Good morning everyone and let me also welcome you to WRAG’s 2018 Annual Meeting and more specifically to this, our business meeting.

It was twelve years ago that I welcomed you to my first WRAG Annual Meeting. We were at the Marvin Center of George Washington University. No business meeting then, just the luncheon. Ralph Smith from the Annie E. Casey Foundation was our speaker. I was nervous. I had joined the staff in September so I was just two months into the job. I’m nervous today too. This is my last chance to get it right. I want to make sure that I fully respect and reflect the journey that WRAG has been on – our evolution from a traditional membership organization, one only serving the needs of the membership, to an organization that continues to serve its membership while also being a thought leader in addressing the needs of the region.

Let me begin by giving you a brief review of WRAG in 2018 –
We started the year with the launch of the Cafritz Lecture on Philanthropy. Rukaiyah Adams was a powerful lead for this series, speaking on the need for congruence between the investment and programmatic sides of the philanthropic house. We brought back Richard Rothstein, who you heard at last year’s business meeting, as a Brightest Minds speaker to discuss residential segregation and its impact. Richard’s work revealed a reality that had been unseen. We co-sponsored with Leadership Greater Washington, Expanding the Table for Racial Equity and, also with LGW hosted a civil rights journey that many called transformational. We had the largest class EVER for the Institute for Corporate Social Responsibility with our partners Johns Hopkins and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. And we launched our latest working group on census 2020.

2018 was a good year and I am proud of all that we did.
Now comes the hard part. It is my responsibility, at this moment, to talk about our plans for the future. Well … I can’t exactly do that, but let me share what I do know and talk some about what I hope WRAG, and the local philanthropic community, will consider in the future.

2019 will, of course, be a year of transition, but there will be some infrastructure stability that should not be minimized. WRAG has a phenomenal staff.
Let me take a minute here to thank the WRAG team. Most aren’t in the room now, but I still want to say their names and thank -- Gretchen, Katherine, Katy, Kendra, Nia, Rebekah, and Rita. These are the people who led all of the efforts that I just described and so many others that time doesn’t allow me to list.

WRAG also has a strong board of directors that you were just introduced to. That strong core of staff and board will be essential for easing the entry of the new leader. Not only will there be a new president, there will be a new strategic plan. Over the course of the year, your input will be sought, in many ways, I suspect, to shape the manner in which WRAG supports the membership and the region in years to come. There will also be a greater depth to our work on racial equity. We are in the process of concluding an internal audit on our organizational adherence to policies and practices that promote racial equity. Based on that report that goes to our board in December, there are likely to be some adjustments to our internal operations. Right now, we know that we will be working with the working groups, the affinity groups, and the Washington AIDS Partnership to offer suggestions as to how they might do their work with an even stronger racial equity lens. With seven other partner organizations, we hope that 2019 will be the year in which we will host a major regional summit on Race, Racism and the Future of Greater Washington. WRAG will kick off our programming in 2019 just as we did in 2018 with the Cafritz Lecture on Philanthropy. Next year’s speaker will be Grant Oliphant, the President of Heinz Endowments. In responding to a January 2018 editorial, Oliphant said “To excuse racism in the name of politics, to attempt to dress it up in fancy clothes and camouflage it, is to condone it.” In much of his writing and work, he urges philanthropy to be bold. I believe that will be his message next year.

And that is my message today.

Today, I am asking you to be bold. I want you to consider four areas – two that I think may be new in your thinking and two others that I hope you will take to the next level. I have been thinking about them for a while.

**The two new areas -- first, the 5% rule – Can we start to think of it as a floor, not as a ceiling?**

It might be interesting to have a conversation with your board about why the foundation invests in the community at the minimal level. What are the drivers for that decision? Has it ever been discussed? What change could you see or seed if the foundation decided to make a larger investment? A few years ago, the Council of Michigan Foundations, WRAG’s colleague organization in Michigan, studied payout rates and determined that if they were higher, they would defeat the primary purpose of foundations that of serving a stated social good in perpetuity. Interesting. Is existing in perpetuity truly the primary purpose of foundations? Is it better for funds to be available in perpetuity to meet the needs of the homeless or is it better to invest higher sums in addressing the causes of homelessness? My point simply is to have the conversation and make a conscious decision. Perpetuity or greater impact?

And, let’s not forget that other 95% that you hold. Are you looking at PRIs and other forms of impact investing designed to both bring in a profit while also addressing societal needs?
The second new area: Foster care – When was the last time that you even thought about the child welfare system – foster care, adoption and child abuse prevention?

At the last WRAG board meeting, I shared with the board my concern about the lack of philanthropic commitment to improvements in child welfare. Since the closing of the Freddie Mac Foundation years ago now, philanthropic support for comprehensive child welfare programming has dwindled significantly, but the needs of these children remain, perhaps unseen, but they remain. There are close to 450,000 children in foster care in this country with the number increasing every year since 2012. There is good news. Some children return to biological parents or families that are now stable or they are adopted. But for those that age out of foster care at age 18 or 21, depending on the state, the outcomes aren’t as positive. According to the Chapin Hall Center on Children, at the University of Chicago, within one year of aging out of foster care, 24% are homeless and within two years, 50% were in prison. I believe that the needs of children who are the wards of the state or who are in abusive environments remain unseen to many. I hope this community will begin to think more actively about the children in the child welfare system.

Now to the two areas on which I hope you will deepen your commitment. First, affordable housing – That term has to mean more than rental units

I am immensely proud of what WRAG has done – with the support of many of you in the room today – to preserve and produce affordable rental units. That is important work that I hope continues. I also hope that when we use the term “affordable housing,” we will begin to also mean affordable homes that can be purchased by firefighters and school teachers, police officers and store managers.

I have tried to learn why affordable homes for purchase aren’t being developed in our region. I talked with bankers, developers, and housing advocates. “The federal government used to subsidize the development of affordable houses,” one banker told me. “When they stopped, it just wasn’t practical to keep building these properties.” “What about condos?” I asked when a developer told me that land was just too expensive in our region. “We can’t depend on lower-income people being able to pay the condo fee,” was his response. No matter where I asked, roadblocks were the answer.

I refuse to believe that American ingenuity can’t solve this problem. What would happen if experts on land use joined with architects and builders, housing policy wonks, bankers, and community organizers to figure out how to produce affordable houses for lower-income people in the Greater Washington region? I don’t mean the poorest of the poor, but for people whose incomes would probably be considered middle class in many parts of the country. What would it take to get people from various disciplines to actually come together? What would catalyze such a conversation?

I think it would take something like an X Prize.

I believe that the simple act of enabling affordable home ownership in the Greater Washington region has to be seen as a Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal and that a large sum of money has to be put on the table for an innovative team to solve it. We like to celebrate the number of people with advanced degrees who live in our region. We talk a lot about our knowledge economy. Nineteen institutions of higher learning are located here. And, a year or so ago, I attended a meeting at which this region was touted as being more entrepreneurial than Silicon Valley based on the number of new ventures birthed here. We have the knowledge and we have the need. We can be a model for the country.
Now, lastly: Racial equity –

Some might think that this would be the easiest topic for me to talk about, but it isn’t. This is the topic that affects me, and I think our country, most deeply. As many of you know, I have been a nonprofit exec for a long time. I thought of myself as just that -- a nonprofit leader -- and tried to ably fill that role. I talked about why we shouldn’t call nonprofits nonprofits – I sure didn’t win that battle even though I still like the term social profits. I joined with colleagues to develop a legislative strategy, a communications strategy and a grassroots strategy when the nonprofit sector was threatened by Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae being put in conservatorship. I brought in speakers to talk about compensation and overhead. I felt it was my responsibility to be focused on the sector.

It wasn’t until the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012 that I saw myself as a black leader of a nonprofit. And, not just any nonprofit, but a nonprofit with a voice and with a powerful platform. It wasn’t until that horrific event that I was so affected to my core that I knew that I had to raise my voice and use that platform for what I thought was a significantly overlooked reality in our country, and in our region.

It took a few years, but ultimately we led an incredible body of work focused on race and racism of which I am very proud. I believe that you – the philanthropic leaders in this region -- took the bold step of naming racism. Then you committed to learning how structural racism and implicit bias, in particular, impact the issues of greatest concern to you. A brief snapshot of the impact two years later is in this year’s Giving Report – a copy is in your bag. Some of you changed your giving, and so many of you committed to increased learning – up an amazing 143% since 2016 when we first asked the question. You committed to grantmaking using a racial equity lens or to internal reviews or deep conversations with your staffs, your grantees, your trustees and just your general community about our failure – our country’s failure – to examine race and racism. The lack of conversations – and action -- has led us to a place where African-Americans rank the highest or the lowest – whichever is worse – on so many indicators of well-being. And, it has been like that for so long that many have been lulled into thinking that there must be something wrong with this community of people, there must be deficits that are ingrained. It must be their fault.

It isn’t. There have been systematic efforts in housing that you learned about from Richard Rothstein or in education or in the manner in which the criminal justice system deepens the consequences for some crimes, but not for others. The stress of living while black in America has increased the likelihood of black people having high blood pressure and of suffering from a host of maladies occurring because of the toxic nature of where some are forced to live, often without the ability to access quality health care. Racism in America is real. The consequences are deep and long lasting.

You have taken so many important steps to learn and to act over the last two years. But your work has just begun. Next year is the 400th anniversary of the occasion of the first Africans being brought in chains to Jamestown, Virginia. If you simply base time on 1619 to 1954, the year of the Brown vs Board of Education decision, there have been 335 years of enslavement and Jim Crow segregation. 335 years of messages about the inferiority of black people, the criminality of black people, the instability of the black family and I could go on and on. We -- all of us -- know the narratives. There is so much to unlearn and so much of the contributions of black people -- and their challenges -- that most people know very little about – that history, those contributions are often unseen. We simply weren’t taught it. Many of us had our eyes opened and our hearts wrenched as we participated recently in an incredibly moving and
meaningful exploration of locales of the civil rights movement. The words of our guides – people who were there – gave a depth of meaning that couldn’t have been achieved just from reading of book.

I applaud the learning and action journey that you are on – that many of us are on. I have thought of the process of working toward racial equity as a marathon, but it’s more than that. It’s a marathon and a relay race. No one group – and certainly no one individual – has the stamina to do this for long. It is exhausting, but it is also the work of our lifetimes. Soon I will leave my role as an advocate for this work at WRAG. I urge you to continue. You must continue. You have sparked an effort that has to be fueled constantly, but this light cannot go out. Our country – our region -- will never achieve its potential without this work being core to all that you do.

My hope for this philanthropic community is that you embrace your ability to be change agents, that you stop to look at what you’ve always done and consider if you always have to do it that way, and that you continue to be bold and fearless.

Thank you for the incredible opportunity of leading this organization.