

Governor Cordero, faculty advisors, Executive Board members, our lovely First Lady Susan Cordero, honored guests and fellow delegates.

I normally charge a speaking fee of 50 dollars an hour. I practiced the speech this afternoon and figured up the bill. It's 100 dollars. Who wants the bill?

Before I begin, let me thank Governor Cordero for bestowing on me this great honor. I am humbled by the opportunity to give the MIG 2009 Keynote Address. Al has done a lot for MIG this year and honored the office of MIG Governor with his integrity and sincerity. I thank him for that and feel fortunate to call him my friend.

I see many familiar faces, but I also see many new faces. Raise your hand if you are a first-year delegate. Very good. I didn't see any new schools registered for this year's simulation, but you never know if any snuck in at the last minute.

I do know that Governor Cordero has folks from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign joining us later this weekend. Having this commitment from a school the size of the U of I is quite a coup. Hopefully, this is a positive trend for the future.

Allow me to welcome all of the first year delegates, really everyone, to Springfield and MIG 2009. My friends, you are going to learn a lot, meet new friends and have fun these next four days. Make your time here count.

A special welcome goes to our friends from Oklahoma who are joining us this weekend to observe the simulation. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to join us this weekend. I'm sure that you will not be disappointed in our little get-together.

Delegates, let's show our friends how it is done in Illinois! Let me rephrase that slightly; let's show them how it's supposed to be done in Illinois!

When Al asked to give the keynote address, I had no clue what to talk about. It dawned on me. Talk about the organization. I've certainly been around long enough to put something together.

MIG is much more than a four-day trip to Springfield.

It is much more than sitting in the House or Senate Chambers.

It's much more than catching up with your friends from last year.

It's much more than a mere exercise in democracy.

It is a chance for you to learn about the governance process in the best way possible, hands-on and in depth.

I work at the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, a regulatory agency under the Governor. We establish environmental rules and regulations. These rules are based on the executive branch would like us to do, the legislature tells us to do in state statute and the judiciary allows us to do under federal and state laws. Lobbyists from the various environmental groups and reporters call into our office every day.

Legislature, executive, judicial, lobbyists, and journalists. Sound familiar? It's not happenstance that MIG has all of these roles. MIG truly is a microcosm of what goes on every day in hundreds of state offices throughout Illinois.

The name of this organization is Model Illinois Government. Think about what that means for a moment. We all understand the words "Illinois" and "Government". It's that one word, "model", with which we have the most problems.

Our friends at Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, a friend of college students everywhere, defines model as "an example for imitation or emulation."

Over the past couple of months, it has been difficult to find anyone in state government to imitate or emulate. The arrest, impeachment, removal from office and continued escapades of our former Governor have given our state a black eye. We have been made the butt of countless late-night jokes and semi-funny skits on Saturday Night Live. Illinois has been dragged through the mud so often that it seems impossible to get things back on track.

If the events of these past couple of months have taught us anything, it is this. We must, all of us must, dedicate ourselves to making our State again worth emulating.

President Obama inspired our nation with his slogan, "Yes We Can." We can make our State again worth emulating. We can and we will make our State again worth emulating. It will take some hard work, but yes, we can make it happen.

I'm not alone in this sentiment. I heard the same thing expressed to me this morning by one State Senator, the Clerk of the House, the Secretary of the Senate and the Senate's Sergeant-at-Arms. We need to move away from the past and restore our state to greatness. We must make Illinois worthy of emulation.

Two weeks ago, our nation celebrated Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday. I cannot think of a better place to hold this simulation than here in Springfield. I also cannot think of a better place to begin making Illinois worthy of emulation than Springfield, Mr. Lincoln's home.

Those of us who live in Springfield live in Mr. Lincoln's shadow. He looks down from buildings and billboards. His home is literally across

the street, two blocks from here. He is buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery and you can see his tomb from the upper floors of this hotel on a clear day.

“Honest Abe” is indeed a model for everyone, including those in Illinois government. We should strive to live up to his example. We honor this great man’s legacy when we follow his examples. Let us all strive to honor President Lincoln by following his examples.

Socrates said, “There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.” I think this one good, knowledge, fits with the mission of Model Illinois Government. In fact, the purpose of Model Illinois Government, as outlined in the MIG Constitution, is to “foster greater understanding of government and politics through simulation of the Government of Illinois and related institutions.”

This is why you are here this weekend. You are here to learn and grow in your understanding of government and politics. Do not let this opportunity pass without taking advantage of it.

When you learn about our system of government, you discover ways to make it better. MIG is an educational opportunity rare in America. Do not let this opportunity pass without taking advantage of it.

Learn as much as you can this weekend. Then take what you learn this weekend back to your campuses and hometowns. Use that knowledge to make Illinois worthy of emulation.

This is my ninth and final simulation. It only seems like yesterday that I was a freshman delegate in 2000. Yes, that was long before most of you learned to drive. When I first stepped onto the House floor nine years ago, I was awestruck. I was in awe that I could be standing in the very same place where laws are made and serious issues are debated. I have been on that floor numerous times since, but that feeling never goes away.

I learned much that year and the education continues to this day.

The things I have learned and the people I have met inspired me to become more involved in government. I left MIG 2000, went back to Western Illinois University (GO NECKS) and joined SGA. I served as a dorm senator, two terms as Senator-at-Large, five semesters as the Chairman of the SGA Senate's Operational Policies Committee and was elected the 2002-2003 Senator of the Year. If it wasn't for MIG and what I learned here, I wouldn't have accomplished those things.

I have been honored to serve in a variety of positions and roles here at MIG over those past nine years. I was a House Committee Whip, a Senate Committee Chair, the last GOP Senate Majority Leader in 2003, the Chief of Staff to two Speakers and one Governor and the Secretariat.

I have won a couple of awards, but nothing compares to helping the delegates learn about and get involved in the process. That is why I stayed involved for so long. Again, do not let this opportunity pass without taking advantage of it.

MIG has taught me a great deal about politics and government. I learned even more about myself as a result of MIG. You also will.

I use what I learned at MIG in my everyday life. As a Precinct Committeeman, a proud GOP Precinct Committeeman, I have to get out the vote. The people skills that I learned at MIG have helped me be more comfortable knocking on doors, registering people to vote and making sure that they had all the information they needed to make that decision. Without MIG, I couldn't do any of those things.

Speaking of information, we live in an age where information is all around us. There is no excuse not to be informed. One lesson that we should all learn and take to heart is that a candidate must earn your vote.

No one is entitled to an elected position, whether here at MIG, your city council, in the State legislature and beyond. Do not fall prey to voting for someone because of their family name, their relatives or the fact that they held another elected position. Get the facts, listen to what people are saying and make them earn your vote.

Our democracy is ill-served by voters whom blindly vote for someone based on the letter next to their name. That may sound strange coming from a Precinct Committeeman, but make them earn your vote. By participating in debate and reading your bills, you are learning about the issues facing Illinois. Take back what you have learned here and be an example for others to emulate.

You will learn that there's nothing more nerve-wracking than standing on the House floor in front of 100 of your peers to argue a bill. You're also going to learn that, by doing that, you'll become a better public speaker. Take back what you have learned here and be an example for others to emulate.

Your debate skills will be honed as a result of your MIG experiences. You will quickly learn how to come up with arguments, sometimes in the heat of the moment. You will also learn the all-important skill of being able to separate those arguments with validity and those that, let's just say, don't smell right. Take back what you have learned here and be an example for others to emulate.

You will also quickly learn about campaigning. Although MIG just started, campaigning is in full effect. Campaigning is part of our political process as old as our nation itself. It is a skill that will come in handy when and if you pursue a career in politics or government. Take back what you have learned here and be an example for others to emulate.

I recently decided to step down as the MIG Secretariat after three years in the position. I did not make that decision lightly. I love the

opportunities that MIG affords students from across the state. It is truly a showcase of democracy in action.

I am stepping down because I am giving serious consideration to running for Sangamon County Board next year. I did not want to commit another year to MIG, only to have back out midway through the year to attend to the campaign. I do not quit once I've started something.

I may not get a chance to do so, so I wanted to take a few moments to thank those whom I met or served with at MIG. Some are here tonight. Others are not. No matter where they are, they will always have a special place in my heart. I trust that you won't mind.

I'll start off by thanking my Mom. Unless she snuck over from Decatur, she isn't here this evening. Without her love and support, I'd probably be in a lot worse shape. If I turn out to be one-quarter of the person that she is, I will have surpassed my wildest expectations. Call your Mom after Opening Ceremonies.

I also thank my brother, my step-father and my three step-brothers. When everything else falls apart, you can always rely on your family. I have two awesome nephews, Kaeden and Karter, and three adorable nieces, Taylor, Mackenzie and Karmindy who make my life so much brighter when they are around.

I would also thank Joan Eastlund and Jay Pearce. These two fine professors have served as Faculty Advisors to the Executive Board for a long time. They are always ready with advice or a quick smack upside the head whenever needed. I am grateful for their words of encouragement when I needed it. Thank you Jay and Joan for your devotion to our great organization.

I would forever be embarrassed if I did not thank Dr. Keith Boeckleman, the MIG faculty advisor from Western Illinois University. Dr. B. is,

well, it's very hard to describe what he means to his students and the WIU delegation. He has been a very powerful force in my life for a long time. If you are fortunate enough to find a professor and mentor who becomes a friend as Dr. B. has become to me, you will be richer for it. Thank you Dr. B!

After nine years in an organization, you're going to meet your fair share of people. You will hear the term MIG family referenced this weekend. Like all families, we have our disagreements. In the end, we come together. I have been blessed to have had to chance to meet, work with and become very good friends with several of those I met along the way. Some of them are here tonight, the rest are certainly here in spirit.

My sincerest thanks go to my MIG family. Special thanks go to two of my former bosses, former Governors Dan Kovats and Dan O'Donnell. I also thank the real boss in the Kovats house, the lovely Jen Even. Our MIG Governor's Senate Liaison Nicole Calcagno and the two of my fellow Republican precinct committeemen, the Honorable Mike Sneed and the Honorable Matt Mau have also been a part of this MIG family and deserve recognition.

My MIG experiences would have not been the same without them. I have spent countless hours with these dear friends. I could spend countless hours relating to you MANY stories about them, but we really don't have all night. Ask me about them later. Some of them are pretty good!

John Kennealy and John Walcher have been like my brothers for a long time. We've been through a lot together and our friendships have been made stronger by that. I know that they will always be there for me, just as I will for them. That is the true meaning of friendship.

Kennealy isn't here tonight, but he served two years as Speaker of the House, so he's left his own indelible mark on MIG. Walcher is here, ably serving as House Chief of Staff after becoming the first delegate to

be elected House Minority Leader one year and House Majority Leader the next. Those are impressive feats from two impressive men. Thank you both for everything.

Lastly, I have to thank Shana Williams. I met Ms. Williams when she was assigned to my SGA Senate Committee. I made quite the first impression in her first meeting.

I got upset at some fool's antics and threw my gavel in exasperation. It sailed gracefully towards the wall, missing her by a foot. She is going to re-tell this story differently, but trust me, my version is right. Since then, she has been like an older sister. You know the type; the one that tells you to calm down or to quit being a jackass. Shana, thank you for keeping me and everyone else in line.

My friends, the past is prologue and our best days are still to come. That is not to say that we should forget the mistakes of the past. We should not. We should remember them and learn from them.

When we learn from the mistakes of the past, we will rise above them and make right what is wrong. President John F. Kennedy once said, "Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future".

The late Ronald Wilson Reagan, another fine Illinoisan and our nation's 40th President frequently spoke of a shining city on a hill. President Reagan borrowed the phrase from John Winthrop, an early American Puritan leader. President Reagan spoke of this city, saying:

"It was a tall proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace, a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity, and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here."

I believe that this city is not just a flight of fancy, it is an obtainable goal. A lofty goal to be certain, but everything worth having once began as a lofty goal.

We can make Illinois into that shining city, a beacon of good government if we choose to do so.

Let us dedicate ourselves tonight doing just that.

Let us put on a simulation worthy of emulation.

Let us teach about what we learn about the model Illinois Government this weekend so that others can help restore our state to greatness.

My friends, the past is prologue and our best days are still to come. I thank you for allowing me the chance to share my thoughts with you. I wish each of you good luck this weekend. Learn much, make new friends and have a good time doing both.