

Speech from the Launch of Oona's Campaign

Friday, 28 May 2010

Below is the full speech from the launch of Oona's campaign to become Labour's mayoral candidate.

Oona King

Speaking at Haverstock School, 26th May 2010 I'm delighted to be back here in the area I grew up, and at Haverstock, my old school. Today is the beginning of a journey that I hope will take me from Haverstock to City Hall. But I'd also like to talk a bit about the journey's you'll take, and the journey's you'll make, in your lives. If you took a helicopter and flew from Epping forest to the South Downs, from Rainham Marshes to Richmond park, what would you see? You'd see a citadel stretching in every direction, containing fantastic landmarks, a river running through it, and big green parks. You'd see us: you, me, and our millions of neighbours – every shape, size and colour – injecting energy and vitality. You'd see the city of London. My city. Your city. Our city. A truly wonderful, great city of the world. And it's one I wish to be Mayor of.

But let me start at the beginning. I was born to an African-American father who was partly Native American Indian, and a white Jewish Geordie mother whose family is Irish, Scottish and Hungarian. My husband is Italian. My children - who are adopted - have roots in England, Italy, Jamaica, St Lucia, and Brazil. Coalitions may be all the flavour at Westminster right now, but in my family we've been doing them for years. What does that make me? I'll tell you. A Londoner. I was brought up in North London, live in East London, I've worked in West London, and I have family in South London. It's because I live and breathe London that I recognise its assets and also its failings. We all know how frustrating London can be. And we all know how inspiring it can be. But London could be so much better. And that's why I'm on a mission. The Labour Party is about to decide who its candidate will be for mayor, and I want us to make a leap into the future. It's no time to hark back to old battles. We have to rebuild. And we have to accept the truth. We lost London to Boris Johnson, and Government to David Cameron and Nick Clegg. We'll only win back power if we show that our eye is firmly on the future. I don't know about you but I already find it strange that the political face of Britain in 2010 is two privately-educated men with colour co-ordinated ties. Isn't Britain more than this? I know one thing for sure – London certainly is. This is the vibrant, colourful, capital of the world – we produce great music - By the way I love music; I even called my diaries about my time as an MP, House Music. Can you imagine what it was like to be the only MP in Parliament who likes House Music? But anyone, in London our cultural industries are the envy of the world: from music, to fashion, to theatre. We're about to host the greatest athletes on the planet, in what will be the most spectacular sporting show on earth. So come with me on my campaign to win London and I'll show you the excitement that exists beyond a suit and tie. Well, okay, I've got a suit jacket on today. But that's because today, women still have to be a bit like men to get ahead in politics. My election will be a step to change that. The point is, my campaign will be a breath of fresh air. I'll bring a fresh approach. And a steely determination to harness the youthful vitality of London and let a new generation build an ever greater city. Let me tell you a bit about what influenced me to go into politics. The biggest factor was my Mum's intense belief in social justice. My Mum, a secondary school teacher who taught here at Haverstock for 10 years, managed to raise two kids alone. Money was short, but love and affection were bountiful. She brought us up to believe we could be whoever we wanted to be. And as I stand here at Haverstock, my old school, I say to you – the next generation – my Mum was right. You can be what you want to be. You have the potential. And London needs your skills, your talent and your spirit. My greatest privilege in life was NOT becoming an MP – special as that was. It was having a mother who cared for me immensely. And my Dad, although he lived far away, cared for me immensely too. My dad was, and is, a mighty fighter against racism. He was sentenced to prison as a young man in the United States, just for his colour. We know this because the white judge who sentenced him finally wrote to the President and said "I sentenced this man because he was black." In the meantime, my Dad was exiled from his own home and family for 40 years, but he never gave up until he won that Presidential pardon. I hope I have inherited some of his tenacity. So although I didn't have material wealth as a child, I was brought up with two amazing role models. And of course here, at Haverstock, at my local state school, I got an amazing education from teachers who cared for me and inspired me. - though I must admit when I told a visiting careers advisor I wanted to be Prime Minister, she advised me to become a librarian. But my teachers here gave me the skills and ability to follow my dream: to play a part in politics; to make the world around us fairer; to make our quality of life better. And this is the most important point I want to make today: if we want to change the quality of life in London, we have to inspire young people and more than we do at the moment. We have to change the way our kids are brought up, and the values in the communities where they live. We have to increase the support we give parents, and the protection we give children. It beggars belief that in our country today children still starve. A small number starve of hunger. A large number starve of love, attention, and simple gestures of kindness. Half of all Britain's poorest children live in London. When children aren't treated in a civilized manner, they cannot learn to be civilized themselves. Damaged human beings leave a trail of victims in their wake, especially as they turn from toddler to teenager, and sometimes (even if it is in a small minority of cases) they exchange a small baby's rattle for a large kitchen knife. So as Mayor, I'd be an advocate for these children, and help prevent them becoming a future burden. Given the right environment, every child is a future star. But it's communities, as well as parents, that hold the key. In the past I've run programmes to open doors for those so easily forgotten. As mayor, I would do it again, but on a bigger scale. And I would make it understood that as a civilised city, we all have a responsibility towards these children. And all of us, even those with no interest in young people whatsoever, reap benefits when they're nurtured not destroyed; loved, not

abandoned; treated fairly, not with spite and contempt. I joined the Labour Party when I was 14 because I thought it was the best way to make things fairer. I still do. But my first Labour Party meeting was so boring I didn't go back for another 8 years. [[That might be what you're thinking about ever coming to hear a politician speak again. But I hope not.] Because you are our future, and we have to engage you. I want to implement the findings of the Youth Review I chaired. Working with the Charity 4Children, we consulted 16,000 young people and found that less than a quarter of 11-16 year olds felt they had a say in the world around them. Instead they reported a growing sense of irrelevance. We have to turn this around. Young people need work, and their work needs to contribute to a better society. We need to instil aspiration in them, and we do this by valuing them. Throughout my life I've been inspired by people who learnt how to change, and become better. The judge who sentenced my Dad is one such example. He mended his ways and became a better person. He shrugged off the habit of a life-time, and disowned racism. Just think what we could all do if we learnt to be better. If we disowned indifference. If we disowned blatant unfairness. Or the tendency to ignore our neighbours. Or on a more micro level, the tendency to litter the places we live. Just think what could lie ahead for London if we learned to change our habits and our communities. The coming mayoral race, like no other, will be about who can deliver energy and renewal. The last mayoral election angered many Londoners, and I understand why. You were 'in' or 'out'. You lived in inner or outer London. You were for one man or the other man. For a guy with blonde hair or a guy with grey hair. For Blue or for red. For change or against it. I don't want a popularity contest based on who's whacky or who's stale. I want passion grounded in innovation and pragmatism. And I'll tell you why: although I'm passionate about things, I'm a realist about London's problems. Passion alone can't mend a leaking roof. And the skills of a roofer, unless married to the priorities of a politician, would not have rebuilt London's schools. But that's what happened under a Labour Government. We prioritised schools. We linked our values and our passion to improving the learning environment for young people. We rebuilt our schools. And the leaking roof that I used to sit under in the 1980s, the one at the end of the Victorian building a few yards from here, no longer exists. And this amazing world-class venue is now a school truly worthy of you, the young people that deserve our faith. So in the weeks and months ahead I will set out the policy that I believe can deliver my vision: - a vision that combines a passion for fairness, with a pragmatism to get things done. Let me end by saying this. London is fantastic. But I want your help - I need your help (and that of your neighbours, your friends, your family) to make it much, much better. There is a coming generation who can turn London into something incredible: a town whose civic identity harnesses the potential of its people, from the youngest to the oldest, and all those inbetween. To all of you I proudly say 'I am London.' Let me be your champion. Let me prove just how much we can do when we come together for the better of our great city.,