Kirsten Gillibrand Delivers Powerful Explanation Of White Privilege

“Institutional racism is real,” the 2020 Democrat told a crowd in Ohio. “It doesn’t take away your pain or suffering. It’s just a different issue.”

By Sanjana Karanth

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) gave a powerful speech Thursday about the concept of white privilege during a roundtable in Youngstown, Ohio, for her 2020 presidential campaign.

Gillibrand was asked by a white woman holding a baby about how Democrats can talk about “white privilege” while she is struggling.

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“This is an area that, across all demographics, has been depressed because of the loss of industry and the opioid crisis,” the woman told the senator. “What do you have to say to the people in this area about so-called white privilege?”

Today in Youngstown, OH, a woman asked: “This is an area that, across all demographics, has been depressed because of the loss of industry and the opioid crisis. What do you have to say to people in this area about so-called white privilege?”

Here’s what I answered: pic.twitter.com/M8Ld5yjVE6

— Kirsten Gillibrand (@SenGillibrand) July 12, 2019

Gillibrand responded that she understands “that families in this community are suffering deeply” and that it “is not acceptable and not OK” for families in the area to experience the financial hardships they have, “but that’s not what that conversation is about.”

“What that conversation is about is when a community has been left behind for generations because of the color of their skin,” she said. “When you’ve been denied job after job after job because you’re black or because you’re brown. Or when you go to the emergency room to have
your baby — the fact that we have the highest maternal mortality rate, and if you are a black woman you are more likely to die in childbirth because that health care provider doesn’t believe you when you say, ‘I don’t feel right.’

“So institutional racism is real,” she said. “It doesn’t take away your pain or suffering. It’s just a different issue. Your suffering is just as important as a black or brown person’s suffering. But to fix the problems that are happening in the black community, you need far more transformational efforts that are targeted for real racism that exists every day.”

The response was met with applause.

Earlier this year, Gillibrand said white women like her must be part of the fight against institutional racism in the U.S. because “it cannot be left to people of color alone,” according to the New York Daily News.

“It is wrong to ask men and women of color to bear these burdens every single day, the same fights over and over,” Gillibrand said in January to the Rev. Al Sharpton’s National Action Network. “White women like me must bear part of this burden and commit to amplifying your voices.”

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