**FUNDRAISING SPEECH**

**FOR**

**LIEN-THU DAO**

Hello and thank you all for being here tonight. I want to extend a special acknowledgement to Senator \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for taking time from your very busy schedule to join our meeting. Tonight involves discussion and a call to action regarding a subject in our hearts and thoughts.... our homeland. I know this meeting will be fruitful and informative and I am honored to participate.

I have a question for all of you: If you had just $1.90 to live on each day, what would you buy? Think about it. Could you live off the Mc Donald’s dollar menu, buy one thing, get a pack of gum somewhere else, and survive? What about housing? Clothing? Transportation? It wasn’t that long ago that $1.90 was the average wage for our brothers and sisters and relatives living in Vietnam, and while things have improved somewhat, in rural areas, access to a decent quality of life is still very elusive. We are here today to remember what life is **still** like in our homeland. We are also here to share ideas and do something about it and to support the people of our country. No matter where we are today, not matter what we are doing with our lives, our roots are in Vietnam.

Back in 1993, when that $1.90 statistic was calculated, according to the World Bank comparative report from a few years ago, other key points were also discussed. In 2014, it was learned that 13.5% of the population was living below the poverty line.... we all have an idea or mental pictures of what that must have been like.... but guess what? That is the **GOOD** news!!! Back in 1993, the percentage of Vietnamese living below the poverty line was an unimaginable **60 PERCENT**! In 1993, the average life expectancy at birth was just 71 years old. It has improved over the past generation to approximately 76 years, but here’s another piece of information from the World Bank report.... In 2015, Japan’s average life span was almost **84 years of age**.... research tends to credit their diet.... is the Vietnamese diet different enough to justify a difference of **EIGHT YEARS**? That’s **MORE 10 PERCENT**!!! Conditions have improved somewhat, but there’s a long way to go, and our people **NEED US**. We cannot and should not rest until we know we are doing what we can for those still there.

Millions of people fled the country. Each one of us has a story.... a memory... a **saga** of how we got here from Vietnam. There aren’t enough words to describe the indescribable, but we are here. We’ve gone to school. We’ve found careers in various sectors.... some of us became doctors, some became businessmen, some are homemakers and merchants, and some of us even became **Senators**.... (**Maybe turn to the Senator when you say that.... maybe lead a little applause?**), Our journeys have been unique, but we share one common thread: **HOPE**. It reminds me of the words of Thich Nhat Hanh who said, “Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today.

We all believed in tomorrow, and look where we are! We’ve struggled, but we’ve accomplished. And we all know the place in our hearts we’ve reserved for Vietnam. Our struggles made us stronger. They gave us determination. They taught us to focus, work hard, respect your neighbor and be there for one another.

The historian, Noam Chomsky has said, “The Vietnamese see their history as an unending series of struggles of resistance to aggression, by the Chinese, by the Mongols, by the Japanese, the French ...” Vietnam has an old soul but it’s really a very young country.... the average age of the population is just over 30 years. Young people have inherited our survival instinct but they need guidance and they need resources to help them find a place and a path to build the country to grow and sustain each person, for themselves, their families and neighbors. They need to know there’s a strategy to work towards a healthier, more productive, and longer life.

Senator \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, on behalf of our neighbors and your constituents, we are honored to have you here to listen to us and hopefully join us to enrich our cause. We admire how you’ve dedicated your efforts to public service, but even more than that, we appreciate all you’ve done for us, and all you will do to continue to guide us into the future. I once heard an old Vietnamese proverb that translates to, “When eating fruit, remember who planted the tree; when drinking clear water, remember who dug the well. Senator, our people back home deserve to savor their fruit and quench themselves with clean, healthy water. The Vietnamese landscape holds fruit as well as legacy. Let’s do all that we can so that our roots back home continue to grow and provide for future generations.

The English writer, Samuel Johnson said, “Great works are performed not by strength but by **perseverance**. The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good...” Senator, we already know you are the personification of perseverance! To have your voice, intelligence, resources, and compassion to guide us and inspire us would mean that we would have a fresh chance and the means to bring action and shift the agenda to one in which we really come together as a proactive community, make a difference, inspire others, and most of all, make our forefathers proud. On behalf of everyone in this room, thank you for being here, for demonstrating your support for our cause, and for being a shining example of what can be done with determination, focus, and **hope.** Thank you all!