Frank Church Institute, Boise State University
2024 Annual Gala
Remarks by Greg Carr upon receiving the Institute's Public Service Award
"The Longest Way 'Round is the Shortest Way Home"

[Greetings and thanks to people.]

"Senator Church was born in Boise 100 years ago.

Frank Church was a Senator for 24 years, from 1956 to '80. I was born in '59. Therefore, he was my Senator through my entire childhood, up to college.

I was in high school in the '70s when he led the select committee that became known as the Church Committee. Senator Church sought a balance between national security needs on the one hand, and the rights of US citizens to privacy on the other. That word, "balance" is the theme of my talk tonight.

My brother Steve and I heard this idea from our mom as well, Betty Carr, born in Kimberly, Idaho in 1922. She would say: "moderation in all things".

My comments this evening describe my journey to understand people who came before me, Senator Church, Betty Carr, and others, who were wiser than I am.

I gave my talk a funny title, "The longest way 'round is the shortest way home." Let's see if that makes any sense by the end.

I had a good childhood in Idaho Falls. Our family spent a lot of time outdoors. We loved camping, the wilderness. Thank you, Senator Church, for the Wilderness Act of 1964.

I studied History in college. I loved it. I went back East for graduate school and studied Government. Now we are in the '80's. I didn't know what to do with my life, so I started a tech company. I did not know anything about tech. That's just what we all did in the 80's, we all wanted to be Steve Jobs. I sold the company about 10 years later. Now I am in my 30's and asking myself again: "what do I want to do with my life?" I met a woman. Her name was Elodie. She was exotic. She was from France. She was getting a PhD in moral philosophy from Harvard. She was out of my league. Spoiler alert: this does not end well for Greg.

Oh, I forgot something: she was Orthodox Jewish. I am not Orthodox Jewish. This little fact mattered to 3 people: Elodie...and her parents. Despite these challenges, I still hoped that Elodie would be my girlfriend. I went to Paris one summer, between her school terms at Harvard. I thought: “I will find a way to impress Elodie and her parents”.

Thus, I decided to study Maimonides. He is a Jewish philosopher. Guess what: his philosophy could be summed up by the word "balance".
Maimonides was influenced by Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher. Aristotle talked about something he called the "Golden Mean".
Aristotle said that virtue was found by avoiding extremes in thought or emotion. Extremes that cause us to be blind to other views and deaf to other voices. He gave examples, such as: recklessness on one side and cowardice on the other. The golden mean between them is courage. He avoided the extreme to find virtue. His advice to avoid polarization might be relevant in the US today.
Little did I know that Mom was channeling Aristotle through the ages when she said, "moderation in all things".

Despite my yapping about Maimonides, Elodie and her parents kindly and gently gave me the boot. I flew back to Boston. I was sad. I had just been dumped. I was back to wondering what I should do with my life. I was 35. To find solace, I went to a place outside Boston called the Peace Abbey.

The Peace Abbey is dedicated to peace and human rights. It’s about ½ hour out of Boston. It has grassy areas and water. It is beautiful. It has quotes from great people written on stone plaques. That sounds familiar, doesn’t it, to my friends here from the Wassmuth Center. I was at your beautiful Anne Frank Memorial today. There were quotes at the Peace Abbey from Mahatma Gandhi, Sojourner Truth, and many more. I was moved by this. I was inspired. I said to myself: “this is what I am going to do, I am going to pursue human rights.” I met a man at the Peace Abbey named Harry Wu. He was from China. He had spent 19 years of his life at the bottom of a coal mine. He was in forced labor, a political prisoner. He had been labeled a Capitalist in China’s cultural revolution in the ‘60’s. In the ‘80’s he made it out and made it to Boston, where I met him at the Peace Abbey. And I said to myself: “that could have been me. I had a nice life in Idaho Falls. But what if I had been Harry”? And that is the beginning of human rights thinking, isn’t it…that moment when we consider another person, and we think: “that could have been me.” So, now I’ve decided to do human rights, but I don’t know what I am *actually* going to do. So, I decide to learn more. And whereas I like History, I thought I would begin at the beginning, and look for the first appearance of this idea that perhaps we should all be treated equally. I find a disciple of Confucius, 2,500 years ago, named Mencius. And Mencius said: “a peasant is as important as an emperor”. Wow. He could have got his head lopped off for saying that. And at the same time, on the other side of the world, in ancient Greece, Athens was famously having an intellectual flowering. They had vibrant theater. You know the names of the great Greek playwrights, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Aristophanes…but the one I liked was

Euripides. Euripides wrote about the small people, the marginalized, the outsiders, who would never be the center of plays by the other playwrights.

Euripides wrote a play called “Children of Heracles”. This was a story about children who had lost their parents in war. And they were wandering around Greece from town to town, looking for a home. They arrive in Athens. And in this play, the people of Athens have a discussion. The kids are not citizens. What moral obligation do we have to these children? Euripides does not tell people how to think. He was just trying to start the discussion. He wrote a play called Trojan Women. This was about women captured in war and made to become slaves. Euripides is causing us to wonder: “what if I were that person?”

So, I kept reading my way through History, the Magna Carta, 800 years ago, John Locke in the 17th C., who talked about Natural Rights. Rousseau, a century later in France, talked about the Social Contract. The fight in the 19th C. to stop slavery. By the way, one of the slave routes went down the Zambezi River in Africa, where I work now. The Suffragists, who worked hard for a long time to get women the right to vote in 1920. I am enthused. I want to help keep this momentum going, the advance of human rights through history. I go to the Dean of my former school at Harvard, and I say: “let’s start a human rights center.”
And he says: “we are a research university, not a human rights NGO like Amnesty. What are the unanswered questions about human rights, worthy of a research university? Everybody likes human rights.” I feel like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, who finally meets the wizard, and he says, “yeah yeah, go out and do this other thing and come back”.

So, I spend another 18 months studying human rights. I bear down, I look at more recent history to find the unanswered questions, debates and disagreements about human rights. I study the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the end of WWII, after the horror of the Holocaust, the UN was created. The UN formed a committee to create a list of human rights that would apply to every human on Earth. Eleanor Roosevelt was named as the Chair of the Committee. She put people on it representing every philosophy and every corner of the world. They met for two years, from ‘46 to ‘48. We have the minutes of their meetings. This was very helpful for me to read through this. And yes, there were lots of debates and different perspectives. The Soviets did not have the same view of human rights as the Americans.

During this time, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote a letter to Mahatma Gandhi, in 1947. He got the letter on a train. In ‘47 India had just won their independence from centuries of British Colonial oppression. Gandhi had worked on this freedom for decades. Non-violent resistance. Strikes. He spent time in jail. If there was anyone in the world at that time who had the moral authority to pound the table, and demand rights, and to call out the British, and to condemn Western society, it was Gandhi. But he did not do that. He wrote back to Roosevelt, and I think what he said is the most amazing thing I read in my 10 years of looking at rights. He said to her: “don’t just talk about rights, talk about

responsibilities." Wow. Once again, I am hearing balance. He is avoiding the extreme.
And Gandhi's words are in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 29 says: "everyone has a duty to their community, in which alone, the free and full development of their personality is possible."

I go back to the Dean at the Kennedy School, and I say: "there is a lot of debate and unanswered questions". So, he says: "let's do it". And we launch the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard.

Meanwhile, in Boise, at about the same time, you are creating your Anne Frank Memorial. You have a quote from Nelson Mandela. It says: "I have been oppressed by white people, and I have been oppressed by black people…" I am thinking: "I suspect 99.9% of the oppression he experienced was from white people, not black people, why did he end his sentence that way?" And once again, I am witnessing balance. He is trying to find a way forward. He wants us to see each other as human beings.

And you have another quote in your Memorial that I love, by Billie Jean King.
In her day she was probably the most famous lesbian in the world. She was respected.
What does her quote say? "Let's celebrate our differences." She does not say: "gays have been oppressed by straight people long enough, and now we demand this and that." She too is looking forward, not backward.
They are taking the high road, instead of continuing the battle, which would never end.

At the Carr Center, we invite the President of Mozambique to come and talk. Joaquim Chissano. He gives an excellent speech on the future of Africa to a packed house. Then we have lunch. He says to me: "you are a philanthropist, and you do human rights, why don't you come to Mozambique and let's find a project to pursue together." At that time, Mozambique was the poorest country in the world. It was emerging from 500 years of Colonialism. They had had 30 years of war; 1 million Mozambicans had died. I start wandering around Mozambique between 2002 and 2004. I am wondering what I can do. This is above my pay grade. I bump into this forgotten national park, Gorongosa. In its hay day it had been one of the best national parks in Africa, with the densest collection of wildlife. But nearly all the animals had been killed in the war, eaten by hungry people. Important to me: Gorongosa can be an economic engine if we revive it.

I go to the capital city, I say to President Chissano and his Ministers: "let's restore your national treasure, Gorongosa. Let's do it with a human rights focus". The Park was surrounded by 250,000 of the poorest people in the world. President Chissano says: "ok, let's do it".

We spend a couple of years making a plan. This is a big project, not only to restore the Park but to help the people who live next door. In January of 2008 I sign an agreement with the Govt of Mozambique, essentially committing the rest of my life to help them restore their national treasure.

Then I get contacted. Nelson Mandela wants to meet me. Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison in South Africa for fighting against white Apartheid. He got out in 1990. He wanted to spend some time outdoors after being couped up. He visits South Africa's national parks. He likes them but there is one big problem: all the tourists are white and everyone who works there is white. Yet, South Africa is a predominantly black country. In his wisdom, Mandela does not say: "let's get rid of these parks." He says: "let's make them more inclusive." He wanted to meet me because his friend President Chissano told him I was going to restore Gorongosa with a human rights focus.
I am sitting in his waiting room. I am thinking about the fact that there is a quote by him in my home state of Idaho, at the Anne Frank Memorial. A nice person in the office tells me that it is my turn. I walk down the hall toward his door, I am thinking: "I am going to tell him about his quote in my state". The door opens and Billie Jean King walks out.
The universe is trying to knock me on the head to tell me that some really smart people have come before me, and I should listen to them. I go into Mandela's office. I ask him for advice on making a human rights park. I return to Gorongosa.

Now I need to run through 15 years in a minute or two. We spend ¾ of our time and money outside the Park. We are working in 120 schools. They are public schools. We train teachers, we provide after school clubs for kids, we keep girls in school and out of child marriage. We provide health care. We help 20,000 farm families. We restored the wildlife to the Park. We now have more than 100% of the equivalent biomass of animals that were in the Park before the troubles.

We take a human rights approach, not a law enforcement approach. You see, in Colonial Africa, parks were run as law enforcement organizations. Rangers with guns would keep local people out of the parks. They would call them "poachers" if they ate an animal. Wealthy people from far away would come to the parks and have fun and go home, and the local people got nothing. I banned the term "poacher". As soon as you use a derogatory term for someone, that is the first step to abusing their human rights, you de-humanize them. I said: "they are people who need a meal." By helping 20,000 farm families get more yield on their farms, they don't need to go into the Park to look for a warthog to eat. We now have very little poaching to speak of. We have not lost an elephant or lion in so many years that I can't remember when it last happened. We are the largest employer in the center of the country. Time Magazine called us a "human rights park", the first time I had seen that in print.

There is one more thing about Gorongosa that I want to discuss, Science. In the beginning of the process, I recognized that we would need science to help us restore the ecosystem. We are restoring rainforests, we need to study soil biomes, plant-herbivore interactions, herbivore-carnivore interactions. And I don't know anything about this. At that time, the most famous biologist in the world is EO Wilson, Emeritus Harvard. He was considered to be the most influential biologist since Darwin. His office was about a half mile from where I lived. But I couldn't just go see him. Remember, I am a nobody. Scientists would fly from all over the world to try to get an hour with him.

But one day I saw him in a restaurant in Cambridge. And I walked up to him, and I said: "Professor Wilson, I am going to go to Mozambique and restore Gorongosa National Park." And he said: "that makes my heart go pitter patter". So, I said: "why don't you come and see what we are doing?". And he came 3 times. He wrote a book about Gorongosa. And, importantly, he introduced us to scientists from around the world. We have 70 universities involved with Gorongosa, including Boise State, thank you. And the goal is knowledge transfer to the Mozambicans. We have a masters in conservation biology, 12 Mozambicans in each class, 6 women and 6 men. They are the future leaders who will run all of Mozambique's national parks and reserves.

Ed Wilson wrote a lot of books. One is relevant to our theme tonight of "balance". This book is called "The Social Conquest of Earth". He explains how our species, human beings / Homo sapiens, evolved over the past millions of years, from homo erectus to archaic homo sapiens, and then we became modern homo sapiens about 200,000 years ago. And he explains that we have genes for selfishness and genes for collaboration, or altruism…and he explains why. Biologists talk about traits that are adaptive. Traits that led to our survival. And you can imagine, 100,000 years ago, there were times when it helped someone survive to be selfish, and there were times when it increased the likelihood of survival to be collaborative, or altruistic. You create a friendship, you help someone, and they might help you some day when you need it. And we all share this human genome, we all have genes for selfishness and kindness, and we have fossil and genetic evidence for this, going back 200,000 years.

We all have angels and devils inside us. And the question is: will we listen to the angels or the devils as we make choices throughout our lives. As I read Wilson, I am hearing Ghandi say: we need to cultivate our character.
And that is his quote on your memorial: "Be the change you want to see in the world".

So now I was thinking: we have a scientific underpinning (the sharing of our genome) for what the wise philosophers have been saying for two and ½ thousand years. That we need to see ourselves as one human species. We need to see ourselves in others. We need society to reflect this knowledge, find the balance. If we know that we all have these genes, then we need to find the balance between justice and mercy in our institutions and our engagement with others.

And the things we obsess about, to identify differences in each other-- religion, place of origin, even the color of our skin-- are of recent origin compared to our ancient genome, which we share. We are all humans.

I have one final story before I end tonight. The title of my talk: "The longest way round is the shortest way home." That is from a book called Ulysses, by James Joyce. It is 700 pages of the most impenetrable English you can imagine. See, back when I was in my 30's, I thought: "if I read this book, I can impress Elodie"! You knew she would appear in this story again. Joyce's Ulysses is loosely based upon the ancient Greek story of Odysseus. Odysseus was away from home for 20 years. 10 of them were war. Then he spent 10 years in a boat encountering all kinds of problems. And he needed to

overcome that adversity to develop his character, some skills, some humility, so that he was ready to go home. And, that line is in Joyce's book: "The longest way round is the shortest way home." And I believe that what Joyce was really trying to say was: "The longest way round is the only way home." The longest way round is the only way to human rights. We need to do the hard work. Follow our angels. For some: serve in the US Senate for 24 years. There are no short cuts. We need to listen to each other, develop trust and understanding. Then, together, as one human family, we can work for a world in which we all enjoy our rights and perform our duties.