

Good evening. I am honored to speak tonight on the post-election future of women's leadership. This year and election have been unlike most others, for so many reasons, but for one, days after election day, we're only now learning who the next President of the United States will be come January, and that we've finally elected the first woman, and woman of color, as Vice President.

However, since you are all probably exhausted from election coverage, I want to instead focus my sermon on one of my professional heroes, the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

As I'm sure you know, Justice Ginsberg served on the Supreme Court for 27 years, with her tenure ending with her death at sunset as Rosh Hashanah began. With all of the uncertainty we are facing right now, in politics and amidst a pandemic, I find comfort in looking to Justice Ginsberg's lifetime of leadership and service to guide me, to guide us all, as we navigate forward, particularly past this divisive election. So this talk is organized around her quotes.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg often said: "My mother told me to be a lady. And for her, that meant be your own person, be independent."

My grandmother, my Bubbe, was Fannie Herman Miller. She taught at this Religious School for 45 years. And she was a lady. She raised four children as Jews here in Lexington during a time often as tumultuous as this one. At a time when most women worked in the home, she was a professor at the University of Kentucky, mentoring other women. She raised my mother, Faith Miller Cole, and my aunt, Samye Miller Stith, to be bold and to make waves, or what some might call "good trouble" – and in that way, to be ladies. And whether that meant becoming the Director of Corporate Communications at Kentucky Utilities in the early 90s, like my mother, or President of the Temple Board and former Chair of the Human Rights Commission, like my Aunt Samye, we were not raised to sit back. Nor can women sit back as we move forward through the rest of 2020 and beyond. We must be independent, we must know our goals, we must take direct action to meet them, not only professionally, but within our families and our communities.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was quoted as saying: "Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time."

There are no quick fixes. There is so much broken in the world right now. But without ceasing, we keep moving forward. When Justice Ginsburg went to Harvard Law School, there were very few women in her class. Yet only two generations later, no one blinked an eye when I said I wanted to go to law school, and it is my fervent prayer that someday it won't be revolutionary, or a first, for a woman to be not only Vice President, but President of the United States. I look at the daughters of my friends, at Jonathan and Sarah Bronner's daughter Ari, at Jill and Dave Angelucci's daughters Paige and Leah, as well as your daughters and granddaughters. And I hope they will grow up knowing that they can be anything and anyone they want to be, without fear and without limit.

But we build this change one step at a time. We bring our daughters, and our sons, with us to vote for women to lead in our government and for men who understand the importance of women to our families, communities, and society. From the beginning of our children's lives, it is our responsibility to set examples for them to follow. So no matter what the result of this election is, change will follow. And hopefully our children will be that change, with us standing behind them, and our parents behind us. One step at a time.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg said: "Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you."

This election week has been a whirlwind for me, and I will tell you all honestly that this talk was mostly written between the hours of 2A and 6A, and mere hours before I was meant to give it I was still revising it. Just this morning, while editing my talk, I learned that former Vice President Biden had overtaken President Trump in the vote total in Georgia. It appears the Congressional district that tipped the outcome, fittingly, belonged to the late civil rights legend John Lewis. In addition to his trail blazing civil rights work, I believe another reason Joe Biden and Kamala Harris won the State of Georgia is because of the well-coordinated voter registration effort, led by Stacey Abrams.

Her story is Shakespearean in nature. An attorney by training like Justice Ginsburg and a former Georgia state representative, Abrams ran for governor in Georgia in 2018. She narrowly lost that race to Brian Kemp because of what was widely reported to be racially motivated voter suppression. According to the Associated Press investigation on the eve of the election (though I have to admit my source material on this is much less highbrow – Vogue. I am who I am), then Georgia Secretary of State Kemp mass cancelled more than a million voter registrations between 2012 and 2018 and in the run-up to the tight gubernatorial race, froze an estimated 53,000 registrations, a majority of them belonging to African American voters.

Abrams lost by less than 55,000 votes. And when she did, she told a reporter, "I sat shiva for ten days. Then I started plotting."

Abrams fought hard. Voter suppression had been a concern for her for years. In 2013, as a member of the state legislature, she created a voter-registration non-profit called the New Georgia Project, which completed 86,000 new voter applications. But after her loss, Abrams became one of the country's preeminent voting rights activists. She began a new non-profit called Fight Fair to combat voter suppression. Through this organization, Abrams tripled Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander voter turnout and doubled youth participation in Georgia. As noted in Vogue in 2019, "She inspired 1.2 million Black Democrats in Georgia to vote for her (more than the total number of Democratic gubernatorial voters in 2014) and "gained the highest percentage of the state's white Democratic voters in a generation."

Building on this effort, Abrams and Fair Fight have registered a staggering estimated 800,000 new voters since 2018 and curbed suppressive policies like "exact match," which

required voter registrations to match voters' licenses down to the hyphen, or risk being tossed out.

Stacey Abrams is part of the bright future of women, and a noble example of someone, like RBG, who has fought deeply for something important and leading in a way that inspires hundreds of thousands of people to join her.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was: "a very strong believer in listening and learning from others."

It appears that women across America are listening to everything happening within the political realm and are learning from one another. The Brookings Institute declared 2020 "the year of the woman voter" because, based on its research, the gender realignment of American politics is the biggest change in party affiliation since the movement by local Democratic voters to the GOP in the "solid south" at the end of the twentieth century. But why? This gender realignment appears to be fueled by misogynistic behavior of some current leaders, who have continually attacked successful women or women of color or even female reporters.

And women across America listened, learned and took action. While suburban women voters helped push the current Administration to victory in 2016, they helped his opponent in 2020. Even President Trump recognized this with his recent public plea, "Suburban Women, will you please like me. Please. Please." But, as reported by the New York Times, many women had listened and were disturbed by what they heard, particularly regarding how he talked about and treated women and by his Administration's child separation policy. They – we – listen. And we learn.

Across the country, parts of the Republican Party also listened to the broader call for greater diversity and inclusion of women within their ranks, and responded to that. And voters supported that. For example, former journalist Maria Elvira Salazar unseated Democrat Donna Shalala in Florida's 27th District. Yvette Herrell, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, beat incumbent Xochitl Torres Small in New Mexico's 2nd District and will be the first Native American Republican woman in Congress. So far, it appears that the number of female Republicans who will serve in the next Congress – 31 – surpasses the previous high of 30, set in 2006. There will also be 96 female Democrats in Congress.

We listen. We learn. We take action.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg said: "Women belong in all places where decisions are being made."

I was raised here in Lexington, then moved to Chicago and lived there a long time, and have been back in Kentucky for eight years. I was a criminal prosecutor in Chicago, and was lucky enough to be trained by countless incredible advocates for justice, many of whom were women. I was scared, coming back to Kentucky and having been away for so long, that I would not be able to find a strong mentor to guide me. That ended up being

ridiculous. As it turns out, Lexington and Kentucky have many women leaders who have not pulled the ladder up behind them, but instead all too often are willing to extend a hand downwards to pull their fellow women up.

Lexington's mayor is Linda Gordon. On the judicial bench in Fayette County we have many smart, strong women including Judge Lindsay Thurston, Judge Melissa Moore Murphy, Judge Kimberly Bunnell, and Judge Lucy Van Meter, to name a few. I was lucky enough to work for our Commonwealth's Attorney here, Lou Anna Red Corn, and her first Assistant, Kimberly Henderson Baird. And at the highest level of Kentucky government is Lt. Governor Jaqueline Coleman and Chief of Staff and General Counsel LaTasha Buckner. We are blessed to have these incredible women leaders in places where decisions are being made. Kentucky is living this vision of Justice Ginsburg's.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg said the following: "I am a judge born, raised, and proud of being a Jew. The demand for justice runs through the entirety of the Jewish tradition. I hope, in my years on the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States, I will have the strength and the courage to remain constant in the service of that demand."

Justice Ginsburg reportedly rarely attended services, but was passionate about Judaism's call for justice. In a 2018 interview with the Jewish Daily Forward, Justice Ginsburg said she grew up in the shadow of World War II and the Holocaust and that it left a deep and lasting imprint on her. "She saw being a Jew as having a place in society in which you're always reminded you are an outsider, even when she, as a Supreme Court Justice, was the ultimate insider," said Jane Eisner, the editor of the Jewish Daily Forward. "That memory of it – even if it's more from the part – informed what she thought society should be doing to protect other minorities."

This message informs all of us as we move forward past this election. We all need to protect and advocate for each other. As women, Americans, Jews – we have a duty to heal this broken world. Through our words and our actions.

We – women and men alike – must be strong and independent; listening and learning, fighting and leading for change one step at a time and for the idea that women, and Jews, belong in all places where decisions are being made.

I will continue to be guided by Justice Ginsburg, by our local political and faith leaders, and by all of you. One step at a time, we can – and must – come together, for our children and our grandchildren. That is my prayer. Thank you.