

Thank you, Rob, for those kind words. Thank you to the Legislature for your trust and confidence in voting for me. Thank you to my family, especially my very supportive husband, who cannot be here today due to COVID restrictions but are with me in spirit. Thank you to the legislative staff who have made streaming of today's event possible, so not only my family but also friends and Mainers all across the state can join me in celebrating this moment.

My grandmother, Margaret Gray Colson Devot, turned 101 on Saturday. Born in 1920, she has lived through some of our country's most difficult moments – the Great Depression, WWII and Vietnam – at a time that both of her sons were serving in the armed forces. She has also lived to see some of our nation's greatest triumphs – victory over fascism and genocide in WWII, the landing of the first man on the moon, passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act and in the very year that my grandmother was born, final ratification of the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote.

My grandmother's story is an American story. She immigrated to this country as a child from Scotland, raised four children including my mom, likes to say she had “two wonderful marriages” finding love in my late Grandpa Andy after my grandfather Edmund Colson had died, and operated her own antiques business for a number of years. Throughout these moments in history – the tragedies and triumphs – she has lived, serving community and country, valuing family and voting – always participating in this democracy.

We find ourselves in another perilous time – the first time in our nation's history that a sitting President is actively seeking to overturn the will of the people and upend the results of a free and fair election because they did not go his way. It is also a time of great division and partisanship. It is a time of great fear, a pandemic and the worst economic catastrophe since the Depression. It is times like these that test our courage and unity.

I learned the lesson of unity from my grandmother. A lifelong Republican, she supported me always, even as I entered into politics as a Democrat. Our relationship has always been marked by love and respect. There's a lesson in the diversity of our families that we should apply to public life – to treat those who are not in our party with courtesy and respect and to realize that even when we disagree, we share the same values and the same goals for a better future.

To find courage in perilous times, we can look to the incredible history of the Mainers who came before us, which is housed in the Maine State Archives. In my work before this at the Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine, I learned the importance of history in ensuring that we learn the lessons of the past to build a better future. I will do my best with the incredible team at the Maine State Archives to make Maine's official records as accessible and open to the public as possible. Together, we will work hard to leverage the possibilities of digital technology to empower the citizenry to learn Maine history from the comfort of their living room.

In the Maine Archives, we can find the pension records and land grants to those who fought in the Revolutionary War, including among them (and I was delighted to find this) the pension application of Hatevil Colson, a long distant relative on my mother's side. Our ancestors fought the War of Independence for the liberties spelled out first in our US Constitution and Bill of Rights and then in the Maine Constitution, freedoms to which we swear a solemn oath today. Undergirding all of those freedoms are free and fair elections – the right of the people to freely elect those who serve them in government. It is my distinct honor to be the guardian of Maine's elections. Maine's elections are more free and secure than ever before in our history. And yet we can do more. I will work hard alongside the mighty team of just seven people in the Bureau of Elections today to advance voter participation through reforms like online voter registration and ensure the integrity of future elections through election audits. The trust of the people in our free, fair and secure elections

is a sacred trust. Maine's Bureau of Elections is a model of integrity and service – always delivering elections in which the people can have confidence, even in the time of a pandemic.

While the Bureau of Elections is fundamental to our democracy, the Bureau of Corporations and the Bureau of Motor Vehicles are fundamental to our state's economy. The Bureau of Corporations registers tens of thousands of corporations each year. The Bureau of Motor Vehicles provides services for more than 1.4 million motor vehicles and 750,000 trailers registered in the state, and more than 1 million licensed motor vehicle operators. Every adult Mainer interacts with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles on a regular basis, and every business owner or nonprofit director interacts with the Bureau of Corporations annually. The service that the hardworking people at these Bureaus provide to the people of Maine is invaluable. I'm excited to partner with them to find ways to leverage technology to make those services more accessible and easier to navigate for all Mainers.

Ashur Ware, Maine's first Secretary of State could not have imagined a world in which we could examine the records of our ancestors, apply for a ballot to vote, start up a business, renew an identification card or register a motor vehicle all from the comfort of one's home. That is the vision put forward by the current leaders and their teams at the Department of the Secretary of State, and I am committed to supporting them in that endeavor to move forward with technological advances that will improve public access, efficiency and service to the people of Maine. I am grateful to every one of the more than four hundred employees at the Department of Secretary of State who go to work every day, some at personal risk during the pandemic, eager to serve the people of Maine. Thank you to the amazing and dedicated team at the Department of Secretary of State today for all you do. I look forward to working together to continue to deliver good government to the people of Maine.

Secretary Ware could also not have imagined that someday a woman would hold this role. Indeed, it would take 100 years of statehood for women to gain the right to vote. Frank W. Ball was Maine's Secretary of State at Maine's centennial, overseeing the implementation of women's suffrage. He had come to power in 1917, the first year women had succeeded in getting suffrage on the ballot for a statewide referendum, a vote which was unfortunately defeated overwhelmingly by Maine's male voters at the time, but three years later the franchise for women would be a reality. Progress during Secretary Ball's term came quickly, but left much work to do. In this moment, even as we step forward, I'm mindful of the work left to do. If we are to be a government that is welcoming to all, we must represent in our ranks the people we seek to serve. I am committed to increasing representation and diversity at the Department of the Secretary of State to be more inclusive and equitable in our service.

Which brings me to my most fervent hope – that Maine's daughters and granddaughters and sons and grandsons too will see that no door is closed to them. When I served in the Maine Senate, one of the best parts of the job was welcoming schoolchildren for State House tours. I always shared with them that I grew up poor, without electricity or running water until I was in the fifth grade. I would tell them to remember that in America, in Maine, you can grow up to be whoever it is that you want to be, to fulfill whatever your wildest dreams might be regardless of who you are or where you come from. Someday before I reach my grandmother's age, should I be so lucky, I hope to see the last of the firsts. May all of us work to advance the true promise of the US Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Maine Constitution of justice and equality for all people.