community beyond just tournaments.

In our current political climate, there are consistent threats to ethical and inclusive speech and practices. From immigration to the dismantlement of social programs, we are surrounded by dangerous rhetoric and discriminatory practices. But we cannot lose faith. We must affirm and reaffirm the vision of our organization, “The Art of Persuasion, Beautiful and Just.” Our values are that we are committed to assuring equal opportunity to all persons. We are firmly opposed to all forms of discrimination and seek to encourage an atmosphere in which every individual is accorded respect. This is why I was proud to be a part of the

national council that under the leadership of Dr. David Bailey was the only national forensic organization that publically spoke out about executive orders that are not in line with our mission and vision of a just and beautiful world. As some of you know, immediately following the passage of the “travel ban,” I was returning on an international flight into JFK and was detained and searched. Several of my colleagues on council saw my angry and frankly hurt messages upon being released and we almost immediately got to work on how to respond to the discriminatory executive orders being signed. This wasn’t just about my experience but about the experiences and potential experiences that many within our community may have to endure. While some organizations decided to stay neutral, as a council we decided that neutrality was not our aim. There are some things that are not in line with our values and it is okay to boldly proclaim this.

Forensics teaches us to not only find but to also use our voices and bodies for advocacy. Personally, I use the skills and experiences I learned through this activity for the advancement of social justice.

As I close this speech, I’m going to do something a little unorthodox. Anyone that knows me or my teaching style knows that I love student

engagement. So when I ask my question, I want you all to stand and yell out your response.

What are you going to use your voice to advocate for?

This is the power of our activity and organization.