

You have been sitting through a very long program this evening, and to get you out of here on time, I promised to limit my remarks to a very brief string of unrelated and inconsequential comments. Does this remind you of any happenings in our political lives?

It has been a grueling year.

World economic circumstances, the behavior of certain greedy individuals and financial systems, the spectacle of partisan bickering over a comprehensive national health plan, the shenanigans of our State Senate, reductions in philanthropic and foundation giving.....It could put you in the mind of Lily Tomlin who once noted that “no matter how cynical you get, it is impossible to keep up.”

I had planned to present a string of facts and supporting data that would vividly portray our circumstances and lay out the serious challenge before us. But you, of all people, do not need to be reminded of the work that is facing us and that we are committed to undertake together.

I want instead, to focus on the positive, on the strides we have made and on the people who are walking with us on that long march. Does it get any better than the array of honorees we have tonight? All of them have identified ways of fighting for hope in the face of barriers that seemed insurmountable. How encouraging is it that The Coalition’s Center for Rehabilitation and Recovery is honored by the arrival of such a distinguished apostle of hope? How heartening that the members of this Coalition struggle through the burdens of funding cuts, policy curve balls, regulations and mandates; and still manage to provide real support to real people who are helped by your heroic efforts.

Dear friends, colleagues, fellow advocates, guests of honor, fellow travelers in government and the many human services sectors, you are the reason for spotlighting hope in the midst of struggle and daily tests of our will and capacities. Like President Obama, I will assert that “there has never been anything false about hope.” Oscar Wilde

has shown us that while “we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.”

I have some words of praise and thanks for The Coalition’s star gazers. Our work could not be possible without them. They are colleagues, a work family; THE force that keeps us plugging away at hope. Please stand as I call your name. Patricia Gallo Goldstein, our Deputy ED (with whom I share a single brain, but she got the greater share), Doris Dieckhoff, our Director of Finance and Administration, Karyn Krampitz, Heather Mermel, Jason Lippman, Aaron Vieira, Marc Kutner, Marie Sabatino, Chris Bianchi, Deborah Short, Pat Feinberg, Amy Smiley, Nanci Bradshaw. Let me speak a special note of gratitude for Gene Aronowitz, who has labored to guide the Center for the last eight months and help lead the search for a new Director. Thanks also to our right hands in Albany, Cynthia Dames and Jim Lytle.

All of you deserve our biggest thanks. I am lucky to be your colleague, coworker and collaborator.

Our final note of hope tonight is the brief premiere launch of “Where It’s At,” our new web based resource for youth in transition—a tangible result of our intensive project focusing on helping these special young people to make a hopeful future for themselves.

Curtain up!