

AG Healey urges business leaders to seize ‘once in a lifetime opportunity’ to address racial inequity

‘America is burning, but that’s how forests grow,’ she tells Greater Boston Chamber

By [Jon Chesto](#) Globe Staff, Updated June 2, 2020, 1:29 p.m.



Attorney General Maura Healey. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Attorney General Maura Healey gave a rousing call to action on Tuesday, urging Boston business leaders to do their part in curbing the systemic racism and inequities that have prompted protest marches across the country in the past week.

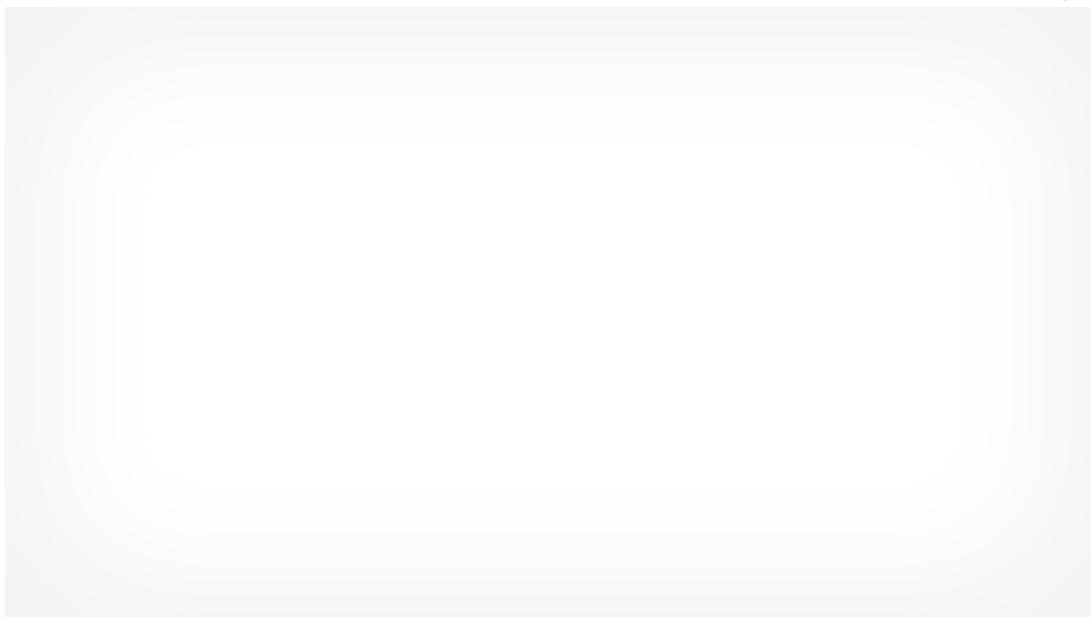
“We have a once in a lifetime opportunity,” Healey said in a speech to the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce. “The challenge I pose to all of us this morning is: Will we seize it?”

She referenced the protests and riots of the past few days over the death of George Floyd, the Black man who died on May 25 after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes. “Yes, America is burning,” she said, “but that’s how forests grow.”

Healey gave the passionate speech from her Beacon Hill office to more than 300 chamber members on a Zoom call. It’s a challenge that local business leaders have been asked to meet many times before. But it has taken on newfound urgency as they watched violence erupt in their hometown Sunday night after thousands had participated in a peaceful rally.

“I support calls for a revolution, but not the revolution of violence in our streets,” Healey said. “I’m calling for a revolution in mindset, a fundamental change to our ingrained assumptions.”

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She urged the white business people on the call to talk with their Black and brown colleagues about their experiences: what it's like to be questioned by security when they visit their offices on weekends, to be pulled over while driving to work, to teach their children how to behave in public to protect their safety.

“If there is anything I wanted to do as AG, it was to address the centuries-long systemic racism,” Healey said. “I’ve fallen short.”

Healey said she was originally planning to speak about the COVID-19 crisis, but switched subjects in light of the events of the past few days. But she did note that the pandemic has also exposed and exacerbated the racial disparities that so many people are out in the streets protesting against.

Amid the widespread loss of life from COVID-19, Healey said, “there have been other kinds of suffering that we need to acknowledge, too.”

In particular, she said, the pandemic has changed perceptions about essential workers. The group certainly includes doctors, other health care workers, and first responders. But Healey cited others, as well: drugstore and supermarket employees, delivery drivers, food production workers.

“They are disproportionately people of color,” Healey said. “These workers have put their health on the line to get us through this crisis . . . They need livable wages and benefits.”

She said some large companies, including Amazon, have made millions on the pandemic. If Amazon chief executive Jeff Bezos can invest in space exploration, she said, he can make sure his workers have adequate personal protective equipment.

She added that state policy makers should prioritize child care, community health care, and telemedicine — in part to ensure that some communities aren't being left behind.

Executives on the call, she said, should listen to their Black and brown employees, who

are scared, exhausted, and upset in this troubled time. “Let them know you see them, you care, and they matter to you,” she said.

She said companies should protect their executives who promote diversity and inclusion, or create one of these positions if they don’t already have one; they are too important to be sacrificed in budget cuts, she said, as happened in the 2008 recession. And she urged chamber members to support Black-owned businesses and to get behind policies championed by minority lawmakers.

“As we reopen, we can’t go back,” Healey said. “The new normal must address the deep inequities that the COVID crisis has exposed.”

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