

**Luncheon Address to  
2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting  
Computing Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (CAHSI)  
Miami, Florida  
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***“Competitiveness, Innovation, and Diversity:  
A View from Washington”***

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Good afternoon. Thank you for that gracious introduction.

It is a pleasure to be here today and to talk with a group of people who are as concerned about the future of computing – and this country - as I am.

When Ann Gates came to see me at NSF three or four years ago to discuss forming an alliance, I strongly encouraged her. As effective a leader as she is, I knew from experience that the old adage about “strength in numbers” was true and that an Alliance would be a great idea. It is an old adage, but one that we all forget from time to time. Indeed, as one with many Hispanic friends and who grew up in a community – South Texas, where the population was 70% or more Hispanic – it has long concerned me that this community was so terribly underrepresented.

I only have a few minutes to leave you with something to think about, so let me make it simple by giving you a bumper sticker:

***At the end of the day, what counts is what you’ve done to make a difference.***

Let me start with what I believe is today an axiom: *A majority of Americans now believe broadly in diversity, at least to some extent.* I know that there are lots of tragic and wrong-headed instances of exceptions – just look at the shameful use of the immigration issue by some politicians, who actually think of themselves as “leaders.” But to prove my point, consider the current presidential race in which on the Democratic side the two top contenders are a woman and an African-American son of a racially mixed marriage, and one of the other very credible candidates is a proud Hispanic. On the Republican side, while the field is less diverse, one candidate currently receives strong support from important sources for his principled leadership, especially on immigration. Can you imagine that happening eight years ago?

What has brought about this change? I think it varies, but there are now at least three strong reasons to take diversity seriously. First and most fundamental, as some of us have long understood, diversity is a matter of *equity*. Whether it is due to our religion, our

humanitarian instincts, or our philosophical beliefs, it demands that we act on that understanding, not just passively hold it.

Second, diversity is *legally* required in this country. Our history has some shameful episodes in its past, but over the past fifty years or so, our laws have made operational what our great Constitution has always said. So, for those that may not fundamentally believe in diversity but who are nonetheless law-abiding, their actions are constrained to act in accord with principles of diversity.

Third, increasingly many people now see diversity as an *economic imperative*. This is where I think much of the emphasis is today. This bodes well for diversity in general and the cause of this organization in particular because now many people and businesses have a strong self-interest in insuring diversity. It is also the source of the title of my remarks “*Competitiveness, Innovation, and Diversity*.”

So, what **is** the connection between competitiveness, innovation, and diversity?

It is straightforward to describe, but harder to achieve.

This country is slowly waking up to the fact that we are not the only innovative or powerful country in the world, and that we may be losing our competitiveness. Wholesale changes in the textile, consumer electronics, automotive, and other major industries are noticed because those changes have resulted in the loss of millions of jobs. Books like Tom Friedman’s *The World is Flat*, studies like the National Academies’ “Rising Above the Gathering Storm” and the Council on Competitiveness’ “Innovate America” report, and various Congressional actions like the recent “America Competes Act” have sparked a broader understanding that a society must be competitive in order to be a leader **and** that innovation is at the heart of competitiveness.

It is a corollary that a country or region’s human capital is its single most important resource in efforts to be competitive and successful. Consider the Middle East, a region full of natural resources that the world is paying top dollar for, but short on people (only about 400 million in the area) and a region in which large segments of the population are underutilized and undereducated, if not downright discriminated against, in all areas of activity. Yet, in the middle of that region is Israel, with few people or resources, but a country that utilizes all of its human resources to the max and is thus relatively powerful and competitive.

There are many studies of how to promote innovation – it is currently a “hot topic” – but it is clear that education is where it starts. I don’t need to elaborate on this to a group of students, educators, and highly educated professionals from industry.

Let me also remind you in passing since that is not my focus today, that it is precisely our technology – computing and networking – that has enabled the globalization of so much of commerce and manufacturing and that is enabling innovation around the globe.

The connection to diversity is multi-faceted. We must utilize to the fullest extent possible all of our human capital. We could solve our professional shortages in almost any area if we could somehow overnight obtain full participation of one or more groups that are currently underrepresented in that area. We must compete in the global marketplace at all levels, and that means that those in industry must understand and be able to communicate well with a wide range of cultures – what better way than to have a diverse set of employees? And we must be able to design better products and services than our competitors. In many areas, it is now understood that design and production teams that are diverse often come up with better solutions.

These connections are not as well understood as the equity and legal drivers for the acceptance of diversity, but in the long run I believe that they will be, and will be more powerful.

But this promising future won't happen just because of studies or Congressional authorizations that carry no money. In the meantime, what can **you** do?

You're already doing one thing by supporting CAHSI. Grassroots efforts such as this are the essence of this country's success – people organizing and working together toward common goals. Continue and expand that group effort.

Increase the number of students of all kinds in computing, and work to expand the number and influence of computing literate people in your companies. You will encounter the cyclical fluctuations of employment and arguments that there is no job shortage. This may affect demand in the short-run, but if you take a longer view I maintain that there is much to be gained by increasing the number of computing professionals at all levels.

If you are an educator, you must insure that your students are getting a competitive education, not just one that prepares them for today's or even yesterday's careers. The heart of that is helping them become innovation-oriented. If you are in industry, you can work for your company to take a longer-range view of the value of its employees. Wherever you are, help those around you develop an understanding of how they can make a difference in their work and as citizens. Remember, as someone said this morning, one person makes the difference.

Political action through groups like CAHSI is important. Even more important is that you vote for candidates that “get it” and that you stay in touch with your elected representatives at *all* levels to make sure they understand what the real issues are and what can be done about them.

For each one of you, set yourself a goal: Whatever you have done in the past year to expand opportunities for underrepresented groups and to help individuals, increase that substantially by the time of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of CAHSI a year from now. Perhaps the leaders of CAHSI can provide a forum next year to showcase what you've done!

And remember:

*At the end of the day, what counts is what **you've** done to make a difference.*

Thank you for listening, and thank you for what you're going to do in the coming year.