

**George W. Romney Administrator of the Year Speech**  
**Remarks by Deborah Tucker**  
**April 13, 2023**

No doubt others who have received this recognition were surprised to be so honored. I am humbled by their accomplishments and proud to be among their company, especially coming, as I do, from the nonprofit community. However, it is clear to me that in the efforts to end domestic and sexual violence, as well as other forms of oppression and indignity, partnerships across sectors and information from all perspectives are needed to overcome the myriad of challenges.

I thank my friends and colleagues who have joined us here who have no doubt similar stories to mine or my dear friend Kit Gruelle, who came into this work from personal experiences with a husband who used violence. Some came to it by understanding how widespread interpersonal violence is and could well be connected to other forms of violence. Whatever brought us, it won't release us until we've done what we can. Thank you, Kit, and staff from the two coalitions in Utah working to end sexual and domestic violence. Please stand, and I hope all will join me in applauding their dedication and avocation.

When I learned about the use of violence, I was in college and volunteered at the first rape crisis center formed in Texas, among perhaps the first 30 in the nation. I'm of the age that women who were college-educated most likely would become teachers or nurses, and knowing I'm a night person, I decided that nurses sometimes had to be at work at 7 and teachers at 8:30, so I better pick that!

As the first person in my family to graduate from college, I was not prepared for that fundamental decision or much of what came after through the next few years. I ended up teaching at the Austin State School for the Mentally Retarded in the Deaf-Blind Project for one year while volunteering nights and weekends at the rape crisis center in Austin, which I read about in the student newspaper, *The Daily Texan*.

Over time, I became the Assistant Director of the Austin Rape Crisis Center and served with a group determined to open a shelter for women and children who needed safety from a person using violence. We were able to accomplish that in record time due to the support of our community. The City Council gave us the facility for \$1.00/year. The County Commissioner matched an \$18,000 operating grant from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. When we opened with 14 beds and 2 cribs, we thought we were in high cotton!

A few months later, after operating almost exclusively with volunteers, we secured a large grant that permitted us to hire three of us to work there full-time. Not too long after, I came to the realization that I needed to learn much more about the administration of a nonprofit and enrolled in the Master's in Public Administration Program at Texas State University. There, I found that the curriculum was geared mostly toward government employees and worked with the professors to re-establish an advisory committee of students interested in many different subsequent careers, which I chaired. Together, we were able a few years later to create a nonprofit track in the TSU MPA Program. An honor that I hold dear is being selected as a Distinguished Alumna of the College of Liberal Arts at Texas State University in 2014.

As I explored more of the public policy challenges, I was exposed to many people of varied backgrounds, professions, and approaches to problem-solving. Attitudes about men, women, and beliefs about violence were complex, overlapping, and sometimes insulting. It was difficult to maintain my adopted “Southern Belle School of Lobbying” approach in the face of comments like, “Well, isn’t it true, Ms. Tucker, that women lie about rape just to get someone in trouble?”

It helped me that I am patient most of the time and able to understand that people adopt ill-formed attitudes and beliefs when not aware of the realities. Some of the legislators I worked with early on and policymakers in other roles in government, such as the courts, law enforcement, or state agencies, were simply operating out of a lack of knowledge. Yes, I know there are some who continue to believe in certain entitlements, but committing physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or violence to others will end as we work together.

While we have not yet, in the United States or elsewhere in the world, ended the use of sexual violence, there is a universal discussion that has arisen through the ME TOO! Movement that is heartening. Hopefully we will soon reach that crescendo where all are united in agreeing that the use of sexual violence, whether against a partner, a child, or a stranger, is unthinkable.

We did see progress in reducing child abuse and domestic violence; however, the pandemic brought the incidence numbers back up, so much work remains. There are people every day who still choose to use it. Those we seek to cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate with are beginning to understand that to end the use of violence, we must both challenge the person using it to acknowledge their behavior and encourage them to take personal responsibility to change it. That is easier said than done! We also must build communities where these beliefs are widely held and we never again hear, “Well, what did you do or say that made him so mad he hit you?” OR “Well, what were you wearing when you said he raped you?”

Meanwhile, we must provide ways to ameliorate the pain and suffering of the victims and assist them to achieve safety and well-being in the aftermath. We have also had to acknowledge that despite our efforts to change laws, policies, and professional practice guidance in a variety of fields, we still lose about 2,000 women a year to murder committed by their husband or partner, most often using a gun. Most of these murders are preventable. Reports of sexual assault continue to rise.

What has decreased significantly is the number of men who used violence or abuse against family members who were not killed in self-defense. Women and children are leaving those who abuse and seeking safety through personal networks or the family violence shelter centers now across the country, rather than having to kill to protect themselves and their children. Some of those have told us they left because they knew it had reached the stage where they would have to kill or be killed. I was pleased to read of the increased funding provided during this recent legislative session in Utah and saw that as a good sign of willingness to address the complexities.

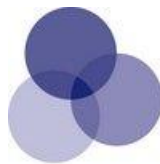
In fatality reviews conducted on family violence homicides, we see some of the time that no one, including the victim, expected the lethal use of force, and most had no contact with any of the professional interventions now available through domestic violence programs, the criminal justice system, or even the ways in which physicians, religious leaders, and other helping professionals who are now being trained to recognize and respond could help. Too many still slip

through the cracks, and therefore the person using violence is not challenged and offered an opportunity to learn more about themselves and take responsibility to stop the abuse. We at the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence use the “5 Things to Say” as most are unsure how to start these conversations. I’ll ask Rob to share that with all of you.

My hope is that with our increased investment in battering intervention and prevention programs, we can end the use of domestic violence. Were we to have a generation or two raised without violence, we’d also see an end to sexual violence, racially based harm, and other forms of seeing people as less. I believe that all these forms of hatred and violence are interconnected and fuel one another in ways it’s hard to distinguish, but the more we learn, the more we see.

I am optimistic that we are on the way, and I thank you for recognizing the importance of what we are doing with this award. I have always gone by the motto, “Share What You Have; Ask for What You Need.” None of us can do it alone, and we will do it together.

Deborah D. Tucker, President



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