

Aaron Swartz Public Memorial

Great Hall, Cooper Union, New York, NY

January 19th, 2013

WIKLER: In this country's long procession of struggles for freedom and social justice, this hall is sacred space. It was in this hall that the NAACP held its first public meeting. This hall -- Cooper Union's Great Hall -- echoed with the voices of women's suffrage leaders, civil rights leaders, workers' rights organizers. In 1860, a young Abraham Lincoln came here to give the speech of his political life to that date -- a speech against the expansion of slavery, where he said, "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it." Aaron lived his short and enormous life to the echo and to the rhythm of those words, and we're gathered here today to remember that life, to commemorate his spirit, to honor his legacy, and to reflect on the challenges that he left us. And to silence our cellphones. (murmurs of laughter)

I'm Ben Wikler; I was a friend of Aaron's; I got to know him in a much less august setting. We had offices next to each other in a former fraternity house in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was being rented out in rooms to progressive activists, and we got to know each other because the wall adjoining our rooms had a huge hole in it. (laughter) So he could hear my voice as I was on conference calls. I could hear how fast he typed. We were both intrigued. And we introduced ourselves to each other and started talking and discovered -- I, first of all, discovered he knew more about my field and my work than I knew about his and, secondly, that he knew more about it than I knew about mine. (laughter) Which was a common thing for Aaron when talking to people about anything.

But what I loved about Aaron was not only his incredible dedication, his incredible brilliance -- also, how much fun he was. We constantly had ridiculous adventures, like when we tried to go see Avatar at an IMAX theater -- it was sold out. We wound up in a trapeze gym, flying around and sending cellphone videos to my wife, who was extremely alarmed at the turn of events. (laughter)

Aaron had a willingness and an excitement to do whatever seemed like the right thing to do. And we're going to hear today from friends and collaborators and allies from all different parts of his life. He started in this work very young. We're also going to -- we heard, as we entered, a little bit of

music that he loved -- he loved Pete Seeger, both his music and his legacy. And in a moment, I'm going to invite Pete Seeger's grandson to read a quick note that Pete Seeger sent. He wasn't able to join us today. We'll also hear from another musician, from OK Go -- Damian Kulash. There are many people who wish they could be here with us. There are some people who are here virtually; this is streaming online at Democracy Now! -- you can get there through rememberaaaronsw.com.

And before we start, I'd like to say thank-you to a bunch of people who've helped make this happen. First, to the team at ThoughtWorks -- to Roy Singham, to Holly Webb, to Shawn McGee, to Brian Guthrie, and everyone at ThoughtWorks, who sponsored this -- Aaron was working at ThoughtWorks. They'd given him a team of amazing engineers to build, essentially, whatever he wanted, to help activists around the world, and that's what he was doing for the last year before his death. So, thanks to them.

Thanks to Julia at Democracy Now!. Thanks to Anthony Mercurio, to Charles Fuhrman, to Paul [Ferris], [Ruan] Al-Haddad. To Joley [McFee], Nick [Alardise], [Verhan Cordeus], [Miha Sifrey], Zephyr Teachout -- everyone who helped make this possible. To everyone at Sum Of Us, and to Taren Stinebrickner-Kauffman. Also to the Baffler, to John Summers, who found the quote that you'll find in the program. A huge number of people were running through all the amazing things that Aaron said. There's no single quote of his that does him justice. But there's so much that he lived for that we'll be remembering today. Thanks also to Beth Wikler and Matt Wikler, my baby son, who might be making himself heard during this event. To Shelly [Darden], to Deepak Gupta, and all the friends who have come around Aaron's friends and family in these incredibly hard days after his death.

One friend of Aaron's who wasn't able to be here is Larry Lessig. Larry went to the funeral on his son's birthday, and it's his son's birthday party today. And at a time like this, you need to be with your family. But he sent these -- these words.

"There are no words for this sadness. Tears were made for this. Silent tears, ferocious hugs; words remain for happier things, for the world he wanted, for the world he helped to build. Let us save our words for this -- for the ways we will make the world he needed, for the ways we will guarantee the justice he was denied. He lives with us, always. He inspires us forever. Let us never forget who he was, and let us not let him down, again."

Before I invite our first speaker, Doc Searles, to speak, I'd also like to ask Kitama Jackson to come and bring the words of Pete Seeger, who sent a note.

JACKSON: My grandfather, Pete Seeger, was very... was very saddened to hear about Aaron. I spoke with him this morning; he was sorry that he couldn't be here with you today. In reading about Aaron, and thinking about my grandfather, I definitely see -- I definitely see a similarity in what they both stood for. And my grandfather is someone who's always been very, very proud of people who stood up for what they believed in, even if it wasn't popular by everyone. And it's astonishing work Aaron has done in his life. Here are the words from my grandfather.

“I’m sorry I cannot be present at this memorial for Aaron Swartz. These modern times are filled with such contradictions that experts are not agreed what the future of the human race will be. But we can agree today that it was a tragedy for this brilliant young man to be so threatened that he hanged himself.”

Pete Seeger, January 19th, 2013

Thank you.

WIKLER: We're going to hear next from Doc Searles, who, as he'll describe, got to know Aaron, I think, when he was 14.

SEARLES: It was strange coming in here this morning -- or this afternoon, whatever it is -- I lose track. Time seems to be off the table here.

I kept thinking I was seeing Aaron. In the line outside, as I walk inside... there's such a sense of his presence. And then I saw this -- I saw the program. That's a photo I shot of Aaron. I licensed it through Creative Commons, so that's one reason it's here. And that happened in part because Aaron educated me on how to do that.

Aaron and I were often generational bookends at conferences that we went to. And we went to a lot of them -- we tended to show up at stuff; that's why it makes sense for Aaron to be at something like this. And one of those was COMDEX, the -- COMDEX was at one time the biggest conference there was. Sheldon Adelson, the guy who funded a lot of Republican activity, was the

guy who ran COMDEX -- he made his bones on that one. But it was a huge conference. And one of the last years it ran in Las Vegas was 2002 -- it was right after the dot-com boom; the dot-com bust was in fact very much a big deal at that time. And I was asked to help put together a panel that was a debate -- it was kind of -- it was a debate between, basically, the same -- the old and the new, more or less -- the Internet culture and the traditional culture, however that was defined. And so they asked me to help put together the Internet culture side, and I chose Aaron as a guy on my side -- the main guy on my side.

They wondered why I would choose a guy so young -- at the time he was 15. He just turned 16 at the time of the panel -- and it's because he was the right one. He was the right one, because he already knew what needed to be known, and he was the -- he was the guy we're going to hand this off to.

Mika told me a great quote before this that really sums up, for me, the -- the tragedy of this.... which is that when we're young, we think our cause is a sprint, and then we're middle aged; we think it's a marathon. And when we're old we think it's a relay race. And Aaron was the guy you wanted to hand this off to.

One of the amazing things about maturing -- about getting older -- is that you realize your job is to leave. Your job is to leave the world better than you found it, and you want to leave it in the hands of people who were really good at taking care of the stuff that really matters, and standing up for the stuff that really matters. And Aaron did that.

When he showed up at this thing, it was interesting because... I think Larry had introduced him to me earlier, but I was amazed -- he was really small. He was this little guy. There's that picture of -- among the ones that are rotating, earlier -- of Larry Lessig talking to Aaron; that was about when he was that age. And yet, as soon as we started talking, it was like I'm talking to this adult. And I asked him about, you know, school and stuff like that, that you ask a teenager -- he was done with school! He was done! (laughter) He moved on. "Well, you're going to high school." "No, no -- I'm not doing that." "You going to university?" "Eh. I'm working." "On what?" Well, there's RSS, there's Creative Commons, there's a whole roster of things that he was active in. David Weinberger wrote a great blog post that said, "Aaron wasn't a hacker; he was a builder." But I was explaining hackers this morning to somebody at a bar mitzvah, that we just came from here. I was explaining hackers as the -- I said, they're really the athletes -- the athlete programmers. The top athletes. Because it's a respectable term. And it needs to have respect

again.

Aaron had -- I believe his mom brought him there; that's what I said on my blog. I don't remember exactly, but he was chaperoned to the place. But when he was on stage and talking, I listened to what -- I could have -- the thing again, somebody went to the trouble of pulling the audio from an old video that was shot live at that thing. Love the web for that kind of thing; somebody digs this stuff up. And as I was listening to it, the one thing I heard Aaron vigorously defending and explaining was general-purpose computing. Something that's threatened now, he was saying this in 2002. To a bunch of executives. "We need to protect general purpose computing." So there's a -- oh, and also he had a -- his computer was this broken Mac laptop that had a -- you couldn't read it, because the light had gone out behind it. Only he could read it. He explained this was OK, because it was still a security precaution. (laughter) 16 years old.

Anyway, so, I was thinking about what Aaron stood for -- you'll hear a lot of that today, and... and my note here says, "geeks and legal-justice." And... geeks tend to avoid the legal stuff. They tend not to want to screw with it. They tend to not want to deal with the politics. We're just -- Linus Torvalds -- I'm an editor for Linux Journal -- would say, "I only do kernel space; I don't do user space." Politics is in user space; justice is in user space. Aaron was in both. And there are so few geeks that stand out and go that extra space, that extra step to defend the rest of us -- to stand -- to look out in the future and see what needs to be, and work on that, and making that happen.

And we need justice here. That's what this hall is about; that's the sacred space we heard about earlier. Justice needs to happen here; that's what Pete Seeger stood for, still stands for. That's what we all need to stand for. Whatever that means -- and in our hearts we know it's there. And the presence that is Aaron in the world persists and is in all of our hearts. But we need to do the work that he started. Thank you.

(applause)

WIKLER: When I met him, Aaron told me he wanted to be, really, a historian. Which isn't what he's most known for. He was working on a book of history -- one chapter was how urban sprawl came to be as a result of a conspiracy of department store owners in Manhattan -- it's a true story. Another was about a group of elementary school-aged girls in a factory in Massachusetts who started organizing trade unions before that was a thing, which resulted in the

creation of public schools to keep them from organizing workers.

The historian Rick Perlstein, who was a good friend of Aaron's, and who Aaron loved, wrote a memorial for Aaron where he said that each of us contains a universe in our heads, a world of information and heroes and villains and ideas. The difference was that Aaron had 14 or 15 of them. And different people here today represent different parts of those worlds. Our next speaker is Glenn Otis Brown; he was the first Executive Director of Creative Commons. He's done a million other things in technology, and got to know Aaron in another one of those worlds.

BROWN: Thank you Ben; thank you all for having me here. Thank you Taren, thank you all of Aaron's friends and family. It's a very humbling thing and a huge honor to be invited to speak here today.

I worked with Aaron, and had the privilege of getting to work with Aaron, in the early days of Creative Commons -- it was around 2002, 2003. Aaron was about 15 or 16; it was about the same time Doc got to know him. And I didn't have any sort of mentor relationship with Aaron; technically he worked for the organization I was running, but that didn't mean that he worked for anybody, as was often the case for the rest of his life. And, in fact, at 15 or 16 he was -- I can safely say -- more emotionally mature than I was at 28 or whatever I was.

So we had primarily a work relationship, a very professional relationship, and I want to talk a little bit about that and give you a couple of anecdotes from that time that left a mark on me. But also to talk about Aaron as a person, and the glimpses of his heart and his soul that I saw, and that I think many others here who knew Aaron much more closely than I did over the years will speak to more later. But....

Aaron's role at Creative Commons early on was -- officially, he was the metadata advisor, meaning he was the person in charge of taking Creative Commons licenses, which were a brand new concept at the time, something people thought was -- I can tell you -- insane. Most people thought we were crazy; they thought it was a "collective hallucination," was one term. And Aaron, he was 15 or 16, came in as a kind of metadata expert and his job was to translate these legal documents written by teams of lawyers in Silicon Valley and in Cambridge and turn them into machine-readable versions of that. So his ability to connect these different worlds that Doc spoke of began that early on.

One thing that I found in something that I used to write called the Captain's Blog -- which I originally called the Captain's Log, in a Star Trek reference -- it was an internal kind of newsletter -- and both Aaron Swartz and Larry Lessig corrected me and said it should be called the Captain's Blog. I didn't know what a blog was at the time, so... (laughter) Illustrative of our relationship. So:

Creative Commons metadata advisor Aaron Swartz recently returned from the O'Reilly Open Source conference, where he gave keynote speaker Lawrence Lessig a run for his money, delivering a Python lightning talk on Creative Commons metadata from within Python. "The response was great," says Aaron. "People kept stopping me in the halls with compliments and questions."

That was not to be the last time that was going to be the case with Aaron.

Another just fun anecdote that comes from these same set of notes... there was a time on the actual page where you could choose a Creative Commons license -- we thought about naming it, just kind of for marketing purposes -- it might be kind of fun. Different names that were going around -- we ended up not doing this, of course -- but different names that were going around were, "The Commons Denominator," "The Genie" -- which I came up with; I have no idea what I was thinking with that one. And Aaron's was, appropriately enough, "The Liberator." Which, as you all know, continues to ring true today in terms of Aaron's view on the world and the spirit that he brought.

But I don't want to talk too much about, like I said, Aaron's work; I want to talk a little bit about his heart and his personality and his soul and his sense of humor. Another thing that I found in these notes, and pointed to from Aaron's blog, was his license haiku, which some of you may have seen. So, this is Aaron speaking on his blog, again around the same time, 2002:

I think that people really use software licenses to express intentions, and don't really read the details of the licenses.
So I think that licenses should be made as simple as possible, so that they don't disagree with intentions... thus,
haiku licensing:

(laughter) And... I have a feeling that most of the people in the room are going to know what this means, but apologies to those of you who don't

know what these acronyms are; you will shortly, if you don't.

[Public domain]: do what you feel like / since the work is abandoned / the law doesn't care

(laughter)

MIT: take my code with you / and do whatever you want / but please don't blame me

LGPL: you can copy this / but make modified versions / free in source code form

MPL: like LGPL / except netscape is allowed / to change the license

(laughter)

GPL: if you use this code / you and your children's children / must make your source free

And he finishes with:

RIAA: if you touch this file / my lawyers will come kill you / so kindly refrain

(laughter)

And mostly I think about -- I haven't stopped thinking about this from the moment I heard the terrible news on Saturday morning is -- every thought comes back to Aaron's smile. Every thought comes back to this smile. It communicated so much more than almost anything else, and everything else that Aaron communicated spoke volumes. But this smile is literally the thing I'm constantly coming back to.

And I have to comment a little bit on, I think, the -- what I've just observed kind of in this last week, the touching public outpouring that is primarily, I think, maybe focused on Aaron's work, and the amazing things he accomplished in such a short period of time. I sometimes find myself, to the extent I feel a sense of regret... I try to turn that into a sense of gratitude, for --

I feel like I didn't, maybe, see it -- I want more of Aaron's soul; I want to have more of his personality; I wish I'd connected with him more on a personal level, and not so much on a work level. But sometimes we only get glimpses, and... we have to be grateful for that. I'm incredibly grateful. I hope that in the response that is coming -- the public response, the work response, the political response, the social response that's already forming -- I hope that at the same time everyone can keep in mind... not at the exclusion of the work -- not at the exclusion of the politics -- Aaron as a person, Aaron's soul, Aaron's sense of humor.

And I want to just read one thing that was also on his blog that struck me many years ago, that I kept, and... and I just want to say it again here, that I think is relevant in a couple different ways, but... this is about Aaron's month offline -- he posted a blog post about spending 30 days offline. This is a guy who it's very difficult to be offline for, like for many of us. So this is a very significant moment for him:

most of all, I felt not just happy, but firmly happy — solid, is the best way I can put it. I felt like I was in control of my life instead of the other way around, like its challenges just bounced off me as I kept doing what I wanted. Normally I feel buffeted by events, a thousand tiny distractions nagging at the back of my head at all times. Offline, I felt in control of my own destiny. I felt, yes, serene.

Which I think is a comforting thing to look back on, but I think also potentially relevant for how we think about our reaction here. I hope that our response to Aaron's passing is as much about our souls and our hearts, and Aaron's souls and hearts, as it is about the work that we will continue to carry on for him.

I just want to finish with another set of lines from a writer I admire, up there with Aaron. This is from a song by Leonard Cohen called "Anthem."

You can add up the parts
But you won't have the sum.

You can strike up the march
On your little broken drum.

Every heart, every heart,

To love will come.
But like a refugee.

Ring the bells that still can ring,
Forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack, a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.

And I just want to finish by inviting everyone here to recognize that this is a tremendous gift that Aaron's given us -- this collection of people, of all different ages, from many different backgrounds. And I want to make sure we take the opportunity and invite you all to introduce yourself to people you don't know -- people who touched Aaron's life, and people whose life Aaron touched. And make -- keep that connection, on a professional level, on the level of work and the work to be done, with the drum, with the march, but also the work of -- of the heart and the soul, and the bell.

Thank you.

(applause)

WIKLER: Aaron moved in and out of different institutions. He spent a year in high school, a year in college; he worked on a huge number of different projects. But he moved into people's lives and stayed there. One person whose life he was in, and who had a huge part in his life, was Quinn Norton, our next speaker. Always a close friend, a long-time partner, a great ally in so many things, and a wonderful writer. And the mother of Ada, her daughter, whom Aaron -- I have this very vivid memory of -- bought a quadcopter for her, which is a heli-- like a remote-control helicopter with four blades that's controlled from an iPhone and flies around. And one day I was at the office, I was working, and Aaron came in and said, "I just bought a quadcopter!" And then he had to explain what the quadcopter was, and then he explained that it's controlled by an iPhone, and then he explained that it was for a seven-year-old. (laughter) Which totally blew my mind, but when Aaron was seven, he built an ATM. So. (laughter)

Anyway, Quinn Norton.

NORTON: What Ben didn't mention in that story is that Aaron immediately crashed that quadcopter -- (laughing) -- and destroyed it, and managed to get another one

on insurance, which my daughter then crashed, and destroyed. (laughing)

After a protracted illness had resolved, I dragged Aaron to Lassen National Monument in California and... I just have this very vivid memory of us up on the side of the mountain, trying to make a campfire in the rain. And what we finally did -- now, Aaron complained the whole way through. It was about the fact that we were there, and it was raining; that we were trying to make a campfire. But during all of his complaints, he kept gathering and finding dry wood, and bringing it back to me, and I'd take it and pile it on. And... eventually, we got a good mound going, but it was still raining. And we sparked the little stuff underneath, and we covered it with newspaper, and then we gave up.

And we went off for a little while, and chatted nearby over something that would cover us -- or under something that would cover us -- and it had time to kind of smolder. And it caught -- it caught underneath the paper. And by the time it blew through the paper, it was strong enough to stay lit in the rain. And Aaron jumped up and, I mean, high-fived me, like we just won a tournament.

An event like Aaron's death divides a life. It's the BC and the AD of one's personal story, and from now on, my own biography will have divided into when Aaron was alive and after he died. We look for the words that will bring him back; we look for memories that contain him, like an incantation. We look for something that can contain that soul. I have a thousand little pieces of our time together; a thousand little nets to try and trap the smoke that he now is.

But I can't. He's slipped away. I loved him, but he's escaped me.

Aaron left us and entered the realm of myth-making not long after. He doesn't belong to any one of us anymore, not even himself -- he belongs to memory and history, and time and hope. Still, I lost a person that day, and a person that I cared for very deeply. And that's actually who I've come to talk about. Not the Internet saint, or the incredibly accomplished activist, or the young and notable Internet technologist -- the Aaron I've come to talk about is the one who sang "Little Boxes" to my daughter while we were driving around Daly City. The person who almost never did any of the damn dishes. (laughter) The one who stole my camera to take long exposures of Ada and I when we were sleeping; the one who complained all the way through all the camping trips. And, grinning, always agreed to the next one. The one who climbed 30 feet up to a top of a tree in Northern California and sat there insisting he liked it; he

wouldn't have any trouble getting back down for quite some time.

Aaron Swartz ate a lot of water crackers. (laughter) A *lot* of water crackers. (laughter) I spent a huge amount of time studying how to feed Aaron, and in time, I managed to consistently get a few vegetables down him on a regular basis. Mostly I managed to feed him cakes and cookies and creme brûlée, and he eventually came to introduce me to another foodie friend of his and he conspired to feed him. And that conspiring eventually turned into a rich friendship, and me helping with a cookbook, which we gave Aaron. It only kind of worked.

He was terrible about making plans at the last minute. Aaron could be a real pain in the ass to deal with. He was so there with you... he was so in the space with you. He had this special quality, which I've noticed again now, seeing so many people that... almost everyone who has something they're passionate about eventually said, "Well, that was the thing that Aaron always said he wanted to be." So I have the impression he wanted to be a writer; my sociologist friend has the impression he wanted to be a sociologist -- and Aaron was doomed, from the beginning, to just be Aaron. To defy these categories.

We talk about how extraordinary he was, but actually, he wasn't. He was another human being, with all the flaws and glories that each of us have, each of us an infinite well of solitude. He was scared and self-conscious; he could be funny and greedy and petty and loving and curious and hopeful, and strange. He was irreducible; he was difficult. A person, the most complex thing we've yet found in our universe. He turned to me once in a movie theater and said, like someone who had just realized the answer to a difficult math problem, "I contain multitudes." (laughter)

However, to call Aaron extraordinary isn't a way to side-step the message of how he lived his life. The only reason we're all here at this memorial, holding up this 26-year-old as a paragon, is that in a culture ruled by fear, he learned and taught me that trying is more important than being afraid. "Don't worry," he told me, "no one remembers your failures." Don't waste time doing small things and being cautious. We're here because he did so much in his 26 years, despite a culture saying you have to be careful and risk nothing. Be responsible, be deferential, go through the proper channels. He rejected all that. He didn't wait to start living, and that's all it took. He understood that his curiosity was all the license he needed. It was the only permission to participate in the world. And when the world didn't understand that, he taught it to them.

He understood that learning was more important than accreditation, and that intelligence is a poor and pale substitute for caring. He burned with a love for humanity, and he surrounded himself with people, all so infinitely complex -- you people. Struck dumb by a love of the world. He lived a life of thought and action, and that is the rarest thing in this world, right now, at this moment in history, to marry our thoughts and our actions.

We shared an understanding that a life is a thing made in the living of it, and he inspired me. And here, in the AD, I will carry that little inspiration like a jewel gripped in my hand: beautiful, valuable, abrasive, and impossible to forget.

I'd like to read a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millet, called "First Faith."

My candle burns at both ends
It will not last the night
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends
It gives a lovely light.

Thank you.

(applause)

WIKLER: We'll now have a brief musical interlude... Damian Kulash, from the band OK Go, which Aaron really liked, is here -- he's going to play a song.

KULASH: This is a song by a band called Lavender Diamond, called "Everyone's Heart's Breaking Now."

*Oh everybody's heart's breaking now
And you feel the world is ending somehow
And you wonder how we'll find our way out
Oh everybody's heart's breaking now*

*Oh everybody's heart's breaking now
When the oceans and the rivers turn brown
And what's living inside 'em is drowned
Oh everybody's heart's breaking now*

Breaking now..

Breaking now..

*Maybe run through the fire and we'll both find the same
But together was better, we hold on together*

*Oh everybody's heart's breaking now
When the children are troubled and down
And there's so many ways you can tell
Oh everybody's heart's breaking now*

Breaking now..

Breaking now..

*Maybe run through the fire and we'll both find the same
But together was better, we hold on together*

Breaking now..

Breaking now..

Breaking now..

WIKLER: I mostly knew Aaron as a friend and as an activist, but I learned a lot about technology from him, and one thing that I learned about was the agile method of software development, which is practiced at ThoughtWorks. And in agile software development, the idea is you make things, right away, and put them in front of real people, and then see what doesn't work, and then fix that. And then make it again. And you're constantly building and changing things, and it's something that works incredibly well in technology. In print products, it doesn't work quite as well, but (trying to) use the same principles, you'll find a typo on the front of your program -- 2012 should be 2013.

But Aaron... Aaron would always try stuff. And one of the things I loved about him was his combination of sort of reverence and fearlessness. So if he found something that was fascinating or interesting, he would just reach out to whoever it was who was doing that thing and start learning from it and talking about it. Which, I think, is how it came to be that one day he came over to my place and he'd just been visiting with Edward Tufte, who is a revered and amazing sort of founder of the field of the visual display of quantitative information. Edward Tufte is here today, and he's going to talk to us about his Aaron Swartz, which was part of the multitude of Aaron Swartzes

that we all knew one way or another.

Edward Tufte.

(applause)

TUFT: Aaron first encountered me at Stanford in 2005 and promptly posted a very funny account about looking for my ghostly presence. He tells the story of how he had a choice between taking a final exam and -- or coming to hear me talk. As it turned out, he did both.

We then would meet over the years for a long talk every now and then, and my responsibility was essentially to provide him with a reading list -- a reading list for life. And then, about two years ago, Quinn and Aaron came to Connecticut and he told me about the four-and-a-half million downloads of scholarly articles. And my first question was: why isn't MIT celebrating this?

(applause)

Then I told him -- actually, I had a problem with what he did because probably, of those four-and-a-half million scholarly articles, only about one or two thousand deserved reading.

(laughter, applause)

But what he needed in downloading was -- in addition -- was a quality control mechanism. (laughter) That would ensure that the material deserved to be downloaded by Aaron. And so I suggested that he combine his search or his downloading of articles with a link to the citation index so he could download articles that had been cited more often than just by the author's mother.

(laughter)

Either at that meeting, or maybe at the next one, we talked a little bit about the legal case -- or maybe this is right before he was indicted. And he asked me if I knew Bill Bowen. I think he knew the answer to that question. Bill Bowen was the president of Princeton when I was -- started out -- and was enormously helpful in my career there. He then became president of the Mellon Foundation, and he had retired from the Mellon Foundation, but he was asked by the Mellon Foundation to handle the problem of JSTOR and

Aaron. So I wrote Bill Bowen an email about it. And I said, first, that Aaron was a treasure. And then I told a personal story about how I had done some illegal hacking as a student and been caught at it and what happened.

In 1962, my housemate and I invented the first “blue box” -- that’s a device that allows for free, undetectable, unbillable long-distance telephone calls. And we got this bug, and played around with it, and the end of our research came when we completed what we thought was the longest long-distance telephone call ever made (laughter) which was from Palo Alto to New York time of day, via Hawaii. (laughter) Well, during our experimentation, AT&T -- on the second day, it turned out -- had tapped our phone. And... but it wasn’t until about six months later when I got a call from a gentleman, AJ Dodge, senior security person at AT&T, and I said, “I know what you’re calling about.”

And so we met, and he said, “You know, what you were doing is a crime” -- network, and all that. And -- but I knew it wasn’t serious, because he actually cared about the kind of engineering stuff and complained that the tone signals we were generating weren’t up to standard. (laughter) Because they recorded them and played them back into the network to see what numbers they were -- we were trying to reach -- and they couldn’t break through the noise of our signal.

The upshot of it was that -- oh, and he asked why we went off the air after about three months. Because this was to make, you know, long-distance telephone calls for free. And I said, “Well, it was -- we regarded it as an engineering problem, and we’d made the longest long-distance phone call, and so that was it.” And so the deal was that -- as I explained in my email to Bill Bowen -- the deal was that we wouldn’t try to sell this -- we were told that... I was told that crime syndicates would pay a great deal for this; we wouldn’t do any more of it, and that we would turn our equipment over to AT&T. And so they got a complete vacuum tube oscillator kit for making long-distance phone calls.

But I was grateful for AJ Dodge, and, I must say, even AT&T, that they decided not to wreck my life.

And so... I told Bill Bowen... that he had a great opportunity here to not wreck somebody’s life. And of course he, thankfully, did the right thing.

Aaron’s unique quality was that he was marvelously and vigorously different.

There is a scarcity of that. Perhaps we can be all a little more different, too.

Thank you very much.

WIKLER: Pretty early -- I guess everything in Aaron's life was pretty early, but -- but even within Aaron's life, pretty early in his life, he had the fortune to make some money that allowed him to be financially independent. As many people have written and reflected, Aaron never actually did anything for the purpose of making money. That he was part of Reddit and (helped us to sell it), I think when he was 20. When I met him, he was maybe the most austere person that I'd ever met, in his personal life. He lived in a tiny apartment; all his belongings fit in a duffel bag and a backpack. He was working in this office that had a hole in the wall. And I don't know what was in his bank account, but I do know that he was using everything he had to try to maximize his impact on the world.

His idea of the number one way to do that was funding his projects, and I think he was right. But in his will, he left everything that's left over to an organization called GiveWell. The co-founder and co-Executive Director of GiveWell is our next speaker, Holden Karnofsky. Holden... thanks for being here, Holden.

KARNOFSKY: I met Aaron through his interest in the work of Peter Singer. Peter Singer is a philosopher who argues that we're morally obligated to give as much as we can to charity, because our money can do so much more good for others than it can do for us. Peter promotes my organization, GiveWell, because GiveWell works to find the charities that are doing the most good, for example, in terms of lives saved per dollar given.

This is not the way most people think about giving to charity. For most people, giving to charity is optional, and it's personal. They see all giving as praiseworthy and all options as equally valid, and they give to a charity that they have a personal connection to, or a personal passion for. To many people, it's a strange and foreign idea that you could be doing something wrong by giving to a charity that's good and just not the best.

But to Aaron, this idea was natural and obvious. Aaron was driven by that same approach, not just for how to spend his money but for how to spend his time and his considerable talents. Aaron believed in trying to maximize the good he accomplished with each minute he had. He looked across all of the things he could be working on, and he strategically chose his best shot at

making a positive difference. You could say Aaron approached making positive change the way a lot of people approach making money: he wanted as much as possible, he obsessed over it, he strategized over it, and he was willing to work in any area for it.

This attitude made Aaron very versatile, and very fascinating -- he was one of my favorite people to talk to. We often met up to do nothing but talk and wander through Brooklyn for several hours. The first time we did this, it took from 10 in the morning until 10 at night. We talked about which political issues we found most important and why, and what we can do about them, and we ventured into other topics as well.

The last time we met was just before Christmas 2012, and Aaron showed up talking about how he was starting to wonder whether the Victorians had been right all along. Because he had been reading studies implying that willpower is like a muscle, and improves with practice. So, maybe wearing silly clothes and being sexually repressed might have made the Victorians incredibly good at practicing self-control in productivity. (laughter) The idea sounded a little silly, and neither of us wanted to believe that we should live like the Victorians, but we also didn't want to dismiss an idea just for those reasons if it might lead somewhere useful. So we tried to assess the idea and the evidence non-judgmentally, and extract some possibilities from our investigation.

That was the start of a six-hour conversation that ended in the dark outside the Grand Army Plaza subway stop. Thats where Aaron said his last words to me in person. Those words were on the subject of whether GDP statistics are robust enough to be able to shed light on whether technological progress is slowing down. These topics were examples of Aaron's interest in what he called "meta-issues" -- how to improve your productivity, how to reason in the most effective way, how to promote rational altruism, how to design our organizations and manage people. Aaron was fascinated by these topics because he thought that figuring out more about them could improve the world on a lot of different fronts at once.

But Aaron was interested in small things, as well. He once walked me through one of his proudest accomplishments, which was getting the letter "s" appended to the end of a word in a financial regulation bill. This subtly expanded shareholder protections, as he explained to me. There was no issue or battle too big or too small for Aaron's interest -- what drove him was just whether he saw an opportunity to accomplish something positive. Our conversations were wide-ranging, but there was always that background focus

on rational altruism -- on bringing it back to getting something done.

So I think Aaron would be honored by the fact that people are trying to get something done in the wake of his death. I think he would be honored by the efforts to combat excessive prison sentences, and to promote freedom of information. But these aren't the only actions that I think do honor to Aaron. I think anyone who is struggling to make the world a better place, in any area, in any place in time, is in some sense honoring his memory.

That doesn't mean all actions are equally valuable; for Aaron, they never were. If you're thinking about Aaron today, I'd suggest looking at your efforts to create positive change and asking yourself if these are the best you can do. Ask yourself whether you've let yourself fall into a job or a cause because it's easy and because you're used to it, or whether you're being strategic and deliberate and reflective about picking the battles where you can do the most good. And after you take the step back today, if you can ask that same question tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that. You'll be thinking about the limited, invaluable minutes in your life the way Aaron thought about his.

With Aaron's death, we now have one fewer person who thinks that way, and I think we desperately need more. Arguably, we need a small army of rational altruists just to match what Aaron accomplished in his short lifetime. We'll need a huge army of them if we're ever going to realize Aaron's dream of the world, which was nothing less than a world without any injustice or suffering of any kind. So if you haven't tried thinking that way before, I think today would be a good day to start.

Thank you.

(applause)

WIKLER: GiveWell, this year, has identified a group that provides insecticide-treated bed nets to combat malaria as the most effective charity in the world this year. You can give to them through GiveWell.org. And on a technical note, you can tweet about today with the hashtag "#aaronswartz" or "#aaronsw" and you can tell friends that they can find a live stream of this event, again, at DemocracyNow.org. You can also submit a remembrance for Aaron at help.rememberaaronsw.com, or read other people's at rememberaaronsw.com.

Our next speaker is the writer and essayist Tom Chiarella, one of Aaron's

favorites, who is doing a reading, which he can introduce.

(applause)

CHIARELLA: It's really not funny, for a lot of reasons, but if you walked in here and you saw David Foster Wallace reading in the program and you thought, "Oh my gosh, David Foster Wallace is reading," I'm so sorry. (laughter) For many reasons. Obviously.

I knew David Foster Wallace a little bit, and I know he wouldn't have wanted to be read like gospel. He -- these [spectacles] are from CVS; I'm struggling. I know that... I told Taren that I would speak a little beforehand to avoid the notion, for David, really, just that these are holy words, but -- and I couldn't figure out how to create something that would segue with a person I considered one of, you know, the more brilliant people I'd ever met. So I just decided I would get up in the morning and write the first thing I thought of, you know, because I've been thinking about nothing else but this.

So this is me, and then I'll segue at some point to David Foster Wallace, and I'll raise my finger and tell you.

My father was an architect who encouraged me to see my entire existence as a kind of city. Not a very grand city, not Rome, or New York, or London, just a component city -- a functioning place. Orderly design, disorderly nature. City, a series of parts, the marketplace, the town square, the promenade, the dark alley, the offices, the union hall. The houses, their windows lamplit. In my dream, this city looks very much like the ones -- in all my dreams, the city looks very much like the one I grew up in -- Rochester, New York -- a city that doesn't matter any more than any other city, just as I matter no more than any other person. But I know those neighborhoods; I know the passage of that river and the pathway of that canal.

I've seen, for some time, in those dreams that there are two spires in my city -- two architectural spikes against the sky. I think they're skyscrapers, or steeples, though I never go near enough to them to get a very good look. The first steeple, I know -- and I knew this morning -- was a representation of myself; a measure of how I live. Of what I bring to the world. Very rarely, it rises high above the city in a thuggish thrust of ego, but more often it's barely visible on the horizon. I try not to look at that.

The second spire never disappears from the skyline. That is my faith. Not my

religious faith; I just don't have any of that. It's my faith in the people who keep things working in my dream city. The electrical workers, the carpenters, the street cleaners, the police. And yes, a kind of government. Government, my father always assured me, was another component of a city, and a way of life, of what we all are. A piece of the power we grant to the people we trust -- we trust to govern us using intellect, knowledge, and compassion.

So I'm just reporting from my dreams, to the world in which I awoke this morning, that that second tower -- it's burning.

Oddly, I never met Aaron. I'm told he liked my writing; I'm also told he liked David Foster Wallace. So let me read this and close.

Worship power, and you will feel weak and afraid. You will need more power over others to keep that fear at bay.

Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, and you'll end up feeling stupid, fraught, always on the verge of being found out, and so on.

The insidious things about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful, it's that they are unconscious -- default settings. They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value, without ever being fully aware that that's what you are doing. And the world will not discourage you from operating on your default settings, because the world of men and money and power hums along quite nicely on the fuel of fear, on contempt and frustration, and craving, and the worship of self.

Our own present culture has harnessed these forces in ways that have yielded extraordinary wealth and comfort and personal freedom. The freedom to be lords of our own tiny, skull-sized kingdoms, alone at the center of all creation.

This kind of freedom has much to recommend it, but, of course, there are all different kinds of freedom. And that kind that is most precious, you'll not hear much talk about in the gray outside world of winning and achieving and displaying. The really important kind of freedom involves tension and awareness and discipline and effort, and being truly able to care about other people, to sacrifice for them

over and over in myriad, petty little unsexy ways every day. That is real freedom. The alternative is unconsciousness, the default setting, the rat race, the constant, gnawing sense of having had and lost some infinite thing.

WIKLER: Our next speaker is Roy Singham. Roy is a software executive, or a technology executive -- he runs ThoughtWorks, an IT consultancy where Aaron was working, and he also is a passionate believer in changing the world. And Aaron thought he was amazing. And he thought Aaron was amazing.

Roy.

*Find the cost of freedom, buried in the ground
Mother earth will swallow you, lay your body down
Find the cost of freedom, buried in the ground
Mother earth will swallow you, lay your body down*

(- Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, “Find The Cost of Freedom”)

SINGHAM: Bertolt Brecht once wrote, “There are men that struggle for a day, and they are good. There are others that struggle for a year, and they are better. There are some who struggle for many years, and they are better still. But then there are those who struggle all their lives, and these are the indispensable ones.” And Aaron Swartz was one of the indispensable ones.

As you have heard, Aaron was a very complex and wondrous soul, and I feel so privileged to have been one of the people who got to see him in all these other forms, his loving -- he loved Ada; he was so patient. He was just -- you know, we say the beautiful soul -- it’s hard, unless you met him, to know how sincere and authentic that really was. This was the person that he had become. And he was also, though, this consummate team member, who could be part of the broader human race in most wondrous ways.

His primary work, in working with ThoughtWorks, was to lead and build the next generation of tools for organizing and democratizing campaigning. He was deeply worried that this wonderful world of technology that had been created was going to be usurped, and not end up being a tool of democracy with a small “d.” So when I first met him, he was like, all these ideas -- he would say, “Roy, you know, I’ve studied these campaigns and how we’ve

done SOPA; I've got this idea for how to do A/B testing with campaigns. But one of the things we have to guarantee is that a woman in India -- in rural India -- with her simple cell-phone -- she could run the campaign she wants without the need for the experts, and for others." He was that much of a caring person. He was, in my humble opinion, one of the true, extraordinary revolutionaries that this country has produced.

He was a leader. He was a mentor. When we first gave him his team here in New York, we got people from all over the world to work, you know, for him. But he, you know, he's a clever guy; this is all people he hasn't met. So, what does he do -- he puts on the theme song for the Muppets, and starts singing the Muppet song, and then starts pairing away with all the developers. For those of you who don't know, developers -- it's not a normal sort of... mode of operandum. And within minutes, he had mesmerized and inspired his -- and changed the dynamics of his interactions.

You know, we had a moment of silence across the world, in all of our 20-something offices. And, you know, it's hard to say how -- had been on a video-conference with me, in front of about a thousand people -- we had live streamed, when we were actively trying to figure out how to launch the campaign for his defense. And he couldn't say much about the, you know, the campaign itself, but he desperately wanted to show people, you know, this was not about Aaron. This was about a broad issue. He was so uncomfortable in that moment, because he knew that he had been railroaded into something that was a side issue on the scheme of his master agenda.

He was truly, as the Economist -- not my favorite magazine, but he said, truly -- in the Economist -- he was a Commons man. He deeply wanted to protect humanity's intellectual treasures as part of these Commons. Economically, he believed that the creation of academic and intellectual property was a social process often paid by governments and by the public and, as had been the case with libraries in previous centuries, he demanded that they stay part of the public good.

He also was not -- I mean, I have to say, unfortunately, in our industry -- in this technology industry -- we have a lot of egomaniacs and egotists. He was not that. He firmly believed that his -- the accident of his considerable intellectual prowess gave him *no right* to appropriate the essential good that is the common tradition of the human race, which is intellectual knowledge.

We were at the funeral with his father -- and I know some of you are parents

here. There's nothing more wretched, as you know, than having to give a eulogy for your own son. And Bob did it in the most human, and -- in a way that all of us cried, of course, when he spoke. But then he made something that stuck a knife in my heart -- he made a very lucid point, about the duplicity of our society, that protects those who accumulate wealth, and treats those like Aaron in a completely different fashion. (applause) You know, it is just... unacceptable.

You heard it, just a few moments ago, how many young students who are, you know, precocious with technology do things. It is well-known that Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs bent the rules for their own good. They did it for themselves. They engaged in shady practices of use of public property whilst at the university in their early days -- none of them faced 35 years in prison. (applause)

Instead, they have amassed great wealth. They are worshipped. Yet here's Aaron, somebody whose life is the exact opposite of these people -- and I've met these people, I've met Aaron, and you can not imagine a polar opposite of beauty in human beings. And here is the opposite of that, and yet he fought every moment -- he lived his truth. He only worked on the important. He really, really did. There was not a day that he didn't do that. And yet, he used his incredible talents and privilege for the advocates of those without.

So, we have a choice. What Bob taught me at that -- at that funeral: we have a choice today. We have this very small and unique opportunity in history to shake up the control by these self-aggrandizing egomaniacs who use technology for the good of the 1%. This is not something that -- Aaron's legacy is to kill that grip.

Aaron was a systems thinker, and he saw that this large accumulation of economic wealth in the form of private corporations was subverting everything in its path. He was, as his close friend David Segal said, a communitarian. It is these ideals that we should uphold.

His views on students -- what -- you know, he gave a speech; some of you have seen it, I think, on DemocracyNow, and some of the clips, but in his speeches, he was encouraging US students to think about their own privilege. Because when they have -- go to an elite university, and they have all these JSTOR documents, he made a salient point: that opportunity doesn't exist for the young child in India. What right do we have for that knowledge, which has come from the ages of the Enlightenment? And he's just so clever with

how he constructs the right frame of thing, that he said, "You know, this is the way we can deal with open access and social justice." He was always challenging us -- I mean, he was always amazing to all of us, who'd look at him and say, "How do you come up with this idea, to figure this way, in this correct way." He was just that kind of guy.

But tonight, I also want to tell you about a side of Aaron that I -- is very important to me, because I grew up all over the world -- Aaron was a deeply internationalist soul. A few weeks ago... excuse me. A few weeks ago, I had invited a small group of progressive Muslims into our offices to talk about how we deal with the growing violence against Muslims and people that people think are Muslims in our country. This was just after the subway event, where the woman had pushed, you know, the young man to his death.

And so, as is my nature, I'd seen Aaron early in the day; I said, "Aaron, you've got to come to this meeting, man... drop what you're doing, show up in the meeting." And, of course, Aaron did that, and he came to the meeting, you know, in the evening. I was actually on Skype at that point. And, as always, here's Aaron listening for an hour to all of these complicated things -- both of us learning about, you know, what is the status of, you know, the politics of the Muslim community here in the United States, and et cetera -- but absorbing all of this thing. And here, most of us are probably double his age. And he waits, and all of a sudden he begins to talk and he says, "I think you guys have framed this issue incorrectly. The right way to frame this issue is we have to conduct a campaign against the merchants of hate."

And there was silence. He has promptly characterized what was the issue at hand in a way that everybody in America could understand, and that we could understand. And I want to tell you that the people who were in that room with Aaron are sitting here today, weeping at the loss of Aaron. And they've asked me, "Roy, how can we allow our country to take away this beautiful voice?" Here is this young, beautiful Jewish kid -- he's a kid to me; he's -- I know he's a man, but -- that voice had no *right* to be taken from us.

It had no right.

And I -- I gravitated between sadness and crying and anger, when I know that when people like that are taken and we don't raise our voices, we are complicit. And I'm so proud that so many of you have showed up tonight.

(applause)

Aaron would have wanted us to look at the history to understand our next tasks. I mean, you understand -- Aaron touched so many of us in the progressive community that we are unable to sort of figure out, what is the strategies and tactics of next? But he was the consummate -- he wanted to a historian, and a sociologist, and many things.

Revolutions are made by people. They are not made by heroes. But nevertheless, leaders matter greatly everywhere in the world. Our country has a tradition of creating a climate of fear whenever they risk change. This climate of fear started, obviously, under slavery, but even in the post-slavery period, under Reconstruction, when you had the Jim Crowe laws, we introduced fear in the post-Reconstruction South. We've witnessed the McCarthy period; we are now witnessing the war against terror, and the rise of Islamophobia in our country. And when our government fails to intimidate, they silence their opponents.

(applause)

52 years ago, Patrice Lumumba was murdered by the Belgian and United States governments in the Congo. He was one of the most important leaders of his generation and, in fact, centuries in Africa. He was that significant. It took us almost 40 years for it to be impossible for the United States to deny that they had a role in his assassination.

45 years ago, in the jungles of Bolivia, Che Guevara was assassinated on the orders of the CIA. Aaron knew, and decided consciously, the system with which he was taking on.

Aaron was a target of the FBI. After the PACER incident, they followed him; he was strip-searched. Let's not pretend that this was not a political issue of Aaron's voice on SOPA and the rest of the issues that he fought.

(applause)

Last December, I was able to introduce two of my -- I have a number of heroes, but two of them, very close to me -- one is Aaron, and the other is P. Sainath, who is India's living greatest journalist, who's covered rural poverty in India for the last 20 years and which, as you know, is a very difficult subject. And the two of them -- the three of us, actually, had began talking. So I wrote him, you know, I think in the second day, and I think he'd heard. And this is what

Sainath wrote back to me:

This was -- and I say it without hesitation -- not suicide. It was murder by intimidation, bullying, and torment.

(applause)

Today, we are left with a number of issues to fight in the wake of Aaron's passing. First, we must demand accountability for those who tormented Aaron. We do not do so to personalize the issue, or to seek revenge -- that is not our motivation. We understand that if we allow the climate of fear to exist, the damage that will be done is that the next Aaron will not come. That is a future that we will not accept in our world. That is a future unacceptable.

(applause)

During our annual retreat this summer, Aaron had joined 500 of his colleagues, and we had a number of speakers discussing one of the more egregious cancers of our country, which is the US Justice System. We have 5% of the world's population, and yet 25% of the prisoners of the world are incarcerated in our country. African Americans now count for one million of the 2.3 million prisoners. 80,000 people as we sit here today are in constrained confinement or solitary confinement. Solitary confinement has been condemned by the United Nations as -- as a form of torture.

(applause)

And Aaron -- he was deeply conscious of privilege. He really thought -- and he would not have wanted to be in history that it would take somebody of his stature, and his connections, to bring attention to this plague and abusive system of plea bargaining in America. Aaron is like many of tens of thousands of Americans who don't have his influence, and doesn't have these friends -- the wonderful people we have here. This system that is in America today is an abuse of state power. A fitting legacy for Aaron would be the dismantling of this system.

(applause)

And a second and more direct legacy must be to change the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act. (applause) We must help Congresswoman Lofgren craft the right language. It has to not only be about getting rid of the question of

criminalizing terms of service, it has to get rid of this ambiguity that's in the law, so that unscrupulous prosecutors from Boston to Maine to wherever they are in this country -- they don't have the latitude that they had to go after Aaron. We have to make sure that doesn't happen.

(applause)

I want to close with the words of Frederick Douglass, one of the greatest leaders of our country, who spoke in this very hall about 100 -- over 100 years ago, a few years after the emancipation from slavery.

The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been borne of earnest struggle. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both. But it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will. Find out just what people will submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and they will continue until they are resistant either with words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.

Dearest Aaron: we loved you dearly. Aaron was like a son to me, and I -- it's very hard to describe the last week. Aaron, you were a gentle giant. You believed in the constant struggle to right the wrongs of the world that previous generations had failed to correct, and for that, I looked at Aaron and I said I know that I have not done my duty in my generation. I feel that deeply.

You refused to accept injustice as inevitable. You have touched and inspired us all with your vision of the social and justice for every person -- every living person on this planet. We promise today with our deepest hearts to carry on your legacy to the best of our abilities. Brother Aaron, one love.

(applause)

WIKLER: Aaron was a fighter. We remember him for his generosity, for his spirit, for his verve, for his brilliance, for his warmth, for his wit, for everything he built. But he also fought. Our next speaker, David Eisenberg, was the founder and organizer of Freedom to Connect. He invited Aaron to give the speech that

has been replayed all across the Internet in the last week, where Aaron tells the story of how he helped millions of people to stop SOPA, the Internet censorship bill.

In the last years of Aaron's life, he had just started this journey of figuring out how to mobilize people, how to light the spark in people, so that they could realize their own power and change the world. And I think that what he did for technology and the Internet he was just beginning to do for politics. It's our job to carry that forward, but it's worth remembering what he already did in that space. So I'd like you to join me in welcoming David Eisenberg.

(applause)

EISENBERG: I can't even remember the first time I met Aaron. He was just there, in the same community I was -- this community. I got joined to this community when I was at AT&T Bell Laboratories. In the mid-'90s, I wrote an essay called, "The Rise of the Stupid Network." Through the essay, I tried to tell AT&T that the Internet would shift control of the network from them -- the telephone companies, the cable companies -- to us. The essay went viral on the Internet before we even knew what going viral on the Internet meant. (laughter) And soon, "The Rise of the Stupid Network," my essay, was such an embarrassment to AT&T that I lost my job.

(laughter)

Over the next years, I watched the telephone companies and cable companies and their allies get the message and then organize to thwart regulation, beat down competition, and distort the law in a war to keep the Internet -- which is to say, this shift from their control to our control -- from happening. Aaron died in that war.

In 2004, I organized the conference to give voice to our side of this war called Freedom to Connect. Last year, I invited Aaron to speak at Freedom to Connect. He asked me what he should talk about and, knowing Aaron, I said, "Anything you want, man." (laughter) But I told him, "Really work on it, give the speech of your life." because I knew he would rise to the challenge. And as you can see, or maybe as you've seen on DemocracyNow or in various other places, YouTube, et cetera, he did rise to that challenge.

So, a few days before that speech, I touched base with him and I said, you know, "What are you going to say?" And he told me, and I was surprised that

he wasn't mentioning his own JSTOR fight. I said, "Aren't you going to cover that?" He said, simply, "No."

No. No.

Aaron wanted to talk about the big fights, the fights to make the world a better place. And I'm afraid that Aaron's legacy is going to be dumbed down to hacker, copyfighter, the way the media dumbed down the SOPA fight to Google versus the telephone companies. So, let's not forget that Aaron fought the bigger fight -- the fight for access, the fight for justice, the fight for democracy. The fight for us -- for this community, and for the greater community that is all humankind. So... now we're going to watch some excerpts from his Freedom to Connect speech, and as you'll see, Aaron actually says it better than I could. So, over to you, Aaron.

SWARTZ: There's a battle going on right now, a battle to define everything that happens on the Internet in terms of traditional things that the law understands. Is sharing a video on BitTorrent like shoplifting from a movie store? Or is it like loaning a videotape to a friend? Is reloading a webpage over and over again like a peaceful virtual sit-in, or a violent smashing of shop windows? Is the freedom to connect like freedom of speech, or like the freedom to murder? This bill would be a huge, potentially permanent loss. If we lost the ability to communicate with each other over the Internet, it would be a change to the bill of rights -- the freedoms guaranteed in our constitution. The freedoms our country had been built on would be suddenly deleted. New technology, instead of bringing us greater freedom, would have snuffed out fundamental rights we'd always taken for granted. And I realized that day, talking to Peter, that I couldn't let that happen. So I did what you always do, when you're a little guy facing a terrible future with long odds and little hope of success -- I started an online petition.

(laughter)

It started from literally nothing. We went to 10,000 signers, then 100,000 signers, and then 200,000 signers and 300,000 signers in just a couple weeks. And it wasn't just signing a name; we asked these people to call Congress -- to call urgently. There was a vote coming up this week, in just a couple days, and we had to stop it. And at the same time, we told the press about it -- about this incredible online petition that was taking off. And I met with the staff of members of Congress and pleaded with them to withdraw their support for the bill. I mean, it was amazing -- it was huge. The power of the Internet rose up in

force against this bill... and then it passed unanimously.

At the time, it felt like we were going around telling people that these bills were awful, and in return, they told us that they thought we were crazy. I mean, we were kids wandering around waving our arms about how the government was going to censor the Internet -- it does sound a little crazy. But when the bill came back and started moving again, suddenly all the work we'd done started coming together. All the folks we'd talked to about it suddenly began getting really involved, and getting others involved -- everything started snowballing. Just a few weeks later, I remember, I was chatting with this cute girl on the subway, and she wasn't in technology at all, but when she heard that I was, she turned to me very seriously and said: "You know, we have to stop SOPA."

(laughter)

So, progress, right? (laughing) The wheels came off the bus pretty quickly after that hearing. First, the Republican senators pulled out, and then the White House issued a statement opposing the bill. And then the Democrats, left all alone out there, announced they were putting the bill on hold so they could have a few further discussions before the official vote.

And that was when, as hard as it was for me to believe after all this, we had won. The thing that everyone said was impossible, that some of the biggest companies in the world had written off as kind of a pipe dream, had happened. We did it. We won.

(applause)

The people rose up, and they caused a sea change in Washington. Not the press, which refused to cover the story. Just coincidentally, their parent companies all happened to be lobbying for the bill. (laughter) Not the politicians, who were pretty much unanimously in favor of it. And not the companies who had all but given up trying to stop it, and decided it was inevitable. It was really stopped by the people -- the people themselves.

But it's kind of hard to believe this story -- hard to remember how close it all came to actually passing. Hard to remember how this could have gone any other way. But it wasn't a dream or a nightmare, it was all very real. And it will happen again. Sure, it will have yet another name, and maybe a different excuse, and probably do its damage in a different way. But make no mistake,

the enemies of the freedom to connect have not disappeared. The fire in those politicians' eyes hasn't been put out.

There are a lot of people -- a lot of powerful people -- who want to clamp down on the Internet. And to be honest, there aren't a whole lot who have a vested interest in protecting it from all of that. We won this fight because everyone made themselves the hero of their own story. Everyone took it as their job to save this crucial freedom. They threw themselves into it; they did whatever they could think of to do. They didn't stop to ask anyone for permission. But if we forget that -- if we let Hollywood rewrite the story so it was just Big Company Google who stopped the bill -- if we let them persuade us we didn't actually make a difference -- if we start seeing it as someone else's responsibility to do this work, and it's our job just to go home and pop some popcorn and curl up on the couch to watch transformers -- well, then, next time.... they might just win. Let's not let that happen.

(applause)

WIKLER: Like a lot of people who knew Aaron, one thing I've been doing in the last week is going through and reading all the emails we sent back and forth to each other. And I found the email he sent me right after he heard about COICA, the bill before SOPA and PIPA. He'd heard about it from a friend at the EFF, the Electronic Freedom Foundation. (applause) And nobody knew about it, and nobody even believed that it was -- that it could exist, that it was anywhere near as bad as he was saying. And he was asking me to put him in touch with some congressional staffers that I knew. And I was kind of skeptical of his reading of the bill too -- it didn't -- like, it seemed like it would be a big deal if someone was trying to censor the Internet the way that he was talking about, but no one was talking about it.

By the time I actually responded to his email, he already put up this petition, and -- taking a page from Frederick Douglass -- the page that he put up was called, "Demand Progress." And I think by the -- it was two days after his first email to me; by the time I sent the email to the congressional staffers it had already gotten to something like 30,000 signatures on the petition, and it was off to the races from there.

Aaron had dozens of other things going on his life, but he recognized this was the most important one, and he turned it into an organization. And to make that organization work, he called on a good friend of us -- a guy he had supported in other political work, who he told me all about -- someone he

thought was a tremendous champion for the kinds of values that we all shared. And that person was our next speaker, David Segal, the executive director of Demand Progress.

(applause)

SEGAL: At Demand Progress, we met Aaron as a genius, of course. That's a word that's overused, but not in his case, and I don't know that I've ever actually applied it to anybody I knew in real life before. But we didn't get to know him as the Boy Genius, or the adolescent genius, that so many others knew, and I really wish I'd gotten to know that Aaron, too. I always kind of did, and especially so over the course of the last week, and I'm sure others of you want the same. The stories have been so glorious and illuminating. So, before I begin, I just wanted to mention -- this is an aside -- that last night, I felt like I got to know that part of his life a little bit more deeply when I happened upon a clip that WBZ posted of a wonderfully sweet interview with a very high-pitched Aaron from 2001, after he won a prize for MIT. Which, for many of the friends he'd met online, was actually an article -- it was actually an article about that award that first outed him as a 13-year-old. (laughter) And so I just wanted to very much recommend that anybody who cares to look for that.

I met Aaron through my unsuccessful run for Congress in 2010, when the PCCC, one of the many important entities that he founded, endorsed me, and he became a fixture at our campaign office. I was in Providence; he was based outside of Boston at the time. And he'd help us rig up cheap poles and cheap robocalls -- things that helped give our uphill effort a fighting chance. And it was very hard work, but we got to have some fun then, too -- built a personal connection; a friendship from the outset.

I remember one early moment when we realized that we kind of got each other in this really strange way -- he'd hang out with me during what's known as "call time," which is that most despicable part of the modern American campaign -- four hours a day, during which you call people you've never met before, all across the country, and beg them for money. And I wasn't very good at this, and I very much appreciated his company. And the frequent line that I'd use to open these conversations was, "I hate doing this, and you hate getting these calls, so donate to me, and I can fight for public financing so nobody ever calls you begging for money again."

And that would lead to all kinds of discussions about election systems arcana, which is the kind of topic that Aaron and I connected around from

pretty early on. And he's like one of three people in this world with whom one can connect around election systems arcania. And it was a fun topic, but it wasn't so great for raising money, and I can still picture him... sitting on the floor, over there, just giggling with delight and in disbelief during one call when I kind of absurdly tried to explain a concept known as Arrow's Theorem -- this is to a potential hippie-kind-of donor on the other side of the country. And I think she did actually contribute... (laughter)

And I know he was a vegetarian, and so I was thrilled one day when he managed to carve out a window amidst yet another 14-hour work day for a field trip to my favorite vegan pan-Asian restaurant in Boston -- the kind of place I like so much that I'd go to it just to get take-out, and then come straight home to Providence. And he ordered "bowl of white rice," as he famously would. He was a supertaster, he insisted, but I hadn't learned that just yet.

And I'd hoped he might go back some time when he was feeling more adventurous; many people whom I've spoken to in recent days expressed a particular pleasure in doing things that managed to impress him. Aaron's stamp of approval was a precious indication of something's worth, something's righteousness.

That summer, he'd entertain our weary staff with unbelievable stories about his exploits. It was with a certain kind of giddiness that he'd talk about having outmaneuvered law enforcement during that PACER episode, when he downloaded millions of free public files related to Federal court cases, and somehow found himself on the wrong side of investigation for "stealing" what the government was calling something like two million dollars' worth of government property. He'd only recently gotten his hands on his FBI file, and loved the Keystone Kops aspects of it -- that they couldn't even figure out that he lived in Boston, as was widely known, and easy to learn with a quick online search. (laughter) He was happiest about the part where they explained how they tried to stake out his parents' house in the quiet woods outside of Chicago, and it reads: "Details: Attempted to locate Aaron Swartz. His vehicles" -- and, to be clear, driving was definitely not one of the respects in which he was precocious. (laughter) I don't think he ever learned to drive in his life. "His driver's license information, and picture, and others at 349 Marshman Avenue, Highland Park. Drove by address in attempt to locate Swartz or vehicles related to the residence, but was unsuccessful. House is set on a deep lot behind other houses on Marshman Avenue. This is a heavily-wooded, dead-end street with no other cars parked on the road, making continued surveillance difficult to conduct without severely increasing the

risk of discovery.”

(laughter)

Chicago considers this lead covered. You know, it’s really, you know, a threat to all of us that they were after. And we can laugh about that, in hindsight, but had, of course, been terrified throughout that investigation. He told the New York Times, “I had this vision of the Feds crashing down the door and just taking everything away.” And a couple years later, I was with him at his apartment in Cambridge a day or two after the Feds had done precisely that. And I’m sure he was again terrified inside, even if he’d brush off questions with a chuckle about the surrealism of it all.

That work on the congressional campaign quickly transitioned into Demand Progress, and Aaron’s conception of that initial petition in opposition to COICA, calling it “The Internet Blacklist Bill.” I remember him calling me up after the election was over, and something like, “Segal, you might have lost that race,” he told me, “But I still need you to help me change the world.” And we shifted from the halls of the Rhode Island State House, the halls of the Congress, and trying to make people care about us and care about the cause, and they do now, but back then they absolutely did not. And here, I was going to read the... the line about stopping SOPA, but he just told that story far better than I ever could.

As, amazingly, the whole planet now knows, Aaron was indeed a passionate advocate for access to information and for a free and open Internet. He believed in these things for their own sakes, but moreover, as a mean towards the even deeper end of building a world defined by social and economic justice. As Roy touched on, Aaron was brilliant, but what made him even more special was how he resisted the impulse to presume that he alone was responsible for his brilliance or should benefit therefrom. He wasn’t a technoutopian; perhaps he, at some point, had flirted with that kind of self-affirming, Randian objectivism that seems to attract so many of his technologist colleagues. But if he ever did, I never heard of it, and he rejected it at a very young age. He told me something once, like -- and I’ve been fumbling for words... the wording over the course of the last week -- something like, “Segal, you’ve got to understand. I might be in a bad mood sometimes, might seem kind of anti-social or misanthropic. But don’t worry -- whenever there’s a problem, I’m always looking for the utility-optimizing solution to it.” (laughter) And his donation to GiveWell is strong evidence of that.

So he was a sort of communitarian who was deeply aware of our world's injustices and who understood the constant struggle that is necessary to even begin to remedy them. And he, in part, of course, succumbed to that struggle.

One of the roles that I've played over the last few days is to try to take all the outrage at Aaron's death, and the desire to make it something meaningful -- to take all of that and to turn it into productive, directed activism. I was in DC on the Hill over the last couple of days and all sorts of people want to help -- it's really amazing. SOPA allies like Ron Wyden, and Zoe Lofgren -- both of them got to know Aaron personally a bit over the course of the fight. And then even right-wingers like Darrel Issa. They all want to know what they can do to help.

And that would be a much easier thing to answer if Aaron had been a normal sort of activist, somebody who cared passionately about just the environment, or just gay rights, or any narrow issue, or to -- and those are all important concerns that he cared about and I care about, but Aaron wanted everything. He wanted to change the whole world. He was trying to hack the whole world, in the best way. He'd even taken to calling himself an "applied sociologist." He had lofty goals, for certain, but he stood more of a chance of realizing them than just about anybody else I've ever known. And so it's terribly difficult to find a fitting tribute.

We're calling for investigations; we'll push reforms to computer crime laws; we'll try to upturn the criminal justice establishment for him so that what happened to him never happens to anybody else ever again...

(applause)

But then, none of it feels like enough.

So, as I close, I want to mention something just so touching and so surprising that he told me once, and I hope I'm not betraying his confidence, but it's -- it's even harder to understand now, and it's been haunting me this week. He confessed to me once that he thought that he -- and this is an approximate quote; this was not very long ago -- had never actually achieved anything that mattered in his life. He really did say that. And it's evidence of his modesty, but it can only possibly begin to make sense when juxtaposed with the breadth of everything that he wanted to achieve and probably could have achieved. And so it's up to us now to make sure that we might bring some of that to fruition, and have it become a part of his legacy.

So, thank you, and thanks for being here today.

(applause)

WIKLER: One problem that Aaron had was this idea that he didn't realize how much he mattered. And I would argue with him about it; a lot of those who loved him did. He really didn't... he didn't feel it, in a way. But the flip-side of that was something really beautiful, which was this belief that everybody mattered -- that everybody mattered just as much as he did.

One of the things that he was doing in his last couple of years, as he was trying to figure out how he could change the world at scale in this gigantic way -- he was putting a lot of work into improving himself, becoming better at life. You can look at his blog -- that's some of the last blog posts that he wrote, are some beautiful essays about how to be better at life. And one of the reasons that he was working so hard at that was our next speaker, Taren.

Quinn talked about how for years, he wouldn't do any dishes. And all of us are stunned that Taren, who was his partner, and with him through the very -- very end -- had gotten him to do dishes. (laughter) And he wasn't not doing dishes because he wasn't a good person -- I think he was terrified of dishes. (laughter) But he found it in himself, he found these ways to push himself, to challenge himself to grow, in a way that was deeply inspiring to all of us, who were inspired by him in so many other ways. He wasn't the kind of "does the dishes" kind of inspiring before, but he was getting there. And I think... he recognized that part of making the world a much better place was being a really good person.

Taren helped inspire that in him, and she also taught him that by example. I feel privileged to have introduced the two of them. Taren's also one of the most amazing activists and advocates that I've ever met, and she was someone that inspired Aaron deeply, and someone who Aaron deeply loved.

Please welcome Taren Stinebrickner-Kauffman.

STINEBRICKNER-KAUFFMAN: Aaron would have loved to have been here. There are so many people in this room and watching online in whose company he delighted. And as much as he didn't like to admit it, he really loved being the center of attention sometimes. (laughter) Of the two of us, he should definitely be the one on this stage. He loved public speaking; he was so proud of that Freedom to Connect speech. He loved storytelling. Aaron, if you want to

walk right in and take over for me at any point, please do so...

Ira Glass, David Foster Wallace, Louis CK, these were some of the people he admired most in the world, consummate storytellers. I remember once last year, we took a trip to DC together, just 'cause he'd been invited to speak at some techie conference -- I don't even remember the name of it. We spent a whole day in transit, and with him working on his speech and his PowerPoint, just to give a talk to a few dozen programmers about why they should apply their skills towards politics. "You can do magic," he told them, with a snap of his fingers and a picture of Harry Potter... (laughter) ...for each anecdote he told about how programming can make the world a better place. "You can do magic," he said.

Aaron really could do magic.

Aaron's magic was in asking questions, first and foremost. He often told me that he thought the reason he was a fast programmer was because that he was just really good at asking Google what the right code snippets were. (laughter)

Aaron's magic was in asking questions and in believing that the answers were not inevitable. Why should for-profit corporations control the world's academic research? It's not a question most of us have ever thought to ask, despite going through years of university, where we might be reading academic research every day. But once you ask it, the answer's obvious: they shouldn't.

Aaron's magic was that he believed that that, and so much else, could change.

More than that, he believed that he could change it -- that he could change the world. And he was right. By last Friday, he'd already changed the world in so, so many ways.

I'm very sad about what happened at many, many levels, and one of them is that I'm so sad that we'll never see all the ways he would have changed the world from here on out.

Aaron would have loved to have been here, and have the opportunity to speak to all of you. I have to say, though, I'm not sure he would have liked the structure of the program. (laughter) He hated ceremony. But memorial services are for the living, and Aaron forfeited his right to make that decision last Friday.

He hated ceremony -- he hated weddings. I had three weddings to attend last summer; he refused to come to any of them, despite liking and knowing all of the friends who were getting married. (laughter) He hated ceremony. If he were here, he'd be wearing jeans, tennis shoes, and a snarky T-shirt.

When he surprised me last month with the suggestion we might want to get married, he said he'd want a Liz Lemon wedding: long on privacy and love, and short on sentimentality and speeches. I said we'd at least have to throw a party afterwards. He wasn't convinced. (laughter) I said we should talk about it again after the trial.

The trial.

The case defined our life together. We started dating in June two years ago, just months after his life had been turned upside down by the arrest, but while the ordeal was still completely private. He told me there was something going on in his life that he didn't want to talk about. He called it, "the bad thing."

For weeks, I didn't know what it was, just that spending time with me was a good distraction for him. I had theories -- wild speculation. My top guess for a while was that he had had an affair with Elizabeth Warren and was going to ruin her career. (laughter, applause) That really was my top guess for a while. (laughter)

He called me one night -- he was in Cambridge; I was at Frisbee practice in DC. He told me that the bad thing might be on the news the next day, and asked whether I wanted to hear it from him first.

I said yes. So he told me he'd been arrested and was being charged with downloading too many academic journal articles. (laughter) I was silent briefly and then blurted out, "That's all? That doesn't seem like a very big deal."

He giggled nervously and said, "Well, I guess it's not like anybody has cancer or anything."

I thought about it and called him back a few hours later. "Sorry," I said, "I think I might have under-reacted a little bit. I'm sure being arrested and prosecuted is very stressful." And he said, "Actually, yours is the most helpful reaction anybody's had so far. Please don't change it."

For a long time we didn't talk about the case very much. He wanted to protect me, and he wanted to cordon it off from the rest of his life. He was worried that I would be subpoenaed, or that his other friends would be subpoenaed, and so he kept it all to himself. He kept all of the stress and the anger and the fear to himself.

We started talking more and more about it over the last few months, as it became clear that the government was not going to recognize that this was just one big mistake. That Steve Heymann, the prosecutor, who was hell-bent on destroying Aaron's life, was not going to come to terms with the notion that Aaron was not a threat, that Aaron should not spend years behind bars, that Aaron should not be labeled a felon for the rest of his life.

In December there was a hearing that I went to with him. The trial was delayed because another hearing -- at this hearing, the decision was made to delay the trial until April. And afterwards, I -- we came out of the courtroom, and I tried to give him a hug, and he pushed me away. And he said, "Not in front of Steve Heymann. I don't want to show Steve Heymann that."

Aaron would have loved to have been here. I'm not sure he would have liked me speaking about him this way. Despite his public profile, he was an intensely private person in many ways. But memorial services are for the living, and last Friday he forfeited his right to decide that. And I think that you -- his friends, his family, his admirers in the wider world -- have a right to know what he faced.

He faced an unfair prosecution by this man, Steve Heymann, who had no sense of proportion or justice and just wanted to rack Aaron up as a notch on his belt, so that he could go into the cafeteria with the other prosecutors and high-five them.

He faced Carmen Ortiz, a US Attorney, who did nothing to reign Heymann in. He faced indifference from MIT, an institution that could have protected him with a single public statement and refused to do so, in defiance of all of its own most cherished principles.

And he faced a deeply dysfunctional criminal justice system -- one that he is far from the only victim of. There are millions of Americans who face the kinds of ordeals that he did, most of them with many fewer resources, and much less support than he did.

And last Friday, he faced the prospect of yet another three months of uncertainty and ups and downs and being forced by the government to spend every fiber of his being on this damnable, senseless trial, with no guarantee that he could exonerate himself at the end of it.

He was so scared, and so frustrated, and so desperate and, more than anything else, just so weary. I think he just couldn't take it another day.

Aaron once told me, early on, when we were trying to navigate a long-distance relationship, and I was sort of apologizing for, you know, "I can't come to Boston this weekend, but I'd love it if you came to DC, but it's -- it's okay if you don't want to; I understand if you don't want to." And I think he'd had enough of my, sort of, caveats, and said, "Look, I'm not in the habit of doing things I don't want to do." (laughter)

In the end, that independence was one of Aaron's core traits, and part of his brilliance. No one could tell him what to do. Unlike most of the world, he refused to let social mores funnel him on autopilot into doing things that don't make sense. He refused to let establishment conventional wisdom of "this is how it's done" stop him from asking the hardest questions. He never let his youth define who he was or constrain what he did. And in the end, he couldn't allow Steve Heymann and the US Attorney's office to control him either.

We now live in a world without Aaron. But the legacy he would have wanted to leave is clear. That's why I'm here today. That's why all of you are here today. Because I still believe that the world can change, even though Aaron's not here to do the changing himself.

Aaron's last two years were not easy. His death was not easy. And the things I'm going to say are not going to be easy. But they are what he believed, and if anything good is to come out of his death, they're the lessons we must learn.

"You can't rest comfortably. You have to think big and think tiny," Aaron once said. "The revolution will be A-B tested." Which, I think, is the big -- the revolution -- and the tiny. He wanted to make sure that each small step along the way was being done right.

"You have to recognize that no one knows what they're doing. Other people telling you you're doing a good enough job isn't good enough, because they

don't know what's possible. Seek out people who push you, not just people who support you. Look up and not down," Aaron said.

Aaron didn't believe he was smarter than anyone else, which is hard for -- it was very hard for me to accept that he really believed that. He really, really believed that he was not smarter than anybody else. He just thought he asked better questions. He believed that every single person in this room is capable of doing as much as he did, if you'd just ask the right questions.

Whatever you're doing, are you confused? Is there anything that doesn't quite make sense about what you're doing? What is it? Never assume that someone else has noticed that niggling sense of doubt and already resolved the issue for themselves. They haven't. The world does not make sense, and if you think it does it's because you're not asking hard enough questions.

If you're in the tech sector: Why are you there? What do you really believe in? If you believe that technology is making the world a better place, why do you believe that? Do you really understand what makes the world a bad place to begin with?

I'm serious. If you're in this room and you work in the technology sector, I'm asking you that question. Do you understand what makes the world a bad place to begin with? Have you ever spent time with and listened to the people your technology is supposed to be helping?

Or the people it might be hurting?

If you work in social change, how do you know that what you're doing is helping the world? When you go to funders or to your email list to ask for money, do you really believe in the core of your heart that you're spending it the best way it can be spent? Do you find yourself telling stories you don't fully believe?

Aaron believed there's no shame in admitting failure. It's why he loved GiveWell, among other things. But there's a deep, deep shame in pride that prevents you from admitting failure. There's a deep, deep shame in caring more about believing that you're changing the world than *actually* changing the world.

Aaron would have loved to have been here, because out of the last week and out of today, phoenixes are already rising from his ashes. The best possible

legacy for him is for all of us to go out from here today and do everything we can to make the world a better place.

A thousand flowers are blooming in his name already. Some of the most important... that we'll be fighting for -- David Segal and many others of us -- are organizing around -- the U.S. Attorney's Office in Massachusetts must be held accountable for its actions.

(applause)

MIT must ensure that it's never complicit in another event like this.

(applause)

All academic research, from all time, should be made public and free and open and available to anybody in the world.

(applause, cheering)

We must strengthen and pass Aaron's Law, which would amend the CFAA to make sure the prosecutors don't have this kind of discretion over computer crimes in the future.

(applause)

And we need fundamental reform to our criminal justice system.

(applause)

Aaron would have loved to be here, but he wouldn't have liked that I'm going to end with a poem. (laughter) Aaron didn't like poetry; he said it was too intense for him. I sent him a poem I had written -- not for him, but that I'd written previously -- to him a few weeks into our relationship, and he never read it, despite my asking. He said he thought it would be too -- too hard.

But memorial services are for the living, and last Friday, he forfeited his right to decide that.

This poem a friend sent me has touched me in a way that few other things have in the last eight days. It's called, "When Great Trees Fall," by Maya

Angelou.

When great trees fall,
rocks on distant hills shudder,
lions hunker down
in tall grasses,
and even elephants
lumber after safety.

When great trees fall
in forests,
small things recoil into silence,
their senses
eroded beyond fear.

When great souls die,
the air around us becomes
light, rare, sterile.
We breathe, briefly.
Our eyes, briefly,
see with
a hurtful clarity.
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,
examines,
gnaws on kind words
unsaid,
promised walks
never taken.

Great souls die and
our reality, bound to
them, takes leave of us.
Our souls,
dependent upon their
nurture,
now shrink, wizened.

Our minds, formed
and informed by their
radiance,
fall away.
We are not so much maddened
as reduced to the unutterable ignorance
of dark, cold
caves.

And when great souls die,
after a period peace blooms,
slowly and always
irregularly. Spaces fill
with a kind of
soothing electric vibration.
Our senses, restored, never
to be the same, whisper to us.

They existed.
They existed.
We can be
Be, and be better
for they existed.

(applause)

WIKLER: We have reached the end of this moment. I hope it's clear this is just the beginning of everything that we have to do. After this, lights come back on, please take a moment to introduce yourselves to the people around you. I think that we're all going to be working together. And as the lights come on, I'd just like to ask for another round of applause for Taren, and for all the speakers who've been so great.

(applause)

“Down by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside...”