

SPEAKER: What a joy and a pleasure it is to be in this room and to see all of you and to have such a lovely turnout for this event. I want to thank everyone from PILA, the Program In Law and Public Service, and the Public Service Center, who worked so hard to put this event on. So thanks to all of you.

When I saw you last as a group at orientation, I spoke at orientation about how there's both privilege and opportunity and responsibility that comes from being a lawyer, and that power and responsibility means that you are the people who are going to make change in the world, and that you are the people who are fortunate to have the education, the tools, and the resources to make change in the world. And the fact that you all are sitting here, means that you already know that. You already understand that part of being a lawyer, and part of your law school journey is making change in the world, is serving the public, is using your tools to discharge that public trust that everyone has.

And I see it as my job, and as the law school's job to help you fulfill your public service dreams in every way that we can. And I just want to echo what Dean Kim said. There are so many people here in the law school, some who are here tonight, others who are not, students, alumni, administrators, faculty, who all consider themselves part of the public service community here at the law school and want to support you in the public service work that you do.

I will say, I am proud to consider myself part of the public service community as well. Many of my most significant law school experiences were public service experiences. I participated in the prison clinic at my law school. My extracurriculars included a prison project, a migrant farm worker and legal aid project. I spent my Summers at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, at a rural legal aid at the Southern Center for Human Rights.

So if you will have me, I like to consider myself one of your own, even though I'm now a dean. But I think of that as part of my service as well.

So I have been so thrilled at the growth in the public service programming at UVA Law School over the tenure of my service on the faculty, as well as during my tenure as dean. Now, we have what I like to think of as a classroom-through-career public service support program. And that includes financial support that Dean Kim was just talking about, academic support in the law and public service program in our clinics, in our pro bono work, personal support, community-based support, professional support in the Public Service Center and elsewhere. You'll hear more details about all of those various types of programming and support after Mary Bauer has spoken.

And we are always thinking about how can we continue to improve and add to the forms of support that we have. So we are open to your suggestions. The commitment to public service at this law school, though I think it has grown in the way that we support it, is very, very long standing. The law school was founded to train students to become servants of a new democracy and leaders of that new democracy, leaders and promoters of justice and the rule of law over the two centers of the law school's history.

Who has been considered an appropriate person to come to the law school, who the law school educates, has been transformed-- completely transformed. There are people sitting in this room, including myself, who were not even contemplated as potentially attending this law school. But what continues is the sense of obligation to serve the public, the sense that the people who come to this law school, now an incredibly diverse group of people in every way, are meant to be servants and leaders of the law.

And the kinds of jobs that our public service graduates leave for when they leave here have been incredibly varied. We have legal aid lawyers, prosecutors, public defenders, elected officials, people who work at the Federal Reserve banks, who work at think tanks, who work at NGOs, who are climate action crusaders, who are JAG lawyers, who are impact litigators. The forms of public service that you can take are many.

And over time, so many of our alumni have become public servants and public leaders that there are too many to name. We have a Wikipedia page, if you're interested. And they're not even all on the Wikipedia page.

But the history of public service at this law school is very long. And it's very storied. And the future, because of you all, is incredibly bright.

In my view, when I think about our mission as a law school, there are three parts to our mission. One part is educating our students. A second part is enabling scholarship and discovery of our faculty. And the third part is serving the public.

I think that service to the public comes from three places. One, it comes from the fact that every lawyer and every law school has an obligation to serve the public. The second is that we are a public law school. And so we have a compact with our Commonwealth, with our government that we are contributing to the well-being of this Commonwealth, and then, beyond that, to our nation and the world.

And then also, this law school and our history mean that we have a special association with public service. And so I am so glad that you all are here, that you chose to come to this law school, that you chose to come to this event, and that you are obviously thinking of yourselves in that long tradition of public service and thinking of your careers as taking you there.

I am delighted to introduce one of our storied public service graduates this evening, who has dedicated her career to the protection of civil rights and civil liberties. Mary Bauer is the head of the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia, where she has served as Executive Director since last June, as a graduate of the College of William and Mary. She is also a graduate of this law school.

And she has done this critical work of serving the public and making change and protecting civil rights and civil liberties at a number of different organizations over the course of her career, serving as the legal director for Muslim Advocates, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the ACLU of Virginia now, and as general counsel for the Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, an organization that supports Mexican-based migrant workers.

She has also worked for many years at the Legal Aid Justice Center, an award-winning legal aid here in Charlottesville, as the legal director of its Immigrant Advocacy Program, director of advocacy, and most recently as the organization's executive director. You may have already heard of the Legal Aid Justice Center. But we have many clinics that we do in conjunction with LAJC. We have a very close relationship with them.

Mary's commitment to public service started when her legal career started. She was the law school's first Skadden fellow in 1990. And her first job out of law school was supporting migrant farm workers who suffered wage theft and workplace abuses.

Mary has clearly worn many hats. But through them all, has really been her abiding commitment to both service and leadership. She is quite simply a model of what I frequently talk about how careers are long, and they are varied, and you get to do many different things in them. I'm so excited for you to learn more about her career and the lessons that she has taken from it as you begin your own. I know it will be inspirational. Thank you, Mary, and welcome.

[APPLAUSE]

MARY BAUER: Thank you so much. It's really, really wonderful to be here and to see all of you. It was a very different experience I had when I graduated from this law school in 1990 when the public interest community was very small, and there wasn't this kind of amazing support and infrastructure.

Annie, you're going to tell me what I need to do to actually move these slides. I know you told me to hit the space bar, but-- oh, there it is. All right.

OK, great. Those of you who wear glasses will understand my challenge here, which is that they immediately fog up when you have a mask on and you come inside. So I want to talk just a little bit about the amazing opportunities that await you if you choose to embrace them, the varied options, the incredible opportunities that await you, not just in your career, but in your life by pursuing a career of public interest law.

So that's what I look like without a mask. And I've had a lot of jobs, as the dean alluded. I have probably had more jobs than a person is supposed to have over the course of now, 31 years.

But it started here in this law school. And I will say, I came to this law school probably in a way that was much different than many of you all, which is that I really had no idea what I was doing. I didn't have a job after I graduated from college. And law school seemed like a good opportunity. And I literally thought that if you came to law school, everybody would just sit around and talk about justice.

And that's what I thought we were going to do. And then, I came to law school, and it was different from that. And it was particularly different from that-- sorry about that-- it was particularly different from that in 1990, when there was not a public interest center here.

And so I didn't kind of what to do. I didn't know what my career would offer me, or what I was going to do. And I didn't have a lot of public interest friends. And there wasn't a public interest support center.

And I'm going to turn off my phone if it doesn't stop in just one minute. And so I say, I stumbled into a career that has given my life a great deal of meaning. And I and I literally stumbled into it.

And that is, back in the day-- you all don't know this-- but we didn't really have like the internet in the same way. And we had a bulletin board with little cards on it. This probably predates everybody here. But literally, there were like these 3-by-5 index cards that would say "job," and it would describe it. And you could write down a phone number.

And I saw an index card for a job working with migrant farm workers on the eastern shore of Virginia. And I thought, that seems interesting. I mean, that was as much like a deliberate plan as I had about what I was going to do at law school-- that this card spoke to me, and so I called the number on it. And I ended up getting a summer job working with migrant farm workers.

And despite the fact that I had stumbled into law school and then stumbled into this job, I found that it was incredibly meaningful work. And it was something that I thought I could do and be good at and that would allow me to live my values. And so one of the things I want to say to you is that I have not had a career where I have felt like, oh, I'm going to go out and serve others.

The career that I have chosen has been largely for me. It has brought me happiness. It has brought my life meaning. And even if you are not an altruistic person who feels like you want to go and serve others, I promise you that your experience working as a public interest lawyer is going to be very, very different from lots and lots of your friends who go off and work at big law firms.

And I have nothing against big law firms. And as a public interest lawyer, we counsel with lots of law firms. I appreciate that they have all the resources and the money and all of those things in the world. But I think it's fair to say that a lot of people who go off and work at big law firms don't necessarily love all the hours that they spend in the day. And their efforts to go find a pro bono case is to give themselves something that they get really jazzed about and that's really meaningful.

And what I have said, and what has been particularly important to me is that the time that I spend between 9:00 and 5:00 or 9:00 and 7:00, or whatever it is actually time that I deeply enjoy and that is deeply satisfying. And I don't need then, at the end of the day, to go find something else to do that makes me feel kind of good about it.

So as the dean mentioned, there are lots of ways to be a public interest lawyer. You can do direct services. You can do impact litigation. You can do criminal defense.

I've done quite a few things. I have never been a criminal defense lawyer though. I think that's really, really important work.

But what I want to suggest is that you don't have to choose one of these things. Because over the course of a career, you can do lots of things. And you can do lots of things at the same time. And you can do lots of things in succession.

And you can make what I think of a reasonable living doing this. Would I love to make the millions of dollars that some people make? Honestly, yes. I think that would be swell.

But I have two kids, one who's going to college, and I am the person who is supporting our family. And I have done that without parenteral support or other kinds of support for 31 years. So it absolutely can be done. And I think my own experience and the experience of people I know in the public interest world is that many of them really feel that the quality of life that they experience is a lot better than folks who go off and work at the big firms.

So there are lots of things that you can explore. There are incredible clinics now. Dean Goluboff mentioned that I worked for a number of years at the Legal Aid Justice Center. I think the Legal Aid Justice Center is fantastic.

Last time I looked, there were something like six clinics that were taught at the Legal Aid Justice Center through the law school. That number could have changed, because I've been gone a couple of years. But it is really an incredible experience.

And there are lots of other clinics too. And it's not new in the sense that it's been around now for a number of years. But it's new in comparison to the experience that I had coming to the law school when there were many, many fewer. So the investment that the law school has made in really providing all sorts of opportunities is really just an incredible change.

And I encourage you to do some things that don't seem obvious to you-- that there are things that you would enjoy, and to take classes that may seem different than the things you might expect. One of the things that I experienced-- I did not take classes several classes that were recommended to me. For example, I thought myself much better than people who took corporations. I was like, no, I'm going to be a public interest lawyer.

So then, I spent like 15 years of my life suing corporations. And I had to go learn all of that stuff. So I just encourage you to kind of think broadly about what you learn and what you experience, and you now, the opportunity to try lots and lots of different things.

Very few people start their career in a job and just stay there. I do know some people who've done that. And they may get promoted and stay in the same place. But almost everyone I know has had a lot of jobs, has tried lots of different things, has lived to different places, have done direct services and then impact litigation.

I personally, believe that people who want to do impact litigation, which I love, I think is like the funnest work in the world-- that it's really a great idea to do direct services first. And I recommend to people who are kind of unsure about where they want to end up or thinking about impact litigation that working at a place like a legal aid program for a couple of years, is an incredible experience, both because you help people in really meaningful ways. But also, because in order to bring impact litigation and change systems and dismantle systems that you think are destructive, understanding deeply how those systems work is incredibly important.

And so, that's the model of the Legal Aid Justice Center that they do direct services, they do impact litigation too. And it's sort of representing a lot of people in individual cases that informs their ability to understand deeply how the systems work and how they need to be changed.

So I always make this plug. I understand that lots of people have to go and live in a particular place because they have family, they have other obligations. And that makes lots of sense.

But I promise you that there are places other than Washington DC, New York City, and San Francisco that have amazing opportunities where you can do really interesting work. And so I'll just share with you a couple of the experiences that I've had that I thought were really just like fantastic jobs.

I mean, if you're a civil rights lawyer, there are a few places better to go and live than in the deep south. And so years ago, I was happily-- very happily living here in Charlottesville, Virginia with my family, when I got a call asking me if I wanted to come and start an immigrants rights project at the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama. And I was like, Montgomery, Alabama? No.

And they asked me if I would just come and consult with them and help them kind of craft the outline of what a program would look like, and what they would need, and how many staff they would need. And so I agreed to do that. And I went to Montgomery, Alabama.

And I ended up writing a proposal for them about putting together an Immigrant Justice Project. And the act of actually writing that proposal was so exciting and interesting that I then made my family move to Montgomery, Alabama, where we stayed for almost 10 years, which was one of the best experiences of my life.

There's just you know, the opportunity to really change some pretty deeply rooted problematic systems in a place like Montgomery, Alabama is really interesting and exciting and different. And so I encourage people who have the ability to consider living in sort of non-traditional places to really think about those things, and where is the work needed, and where will you learn a lot.

Another place that I ended up living in many ways, by stumbling into that is back in the '90s, I was working here representing migrant farm workers. My fellowship ended. And I looked around. And there was a job at a program in Washington state, then called Evergreen Legal Services, now Columbia Legal Services. And they were looking for lawyers to represent migrant farm workers.

And so I moved to Wenatchee, Washington, which is a lovely little town in the mountains that I had never heard of or visited. And I moved there and had really, a wonderful experience. But it turns out, Washington state is actually like pretty far away. And all of the people that I knew were here and around here. And so I didn't end up staying there but a short time.

But it was a really-- it was a very, very high quality legal services program and a really great experience. And you know, something that I learned a lot from. So I encourage people to really kind of think outside of a kind of narrow box of what you would like to do, that there really are a lot of interesting opportunities no matter what you choose. You can't really choose wrong in a sense-- is that you learned something from every job. You can say, maybe I won't stay here for the rest of my life. But it's still an opportunity that you will learn a lot from.

So I want to leave you with a couple thoughts. I'll tell you one story about the kind of work that has kept me motivated. Years ago-- a long time ago, 20 or so years ago, I participated in a series of class action lawsuits on behalf of forestry workers who planted trees in the Southern United States.

And forestry workers, almost all come to the United States on what are called H-2B visas. And that means they are allowed to work only for the employer who petitioned to bring them. And they can't-- if they get here and they hate it, or they're treated terribly, they can't leave. Their only choices is to go back home to typically Mexico or Guatemala, or to remain working in the United States.

And because most of those workers have to pay a lot of money to get those jobs and come to the United States deeply in debt, there is sort of quality of servitude and exploitation that is very typically associated with the very structure of the visa program. So we did a series of cases on behalf of pine tree workers suing three of the largest corporations in the world, the paper companies that we alleged controlled the worker's employment, even though they weren't their direct employer. They were working for a subcontractor, who then worked for International Paper, Georgia-Pacific, some of these huge multi-billion dollar corporations.

And as part of that experience, we did a lot of depositions-- lots and lots of depositions of the company personnel. And I defended dozens and dozens and dozens of depositions of workers themselves in Mexico and Guatemala. And so if you are involved in one of these cases, after a while, the depositions get kind of rote. The employer's lawyer asks the same questions over and over again of workers.

And one of the things that I observed in defending dozens and dozens of virtually identical depositions, is that there was one question that virtually every worker answered identically, despite the fact that they didn't know one another. They hadn't coordinated their testimony. It was just kind of an authentic answer.

And the question was, what do you hope to get out of this lawsuit? And the answer, almost to a person was, well, just as for the other workers so that no one is treated the way that I was treated. Not a single person said money, which is what they were actually owed.

But it was this really deep belief in this system that America offered a fair and decent system of justice. And I will tell you, as a legal aid lawyer, as a civil rights lawyer, I often do not believe that the American system offers a system of fair justice. I often am bitter and cynical that I have lost cases that I should have won.

And yet, in those cases, my clients showed this profound belief that justice really is for everyone. And what I would say to you is that it is an incredible honor and privilege to stand with people, to represent people who deeply believe that. And although I would love to make millions of dollars, as I have already conceded, there is not-- there's very little in the world I think, that is better than that-- that is to stand with people who believe that justice is for everyone, and to support that effort, and to do that as your day job, right, not to have to do all of these other things and add this on, but to actually spend your time doing work that you think is deeply meaningful.

And I've had lots of good experiences. And as I mentioned, I have lost cases. And I've had all sorts of kind of experiences with the courts. But I have felt like in all of the work that I have done, that I deeply believe in it. And that is worth a lot. That is worth a lot.

And I just will say to you, don't settle for less than that. Don't settle for less than finding the work that really makes your life meaningful and satisfying. And I won't say that my career is the most meaningful thing in my life, because I have kids. And this is getting recorded, and maybe they would hear it.

But they're teenagers. So probably, they would have no interest. But it's pretty high up there.

And lots of weeks, I spend more time at my job than I spend with my family, because that's the nature of work. And so having that be a place that is deeply nurturing to your soul is worth a lot of sacrifice, and is worth a lot of the things that you don't get through a life in public interest law. And I just wish for all of you that-- that you experience that over the course of your career.

I have complete faith that this institution will offer you the support and the experiences to get you where you want to be. And I am here, living in town. I want to be a resource for you all. I have confidence you're going to do great things. I can't wait to read about it.

And I hope one day I figure out, oh, that person was at that little lecture that I gave. But I think you're going to do amazing things. Thank you all.

[APPLAUSE]