

# Speech by Anthony M. Kennedy at Sunnylands on Civic Discourse

Thank you very much for that kind introduction. It is an honor to be here at Sunnylands, a place dedicated to the spirit of public service, and to have the opportunity to speak about civic discourse.

When I was growing up, civic discourse was a way of life. It was a time when people of differing views could come together to engage in conversation, to debate ideas, and to seek common ground. It was a time when civility and respect were the hallmarks of our political and social discourse.

Today, unfortunately, our public discourse has become polarized and divisive. Too often, we hear harsh and disrespectful language, personal attacks, and ad hominem arguments. We see a lack of civility and an unwillingness to engage in reasoned debate.

This trend is troubling, not just because it makes our political and social discourse less productive, but also because it undermines the very foundation of our democracy. Democracy requires that we have a shared commitment to the values and principles that underpin our system of government. It requires that we be willing to engage in reasoned debate and compromise to find common ground.

So, what can we do to restore civility and respect to our public discourse? I believe that we must begin by recognizing that our fellow citizens who hold different views are not our enemies. They are our fellow Americans, with whom we share a common heritage and a common destiny.

We must also recognize that civility and respect are not signs of weakness, but rather signs of strength. They allow us to engage in meaningful dialogue and to find common ground.

Finally, we must recognize that democracy is not a spectator sport. It requires active participation from all of us. We must be willing to engage in the hard work of civic engagement, to listen to others with an open mind, and to be willing to change our views if the evidence warrants it.

In conclusion, I would like to quote the great Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who once said, "The best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the

competition of the market." This competition requires civility, respect, and reasoned debate. It requires that we be willing to engage with those who hold different views, to listen to their arguments, and to respond with reason and evidence.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak here today, and for your commitment to the spirit of public service that Sunnylands embodies.