This award, initiated in my name, fills me with pride and validation that our hope lies with the people who have the vision, the courage, and the hard work to change the world. My successes have not been mine alone, but have emerged from the partnerships I’ve had with the women and men who saw beyond ego and recognition to applaud our joint efforts, who worked in solidarity to support and cultivate our collective creativity and ideas.

We have no idea what the world as we know it, and American society in particular, would look like if women were equally represented in power positions that control wealth and influence. We’ve had decades of effort and some limited success along the way, but no sustained universal shift in the ways our culture assigns privilege based on gender.

One of the most difficult barriers to overcome is our own complacency with our good intentions. We are, after all, convinced of our regard and love for women. We all have women in our lives who we love and who are central to our sense of ourselves--our mothers, daughters, sisters, girlfriends, grandmothers, aunts, nieces, grandchildren, friends--and because we are comfortable with our own sincerity, we know that we mean well and do the best we can.

Our socialization and the value we place on accepted norms, however, keep us from critically acknowledging our own biases. We are much more apt to do the things that make us feel good than we are to challenge what feels unjust and face the rebukes so quick to come our way. It is so easy to be misunderstood when the world is framed for us in neat categories and so difficult to find nonbinary pathways to real understanding and support of the complex lived and gender identities unique to all individuals. We compartmentalize our human categories and increasingly polarize them. We seek simple answers to complex problems and we look to the support of those who reinforce what we intuitively know to be true. We fine tune and critique those we agree with and rage against those who
challenge our world views. We achieve minor successes, label them best practices, and then hold future efforts to a standard that has yet to produce necessary, sustainable change.

Over my life and career, I’ve discovered many truths. Let me share just a few:

- We learn more from our mistakes and acknowledging our own biases.
- Although much more difficult, we make more progress when we embrace complexity and understand the reality of competing and contradictory truths.
- We always feel stronger if there is at least one person in the room willing to take a risk and back us up.

I’m proud this award honors student activists. Young people are much better equipped to see the world differently, to imagine the world as if it could be otherwise. Older people are more able to identify and name the mistakes of the past, remember the false starts, the failed promises, and express a constant urge for caution that keeps us mired in the familiar. If we are to envision a better world, we need to listen and support young people.

To do this takes trust, the willingness to share power, and the courage to move out of our own comfort zones. It requires us to be suspicious of neat categories, especially when it’s us vs. them, and to understand that intersections of difference provide the real possibility for lasting change. It requires that older people delegate authority and help to create opportunities for young people to test their power and ideas, and take the lead.

The older people in the room have much to share: our experience, institutional memories, knowledge of history, our hard-earned ability to challenge others with respect and appreciation for the value of different perspectives. But younger people are so far ahead of us in understanding the current world. The next generations have so much to teach us. We must learn from one another. We must give everyone a place to stand. We have our very best chance for solving the world’s problems when everyone contributes to the conversation. We cannot let our desire for power or our fear of the perceived lack of it keep us silent. This work is lifelong; it will take all of us.
My interests have always been about systems, policies, protocols, and the ways to operationalize them to create meaningful change in the world. My dream has been that my legacy not be about individual achievement or organizations, but rather a celebration of the ongoing accomplishments and vision of all those I’ve worked with over the years. Whenever I could, I lit a fire, leveraged someone else’s work, and made connections—that was and continues to be my life’s work.

Congratulations to the awardees who have already made a difference and to everyone they’ve touched. Because that is how justice and love spread. Nothing excites me more than seeing the new generation of leaders emerge.