My fellow graduates, faculty, family, and friends, Good Morning.

I suspect that many of you, like me, were relieved on May 21st, when contrary to predictions, the world did not in fact come to an end. Apparently the forecasters had miscalculated the date. There are rumors however of a revised date somewhere in the near future. There's a silver lining of course. Moments from now, we will be receiving our law degrees. So, so long as the world comes to an end rather soon, we'll get the law degree without the debt or having to study for the bar exam.

Well those of you who know me well know that I am a man of many words. And, despite my best efforts, today will be no exception, so settle in.

At the risk of sounding trite, it really is an honor to have been selected by you, my classmates, to be your voice today. As I have gotten to know so many of you over the past three years, I have been reminded of what an amazing job the Admissions Office did in putting our class together. Our class includes an author who prior to arriving at SLS published a book on Democracy in the Middle East; LLM, JSD, and other international students who have worked as law professors in

their home countries, an individual who ran a hot dog factory in Costa Rica, several public school teachers, an organizer of indigenous peoples in Mexico, a colleague who was the lead musician of the band Zox, and more than one classmate who courageously risked their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. So, it is indeed humbling to be chosen as your voice today.

I come from a modest background. I grew up in a community where for most of us, Robitussen and Oragel substituted for health insurance and dental exams. When we absolutely needed medical care, like when my brother broke his arm or my mom and I got hurt in a car accident, we spent long nights and early mornings at Miami's County Hospital, Jackson Memorial, the hospital for those without health insurance.

I remember the butterflies I felt in my stomach every Monday morning as my fourth grade teacher would go through the class roster to collect lunch money for the week. While she would unfailingly and kindly whisper "taken care of," that never lifted the embarrassment I felt at having my meals provided by the federal free lunch program. After transferring schools, I found myself in the majority and discovered this because those of us receiving free and reduced lunch stood in a separate—much longer--lunch line from those who paid for their meals.

Like schoolchildren across the country, every August my brother and I made our annual pilgrimage to buy clothes for the upcoming school year. Each year, without fail, I'd make some excuse to my mom about needing to look for some item in some aisle and suggesting I'd return soon, to avoid the humiliation of standing in the layaway aisle at K-Mart.

Like so many of you, I came to law school to give voice to people who could not always speak for themselves—the folks who stood beside me in those lines or sat alongside us in those emergency rooms. I know others of you were also inspired by your own experiences, whether as someone who has been inflicted with an illness that has debilitated and demoralized countless others; as a pre-adolescent who moved to this country with no knowledge of English; or as a teenager who not only had to wrestle with all of the things that all teens struggle with, but also had to worry that you would be judged, condemned, and harassed for being who you are.

Over the past few years Stanford Law School has made it possible for so many of us to give voice to the voiceless and the vulnerable. Over the past three years, members of our class—students sitting in front of you today have:

- Represented kitchen workers and auto mechanics, housekeepers and day laborers to secure thousands of dollars in overtime wages and back pay that were illegally withheld from these workers by unscrupulous employers;
- The financial and housing crises revealed that working folk, many of whom of limited English proficiency, were duped into refinancing homes in which they spent years building equity only to find themselves unable to make the new mortgage payments. Our classmates represented these folks who were at risk of being evicted or foreclosed upon;
- Students sitting in the audience today have fought deportation proceedings which, had these deportations occurred, would not only have left children, in this country, without a parent, but also without a means of support, moving them from an already precarious situation to certain poverty;
- As county mental health departments and school districts fought over who was responsible for paying the bill, elementary-aged students with severe mental and emotional disabilities went without the services they were entitled to. Students sitting in front of you today represented those children and their parents.

- We have secured social security benefits for veterans, restraining orders for victims of domestic violence, and legal status for refugees from Iraq and victims of the Earthquake in Haiti.
- And, students sitting in this audience today have secured the release of individuals who under California's Three Strikes Law had served 14 and 16 years for crimes that even the judges who sentenced them, believed in retrospect were far too harsh for the crime committed and for the circumstances surrounding the crime. One client's third strike came when he was arrested while trying to return a pair of pants which he hadn't paid for. His prior convictions were for two non-violent burglaries, which he committed on the same day thirteen years earlier, when he was 18 years old. In the third instance he was trying to return the pants in order to buy a car seat so he could take his newborn daughter home from the hospital. California law requires that parents have a car seat before they are allowed to leave the hospital with a newborn. Had it not been for our classmates, he would still be in prison today on a sentence of 25 years to life. I'm not diminishing the importance of following the law, but I am submitting that our classmates facilitated an outcome that was in line with prudence, a more fundamental notion of fairness, and compassion.

What I have shared is just a fraction of the efforts that have been undertaken over the past three years on behalf those whose voices would not otherwise have been heard.

The challenge for those of us receiving our degrees today is to continue this commitment when we don't have the Mills Legal Clinic or the Levin Center facilitating our efforts and when we have countervailing pressures of billable hours and other responsibilities that make such a commitment all that more difficult.

Today, of course, is not just for reflecting on our accomplishments of the past three years, though these accomplishments deserve to be acknowledged and relished, but it is also a day to recognize those who have helped us make those accomplishments possible.

First, the teachers. I, like so many of you, have benefited from wonderful teachers going back to my days in Nursery school. And with people like Bill Koski,

Betsy de la Vega, Diane Chin, and too many others to name, the past few years have been no exception.

For the significant others in the audience. I, like some, came to law school with a significant other, my wife Zahra whose unstinting work, from food sovereignty for developing countries, to foster children in San Francisco's Baysview, I respect deeply. I love you honey! Others have picked up significant others during the course of law school. For all of the craziness that they have put up with over the past three years and before then—the LSATs, the applications, I think we owe the significant others in the audience today a round of applause.

Finally, our families, and in particular our parents and others who raised us. I am the son of a young lady who came to this country when she was twenty-four years old—a bit younger than almost all of us graduating today. Although she was a teacher in her home country, with no support system and in an effort to secure status in this country, she ran a Laundromat. She worked twelve hour days, seven days a week, standing on her feet the entire time, washing clothes, mopping the floor, and doing whatever else it took to run a laundromat. She transitioned from a Laundromat to a drycleaner, with the same hours but now with the fumes of

cleaning chemicals lingering in the air and the steam of the pressers combining with the Miami humidity to create something the equivalent of a sauna. At the end of those long and taxing days, day after day, year after year, she would come home and without exception or a hint of impatience, sit with my younger brother and I, for hours, encouraging me to explore my interest in history and government by helping me to complete extra credit book reports, listening to me as I practiced campaign speeches for fourth grade class president, and buying my brother and I our first trophies for achieving the summer reading targets she set for us. She was so committed to ensuring that there wasn't a single opportunity that we didn't avail, that she would often return to work late into the night on Fridays and Saturdays long after the drycleaner was closed, if she had taken time away earlier that day or week to attend my school play or to shuttle me to a debate tournament. Perhaps as important as anything, she taught by example, somehow finding the time to volunteer helping elderly immigrants in need of healthcare, and as I was entering high school, going to school to become a nurse--and I would note serving as the speaker at her graduation.

So, to all the foster parents, step-parents, grandparents, the parents we lost before starting here at Stanford; the parents, who during our time here, have

courageously fought off disease; and all the other types of parents and caregivers, we thank you and we love you.

Finally, if you'll indulge me for a moment. If I'm not mistaken, I believe I am the only Muslim in the graduating JD class of some 180 students. I know that you are not the audience that needs to hear this, but I hope that in reminding you of this, you will, in turn, be encouraged to educate others. My commitment to social justice and human dignity is rooted as much in my faith as it is in my life experience. The central messages of the Islam I have grown up with and continue to practice are quite simple—difference, including religious differences, are not merely to be tolerated, but encouraged and celebrated as it is through difference that we learn from one another. As God's representative on this planet, we are stewards of the natural environment. Finally, the ethics of compassion, sharing, and respect for life, which are rooted in the Quaran and the example of the Prophet Mohamed, demand that we gather all of the effort, creativity, and intellect that we can must and vigorously act to care for the weakest among us.

That said, I end with this. As Dean Kramer mentioned, last year, in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti, about a dozen of us from here at Stanford Law headed

to Miami to help Haitians living in here in the U.S. apply for the ability to work legally in the United States. As has been the case in the past when a nation is confronted with a natural disaster of the scope of the Haiti Earthquake or with significant civil strife, rather than deporting nationals of that country back to a situation where their lives might be at risk because of the inhumane conditions in their countries of origin, the U.S. government will permit those here in the U.S. to work legally, so that among other reasons they can send money back to their home country for rebuilding efforts, etc. As we were doing outreach in Little Haiti and at Jackson Memorial Hospital, where in one of the urgent care rooms that was quite familiar to me, I met a lady by the name of Marie Baptiste, who was there with her son Peter. We explained to Marie what the program was all about. She was understandably very reluctant to share what is obviously very private and sensitive information about her legal status with folks she has just met a short while earlier. She was also baffled by the idea that anyone would be willing to help her with her immigration paperwork for free. A couple of us shared with her the fact that we were the children of people, who like her were not born in this country, and therefore we could relate somewhat to where she was coming from. With some more persistence we were able to convince her to work with us. Over the course of nearly two full days as we completed her application, we went

through a stack of papers several inches thick. We came across copies of money order after money order that Marie sent to the immigration services year after year. Year in and year out, on a very limited income, she paid good money--a few hundred dollars each year in application fees, for fingerprints, and so on. And each year, she would receive a letter rejecting her application. Because she couldn't read, much less read English, she had no idea why her application was being rejected. On a number of occasions she went to a local notario—someone who was not a lawyer but who purports to be able to give advice on immigration matters. Because the fees that immigration attorneys charge are beyond the reach of what so many can afford, many like Marie turn to notaries, still paying them a few hundred to several hundred dollars for help. It was apparent to us that Marie got nothing for her money—which is in part why she might have been so reluctant to trust us. Marie's son Peter was 8 or 9 years old was with her the entire time. Peter did not speak, nor did he sign. If he needed to get his mother's attention, he would make a sound. If he saw something that amused him, he giggled profusely. Every few minutes, mucus would ooze uncontrollably from his nose, far more than what we might be accustomed to when we're not feeling well. Toward the end of the second day, when we were more comfortable with one another, I asked Marie what the matter was with Peter and as best as I could

understand from her very limited English and from my limited understanding of anything science related, the mucus was filing his ear canal as well, which limited his ability to hear and, I guess, to speak. To this day, I'm convinced that the ailment was something relatively easy to fix. In any case, at the end of the two days, we realized that Marie did not have passport photos which were needed with the application. Given the late hour, we drove her to a Walgreens down the street. When we returned, she asked if she and Peter could remain in the mini-van for a few moments—He was 8 or 9 years old, but she had to change Peter's diaper.

If this was an issue spotting exam to identify all of the failures of the system, all of the areas of need, and all of the opportunities for positive change, it would be an easy one. In any case, a few weeks later we would receive the good news that Marie, along with nearly two dozen others, was granted her legal status—her work permit. We did a lot of good work during our time there, but it is clear that much work remains to be done. That night as she and Peter left the restaurant that we were working out of in Little Haiti to catch the bus home, in her heavy creole accent, she turned to us and said, "I pray to God to bless you. I pray to God

to bless your families." I can't think of a better way to conclude, thank you again for this honor and God bless you and your families.