REMARKS OF HELEN D. (HEIDI) REAVIS, FORMER CHAIR OF WOMEN CREATING CHANGE – MARCH 26, 2022 – FRANCES PERKINS PLACE EVENT, 46 STREET AND 9TH AVENUE – SPEAKING AFTER TOMLIN PERKINS COGGESHALL, AND INTRODUCED BY ERIC BOTTCHER:

THANK YOU ERIK.

FRANCES PERKINS PLACE. SUCH A NICE RING TO IT. THIS WAS HER PLACE. THIS DESIGNATION - HERE AND NOW - AT THIS LOCATION - COULD NOT BE MORE APPROPRIATE.

AFTER ALL, PERKINS WROTE HER COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY MASTER'S THESIS ON MALNUTRITION AMONG STUDENTS AT P.S. 51 – RIGHT DOWN HERE ON WEST 44TH STREET [point to it]. AND SHE WAS THEN ASSIGNED AS A SOCIAL WORKER, TO LIVE AND WORK AT HARTLEY HOUSE, RIGHT DOWN HERE ON 46TH STREET [point to it]. SHE LIVED HERE, SHE WORKED HERE, AND NOW HERE WE ARE, IN THIS SPOT TOGETHER, HONORING THIS WOMAN WHO CREATED POSITIVE CHANGE, AND A LOT OF IT.

NOW SPEAKING OF WOMEN CREATING CHANGE, I AM HERE ON BEHALF OF THE ORGANIZATION THAT FRANCES HELPED FOUND MORE THAN 100 YEARS AGO – WOMEN CREATING CHANGE, THEN KNOWN AS THE WOMEN'S CITY CLUB OF NEW YORK. I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR SO THOUGHTFULLY INVITING US TO JOIN YOU IN HONORING ONE OF OUR MOST ACCOMPLISHED AND INSPIRING MEMBERS. I ALSO WANT TO ECHO THE OTHER SPEAKERS IN THANKING ALL OF THE HOSTS AND SPONSORS OF THIS EVENT – AS WELL AS THE MCMANUS MIDTOWN DEMOCRATIC CLUB, AND THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CLUB, FOR ADVOCATING - SINCE 2017 - FOR THIS HONOR FOR FRANCES PERKINS – AND HELL'S KITCHEN, AND NEW YORK.

WHAT STARTED IN 1915 AS A CIRCLE OF 100 FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES, INCLUDING FRANCES PERKINS, AGITATING FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE, HAS GROWN EXPONENTIALLY AND ENDURED FOR OVER A HUNDRED YEARS. AND THIS IS BECAUSE THE GOALS OF SOCIAL IMPROVEMENT AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ARE PERENNIAL IN A FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY. [Pause.] TODAY, WOMEN CREATING CHANGE – ONCE A CLUB – IS AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY, THAT PARTNERS WITH ORGANIZATIONS AND WOMEN HISTORICALLY EXCLUDED FROM CIVIC PROCESSES, IN ORDER TO DEVELOP PROGRAMS – AND INFLUENCE POLICIES – TO PROMOTE MORE EQUITABLE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN NEW YORK CITY AND BEYOND. FRANCES WAS A FOUNDING MEMBER 107 YEARS AGO, SO IT'S FITTING FOR WCC TO BE HERE TODAY AS WE CARRY HER DREAM OF CIVIC PROGRESS FORWARD INTO THE NEXT CENTURY.

FRANCES WAS A WOMAN OF QUIET FAITH AND REMARKABLE CHARACTER – AND GREAT COURAGE. SHE CHOSE TO KEEP HER OWN NAME, AT A TIME WHEN DOING SO WAS PRACTICALLY UNHEARD OF. AT THE TIME SHE ATTENDED MT. HOLYOKE COLLEGE, LESS THAN ONE PERCENT OF ALL WOMEN ATTENDED COLLEGE – AND ONLY A TINY FRACTION OF THAT SMALL FRACTION WENT ON TO GRADUATE SCHOOL. SHE WAS AN EXCEPTION IN PREVAILING GOVERNMENT CIRCLES CONCERNING THE PROMOTION OF JEWS SEEKING ASYLUM HERE DURING THE WAR, INCLUDING SUCH IMMIGRANTS AS ALBERT EINSTEIN. INDEED THE SOCIAL PROGRAMS FOR WHICH SHE WAS THE ARCHITECT INSPIRED GOVERNMENTS ABROAD. SHE DID NOT SHY AWAY FROM CONFLICT – AND AT THE SAME TIME DID NOT STAND IN THE WAY OF COMPROMISE. I UNDERSTAND FROM HER GRANDSON TOMLIN, THAT FRANCES WAS CALLED A 'HALF A LOAFER' – UNDERSTANDING THAT COMPROMISE IS THE ART OF ACCOMPLISHMENT.

NOW, PERKINS COULD BE FAMOUS FOR BEING THE FIRST WOMAN CABINET MEMBER, SERVING AS SECRETARY OF LABOR FOR THE ENTIRETY OF FDR'S ADMINISTRATION – AND ADVISING PRESIDENT TRUMAN THEREAFTER.

SHE COULD BE FAMOUS FOR BEING THE LONGEST SERVING CABINET MEMBER IN HISTORY, FROM 1933 THROUGH 1945.

SHE COULD EVEN BE FAMOUS FOR HER WORK RIGHT HERE IN NEW YORK, AS A RESULT OF THE INFAMOUS TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY FIRE WHEN FACTORY WORKERS, WOMEN AND CHILDREN, WERE LOCKED IN AND TRAPPED ON THE EIGHTH AND NINTHS FLOORS, AND 146 DIED IN JUST 18 MINUTES. AS YOU'VE HEARD, THE 111TH ANNIVERSARY OF THAT FIRE WAS YESTERDAY, MARCH 25. AND AS A RESULT OF THAT TRAGEDY, FRANCES WAS APPOINTED THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY FOR THE COMMITTEE ON SAFETY OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, AND THE COMMITTEE'S WORK UNDER HER LEADERSHIP RESULTED IN 38 LABOR REFORM LAWS BEING IMPLEMENTED, LAWS WE STILL BENEFIT FROM TODAY ... FIRE ESCAPES (point up to some). INTERIOR CROWD LIMITATIONS – YOU ALWAYS SEE THOSE SIGNS (point to a restaurant or place off the street). EXIT SIGNS (point to one). AND NOW, FRANCES GETS HER OWN SIGN (point to the new FP street sign behind you).

YET ALL THOSE ACCOMPLISHMENTS JUST SCRATCH THE SURFACE OF FRANCES PERKINS' LEGACY.

NOW IT'S 2022. IMAGINE: OUR NATION WITHOUT UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE. IMAGINE: OUR NATION WITHOUT SOCIAL SECURITY. IMAGINE: OUR NATION WITHOUT A FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE. OUR NATION WITHOUT A 40 HOUR WORK WEEK. OUR NATION WITHOUT LAWS REGULATING CHILD LABOR. ALL OF THOSE LANDMARK NEW DEAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS — AND MORE — ARE LARGELY A CREDIT TO FRANCES PERKINS. A NAME SYNONYMOUS WITH PROGRESS BUILT ON EMPATHY – AND PRACTICALITY.

NOW IMAGINE: A CITY AND A NATION IF FRANCES PERKINS WERE ALIVE AND ACTIVE TODAY. IMAGINE THAT. A SOCIETY WHERE MINIMUM WAGE IS NOT BELOW THE POVERTY LINE. [Pause.] A SOCIETY WHERE HEALTH CARE IS UNIVERSAL AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL. A SOCIETY WHERE PUBLIC EDUCATION IS FULLY FUNDED AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL. A SOCIETY WHERE PUBLIC HOUSING MEANS HEAT AND WATER – AND SUCH BASICS ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL. A SOCIETY WHERE TAX INCENTIVES AND TAX CREDITS REFLECT A GOVERNMENT WANTING TO SUPPORT ALL CITIZENS' BASIC NEEDS. A SOCIETY WHERE THE MERE COUNTING OF ALL OUR PEOPLE IS NOT ATTACKED AS PARTISAN, AND WHERE VOTING IS NOT SUPPRESSED. [Pause.]

FRANCES SAID: "THE PEOPLE ARE WHAT MATTERS TO GOVERNMENT, AND A GOVERNMENT SHOULD AIM TO GIVE ALL THE PEOPLE UNDER ITS JURISDICTION THE BEST POSSIBLE LIFE."

IN HONORING FRANCES PERKINS, IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO IMAGINE THAT CITY AND IMAGINE THAT NATION AND STRIVE TOWARDS THOSE GOALS THAT PERKINS EMBODIED.

I WILL LEAVE YOU WITH MY FAVORITE QUOTE FROM FRANCES PERKINS: "MOST OF MAN'S PROBLEMS UPON THIS PLANET, IN THE LONG HISTORY OF THE RACE, HAVE BEEN MET AND SOLVED EITHER PARTIALLY OR AS A WHOLE BY EXPERIMENT BASED ON COMMON SENSE AND CARRIED OUT WITH COURAGE."

AND NOW I CAN'T RESIST – MY SECOND FAVORITE FRANCES QUOTE: "BEING A WOMAN HAS ONLY BOTHERED ME IN CLIMBING TREES." AND TO ALL OF YOU, KEEP CLIMBING! THE LADDER OF PROGRESS NEVER ENDS. THANK YOU FRANCES FOR THE INSPIRATION TO REACH HIGHER.

THANK YOU.

Council Member Erik Bottcher, the New York City Department of Transportation, Manhattan Community Board 4, the Frances Perkins Center, The Perkins Family, and Hell's Kitchen historian James Kaplan will host the unveiling. NYS Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon and WCC's former Chair of the Board and current counsel, Helen Diana (Heidi) Reavis, Esq., will appear as a guest speakers. RSVP to Council Member Erik Bottcher's office at 212-564-7757 or district3@council.nyc.gov.