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Good evening!

It's a great pleasure to be in the company of such a distinguished group of leaders who are working across this industry on important topics impacting our families and the economy.

Senator Neil Breslin and Assemblyman Kevin Cahill, it's a privilege to be with you this evening. Linda Lacewell, thank you for engaging in conversations that are important to New Yorkers and this industry.

I'd like to thank Mary Griffin and the team here at LICONY for the invitation to speak with you this evening.

The work you do is crucial to allowing our industry to do what we do best. You've had a heck of a legislative year with many successes. We know that doesn't happen without putting in long hours and hard work. We're grateful for the work you do here on the front lines in New York.

New York is a fitting place to talk about what's next for our industry and for the 90 million Americans who rely on us for financial peace of mind. New York has long been a hub for progress. It's a symbol of advancement and innovation around the world. City by city, block by block, New York changes constantly. It's no wonder the state motto is "Ever Upward" – always pursuing, always seeking progress. It's a mindset that powers this state and our country and moves us forward.

That's especially important now in the era of accelerated change that we find ourselves in. Businesses are no longer in an era where simply improving what they do is enough. They no longer have the option of taking the old model and asking "how can we do it better, faster, and cheaper."

We are in an era of rapid, continuous change, where sometimes the old model is turned completely upside down. The new questions business must ask are "How do we think differently? What problem should we actually be solving?"

It's not just "How do we empower the consumer," but rather "how do we engage the consumer where they are at in their life?"

This is an era when even disruptors are being disrupted.

All of this change has shed light on the need for consistency, reliability, and uniformity. It's an age of consumer rights. Policy makers are keenly interested in protecting consumers. And likewise, consumers are demanding protection.

That's what I want us to consider this evening, as we are gathered here representing the insurance industry during a dynamic time. We are in an era where families are looking for answers. And failure to answer wouldn't just be a missed opportunity – it would be counter to who we are as an industry.

For over a century, our industry has been a problem solver. We've been a guarantee. We are there when people and our country have needed us the most.

Tonight, I want to focus on three areas where I believe this industry must be charging forward on behalf of American families.

First, we need a national solution to address financial and retirement savings gaps.

Second, we need a national solution to paid family medical leave.

Third, we need to turn up the gas on financial education.

Let me start with the financial gap. What does that mean?

People think about financial gaps in many different ways – it could be an income gap, a retirement gap, a pay gap, or a savings gap.

Let's consider for a moment what the gap means for people. For people, that gap represents a barrier to a dream or a healthier, more secure financial life. It represents a point of stress in their marriage or the feeling of falling short when it comes to providing for an aging parent. For some communities – particularly economically disadvantaged communities – the gap may feel insurmountable – like something that will never close.

Closing the gap is a big need – and it's becoming even bigger.

The way Americans work and how we live is changing. Americans are living longer. Some Americans could expect to live 30 years in retirement.

The first generation of workers who have largely self-funded for retirement is nearing the age when they will start drawing down on their savings. We face a big question – are Americans saving enough?

There are 16 million workers in the gig economy. Many of those independent contractors work for small employers who don't know where to start to offer a 401(k) or any kind of retirement savings option – even though they may want to.

Social Security is facing its own challenges. The surge of retiring baby boomers, the lack of young people to support them, and people living longer put stress on the program. We've all heard the statistics … 10,000 baby boomers a day are turning 65 over the next decade. One third of them have somewhere between 0 and $25,000 in savings.

Millennials are deeply worried about their financial and retirement security. Student loans are a big issue. Many carrying the burden of student loan debt don't feel they are in a position to start saving. This is a problem.

If we don't begin addressing the savings gap now, we will be left playing catch-up, with American families bearing the burden.

It's also an issue where human needs and the strength of our industry intersect.

We have private sector solutions that help people deal with the most important concerns in their lives, but we must be forward leaning. We can be a global problem solver by embracing bold policies that we know will work. We can start by tapping into the wisdom of our industry.

Behavioral economists and actuaries are deeply in tune with consumers, understanding what they need and how they think. Behavioral economists for years have studied how "nudging" people through choice architecture can shape better public policy. And specifically, they have looked at automatic enrollment in retirement savings plans. They tell us it is the perfect nudge to get Americans to save.

In fact, it increases savings astronomically. With auto enrollment, participants join sooner and very few people drop out after they are enrolled.

And so this year, our industry announced a bold shift. We endorsed a federal proposal by House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richie Neal that would require employers to provide workers access to automatic payroll deduction savings through an IRA, 401(k), or other qualified retirement plans.

A requirement like this would provide access to 30 million more Americans. This is the kind of model we need to lean into to begin to close the savings gap.

We're also acutely aware of the role employers play in this issue. Employer-provided retirement plans have done as much as any other force for good in helping people save and prepare for a secure retirement. We need to encourage more of this – and so we need to make it simple for employers.

We're actively pushing for the passage of the SECURE Act. SECURE will expand access to retirement plans for millions of Americans. It will allow older workers to contribute more to their IRAs. It will prevent up to 4 million people in private-sector pension plans from losing future benefits. It will make it easier for small businesses to band together and provide retirement plans for employees – leading to at least 700,000 new savers.

We need national solutions to close the retirement savings gap. We're going to use the strength of industry, our political influence, and our persuasive capabilities to continue to be a global problem solver on this issue and advance policy that really makes a difference.

Now, let's talk about caregiving. We need a national solution on paid family medical leave.

Paid family medical leave has the attention of leaders on both sides of the aisle and across all sectors. It's an issue we ought to be concerned about. For starters, caregiving directly effects a person's ability to save for retirement.

It's burdensome on women, who are more likely to be the one taking time off of work to provide care…whether to a child or aging parent…and more likely to live alone in retirement.

1 in 5 women take time out of the workforce to care for a baby or relative. On average, women lose over $300,000 in wages, social security benefits, and retirement plans over a lifetime because they took time off work to care for a family member.

We – the life insurance industry – need to be there, in this conversation, leaning in and providing knowledge. 47% of private sector workers are covered by short-term disability policies, and the number one paid benefit is maternity leave. That's great, but we can do more.

We need a national solution to help more employers offer paid family medical leave – a solution that expands the paid leave our industry is already providing. And we are learning from the program in place here in New York, which did indeed include private insurance as a key foundation of its solution.

By bringing the full intellectual resources of our industry to bear, we can support policymakers and our customers and consumers.

Finally, we need to turn up the gas on financial education.

We need to empower the next generation and ensure that all Americans and all New Yorkers ….regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, or economic status….have knowledge to make smart decisions for their financial security.

You don't need to earn a high income to be financially secure, but you do need to have a plan. Think about this – 25 percent of the most financially secure households earn $50,000 or less annually. Income alone does not determine financial security…. but financial literacy and preparedness does.

The financial inclusion part of this is making sure ALL communities have access to the information and products they need to protect their financial futures. It's about empowerment and financial security.

Did you know only 20 states have financial literacy requirements? New York requires economics courses, and many include a financial literacy component.

New York's career and technical schools require financial literacy courses. We need more of that across the country.

Financial literacy and inclusion can be powerful conduits for growth, and our industry is well-equipped to take up this mantle. We have trusted financial professional on the front lines with clients.

Our partner trades like NAIFA are doing great work in making it a priority to recruit a diverse set of financial professionals to represent the communities we serve.

To put it frankly, our young people need to see other people who look like them making smart financial decisions. They need to see other people who look like them advising them!

Superintendent Lacewell has spoken forcefully on need for more diversity in industry – and we agree with her. This must be a priority for us.

We are holding a panel discussion at our Annual Conference in Boston in just a few weeks to discuss how we promote a diverse and inclusive workforce. We've established an internal "think tank" to bring solutions to the fore. We'll be joining LICONY and APCIA for a great Women & Diversity in Insurance Conference in New York in 2020. Thank you to Mary Griffin for her excellent leadership in this area.

ACLI is working one-on-one with government officials who want to actively deliver financial education to all communities. We're partnering with organizations like Junior Achievement to raise the conversation on financial inclusion.

Our industry has been a part of American life for generations. We have an incredible purpose. And we are FOR people. We have a responsibility to be problem solvers as our nation grapples with the financial and retirement savings gap, paid family leave and caregiving and financial literacy and inclusion.

It will not be easy. There are no straight lines to progress.

Our success will be determined by how well we can work together. I'm confident that we can.

Your companies are hard at work meeting consumer needs with product solutions. We are hard at work fighting for policy solutions to help you do what you do best. It's truly a team effort.

Big things are ahead – for this industry and for the millions of American families who need a guarantee in this every changing world.

Let's heed the charge – "Ever Upward."

Thank you.