

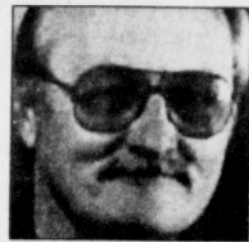
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# OPINION

## Obama's Battle Hymn of the Republic

Made me proud to be an American

BY DONALD KAUL  
THE PORTLAND  
OBSERVER



I don't think President Barack Obama gave a good inaugural address this time, I think it was a great one.

He began with the principles of freedom and equality that inform our founding document, the Declaration of Independence, and followed our journey through the many struggles we've undertaken to make those principles manifest — Seneca Falls, Selma, Stonewall.

Obama made glancing reference to Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, as well as Martin Luther King's speech on the other end of the Mall more than 40 years ago, and echoed John F. Kennedy's words of resolve.

He embraced Franklin D. Roosevelt's idea of government as an engine of progress and paid homage to the women's movement and its continuing fight for equal treat-

ment. He sounded determined to do something about climate change, the growing divide between the very rich and the rest of us, reforming our broken immigration system, and reinforcing voting rights.

And he tied it together under one phrase: "Preserving our individual freedom ultimately requires collective action."

After three decades of being fed the lie that government isn't the solution but rather the problem, it was a gust of fresh air to hear a president sound like an unapologetic liberal.

That theme was struck immediately when the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir started things off with a rousing rendition of "Battle Hymn of the Republic," the anthem of the Union forces during the Civil War. I can only imagine how that sounded to the southern Republicans, who have done their best to thwart Obama's leadership at every turn.

It was as if he said: "We not only won the damn election, we won the damn war. It's about time you got used to it."

Was it a conciliatory speech? Of course not. He tried that once,

remember? All he got for it from the Republicans was implacable hostility, unyielding obstructionism, and insults.

This speech, elegant in its phrasing and majestic in its arc, planted Obama's battle flag on the Capitol steps. Up until now, the Republi-

can haven't shown much respect for our president. They have made it clear that they think he's a push-over. They might be having second thoughts.

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Some have said that this marks

the end of the era of Ronald Reagan. God, I hope so. Conservatives have raised Reagan to mythical status, endowing him with virtues he would not have claimed for himself.

I was in Washington during the first Reagan inauguration and it was quite a spectacle. Every limousine

up and down the East Coast was commandeered for the event. You saw them everywhere, disgorging ladies in fur coats and men in formalwear. I felt as though I were witnessing a coronation in a for-

eign country.

For all his posturing, it was Reagan who sold the Republicans on the idea that it was OK to have a big government, so long as you didn't pay for it.

Since then, they seem to have realized that you can only work that scam for so long, so conservatives now want to cut government, particularly as it pertains to the poor, the young, and the old, all the while maintaining the privileges granted to the rich and powerful.

They're having a tough time selling that formula. That's what the election was about. We'll see whether Obama can make good on the implicit promises of his speech or whether the congressional proxies of the oligarchs who own our society can hold him off.

The election in 2014 will help answer that question.

As for myself, I had a great time hearing Obama's speech. It made me proud to be an American. I love this country. For all of its flaws and warts and unfulfilled promises, I wouldn't be a citizen of any other.

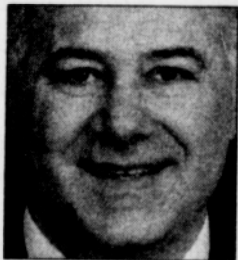
*OtherWords columnist Donald Kaul lives in Ann Arbor, Mich.*

## Creating a Pathway to Economic Justice

Invest in career and technical education

BY BRAD AVAKIAN

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. dedicated his life to economic and social justice. Today,



we celebrate his legacy of service not just against the most insidious forms of discrimination, but also as a pioneer in the fight to recognize the dignity of all labor.

In his last Southern Christian Leadership Conference address, Dr. King noted that "the problems of housing and education,

instead of preceding the elimination of poverty, will themselves be affected if poverty is first abolished. The poor transformed

into purchasers will do a great deal on their own to alter housing decay.... The dignity of the individual will flourish when the decisions concerning his life are in his own hands, when he has the means to seek self-improvement."

Today, more Oregonians enjoy greater access to economic opportunity because of Dr. King's work, yet too many workers still face unlawful discrimination, lower wages and barriers to employment and housing.

As a former civil rights attorney in private practice — and today, as Oregon's Labor Commissioner enforcing the state's civil rights laws — I've worked to aggressively protect the rights of Oregon workers.

But breaking the barriers of discrimination alone will not end the cycle of poverty. We must build a foundation of true equality in which all Oregonians enjoy access to a quality education and living wage job.

Oregon can provide greater opportunity for students and young people by investing in career and technical education in our middle schools and high schools. In fact, the greatest investment we can

make to create a vibrant, more just economy for the next generation of leaders is to ensure that Oregonians throughout the state enjoy access to 21st Century shop classes.

Employers consistently tell me that their workforce needs are not being met because they can't find workers with the applicable skills. We need to reverse the disinvestment in the shop classes and vocational training that were once a staple in Oregon public schools.

With smart, cost-effective investments in Oregon's workforce, we can not only prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow, but also help employers looking to fill well-

paying — but difficult to fill — positions today.

Dr. King believed that one of life's most urgent and persistent questions was: "What are you doing for others?"

As a state, we should ask ourselves what we are doing for Oregon students and workers and recommit ourselves to investing in a more equitable and prosperous future.

Restoring modernized shop classes and practical applications of classroom learning can create a pathway to economic justice and opportunity for Oregon students and communities.

*Brad Avakian is Oregon Labor and Industries Commissioner.*

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