

CMCA CONFERENCE
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Remarks by
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I gave a lot of thought to the theme of this year's conference – Bridging Cultures.

As many of you know, I work for the State Architect's Office, so naturally, the first thing I thought of was building bridges – which would consist of compiling several parts, such as self weathered tubular steel, lateral rods, etc.

But this conference is about actually bridging cultures, not building bridges. So I gave it some more thought and realized that it too will consist of a lot of various parts such as learning about the differences between various cultures. We also must learn about our similarities and the various advantages that each culture possesses. However, we also face common threats and common challenges.

The legacy of our parents and ancestors influences each of us in different ways and while life was often hard and resources scarce, we always knew who we were and that the measure of our worth was inside our heads and hearts and not in our possessions.

Too many young people – of all colors and all walks of life – are growing up today unable to handle life in hard places, without hope and without adequate attention. As a result, we are on the verge of losing generations of our children to drugs, violence, too-early parenthood, poor health, poor education, unemployment, and family disintegration. Millions of Latino, Native American, African American, and other minority children face similar threats. And millions of white children of all classes, like too many minority children, are frowning in the meaninglessness of a culture that rewards greed and tells them life is about getting rather than giving.

Children are taught – not by sermonizing, but by personal example. We need to teach our children that they can be and do anything; that race and gender are merely shadows; and that character, self-discipline, determination, attitude, and service are the true substance of life.

Young people need to believe they are needed and adults need to be reminded that our children and youth all have something to contribute and are precious resources to be nurtured and cherished.

You didn't have a choice about the parents you inherited, but you do have a choice about the kind of parent you will be.

Remember your roots and pass these roots on to your children and to other children. Young people who do not know where they came from and the struggle it took to get them where they are now, will not know where they are going or what to do for anyone besides themselves. African-American, Latino, Asian American and Native Americans should know about the European history and cultures and white children should know about the histories and cultures of diverse people of color in order for us to share the advantages we all possess.

The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to.

W. E. B. DeBois was one of the founders of the NAACP. He was the first African American to graduate with a Ph. D. from Harvard. He, and I quote, stated, “The key to open the door to equality was education and that all must acquire an equal opportunity to equal education. We have to vote for the men and women that will embrace the kinds of programs that will end all forms of racism. Never fool yourself in believing that the bottom line to equality is anything else other than economics.”

Sisters and brothers, lets not be fooled – there are many Americans who favor racial justice, as long as things remain the same. Many voters hate congress, but love their own member of congress as long as he or she takes care of their special interests. Many Americans cry about the growing gap between the rich and the poor and middle class. They are outraged at escalating child suffering and they favor government action as long as somebody else’s taxes are raised and somebody else’s program is cut.

It is a must that we tell our children to take pride in who they are and where they came from – and yet we have to tell our children not to believe in our own congress. A congress that passes legislation that discriminates against the poor, the elderly, and does not guarantee equal rights for all races.

It is time to stop and put an end to all of this. We all need to vote and hold those you vote for accountable. We get the political leaders we deserve. By not getting out there and voting, we allow others to do our voting for us. If we don’t vote, then we need to tape our mouths shut for we gave up the right to criticize any current political leader by not exercising our right to vote.

American’s children and family’s future are too important to leave to politicians elected by so few. Any American who cannot bother to vote and who thinks that a single vote does not matter is letting American down. If we don’t like what our political leaders are doing, we must make that clear through our voices and our votes.

The current congress and white house have made their agenda clear – demonize programs that they label social welfare and glorify programs that they label corporate incentives even though the so-called social welfare programs get only a small fraction of the money compared to what is spent on corporate welfare. The oil industry is experiencing the highest profits ever right now while they maintain high gas prices that hurt us all.

The republican congress and the white house just slashed all social programs while at the same time they gave the oil industry the highest ever amount in federal funding for research. They also passed a law that will make it impossible for anyone to ever sue the pharmaceutical industry, so no matter how many people are killed by their products, they cannot be sued. They also have refused to raise minimum wage since Clinton left the white house.

Stop listening to what our legislators say and look at what they are doing. It is just plain wrong to believe that the concerns of everyone in this room are not connected to what happens in the rest of the state and in Washington.

Republican legislators state quite clearly that equality already exists. Sisters and brothers, I stand here before you knowing as you all do that it does not!

We must all clearly understand that we must embrace the diversity we all bring to the table and realize that we can only achieve better economic positions for ourselves and our families if we come together and vote for legislators who care out our economics.

Change will come, not from the top down, but from millions of people like you and me raising our voices from the bottom up. We need to tell our religious, political and professional spokespeople what is important to us and hold them accountable.

Remember, leaders come in both genders, all sizes, colors, ages, from all geographic areas and neighborhoods.

Dwight Eisenhower states, "Every gun that is made, every warship launches, every rocket fired signifies a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone-----it is spending the hope of its children."

The undeniable fact is that our children's future is shaped both by the values of their parents and the policies of our nation.

President Bush and congress have yet to recognize the child and family poverty and financial insecurity as the national disaster it is. President Bush and congress has failed to attach it with a fraction of the zeal and shared commitment we now apply to digging out after a devastating hurricane, earthquake or fire.

When are they going to mobilize and send troops to fight for the "life-style" of the 100,000 American children, majority of which are minority, who are homeless each night? When are they going to fight for the standard of living of thousands of young families who earning capacity is eroding and who are struggling to buy homes, pay off college loans, and find affordable child care? When are the leaders coming to the rescue of millions of poor working and middle class families fighting to hold together their fragile households on declining wages and jobs?

Why were we able to put hundreds of thousands of troops and support personnel in Iraq within a few months when we are unable to mobilize hundreds to teachers or doctors and nurses and social workers for desperately underserved inner cities and rural areas to fight poverty and ignorance and child neglect and abuse?

Isn't it time for Bush and congress and all of us to redefine our national security and invest as much time and leadership and energy in solving our problems at home as we do to our problems abroad?

We must continue to fight for equality for all races, genders, and age groups. We must take on those that discriminate through inappropriate actions and those who create discriminatory legislation.

Sisters and brothers, bridging cultures is not a task, it is an opportunity. It's a challenge that we should all be proud to undertake. It is a challenge that we can change the very world we live in.

I am very proud of our CMCA Committee for taking on this challenge and for opening our eyes.

You have heard me speak before about Sojourner Truth. Sojourner was a slave woman who could neither read nor write but could not stand slavery and second-class treatment of women. Let me end with this quote from Sojourner. One day during an anti-slavery speech, she was heckled by an old man who said, "Old woman, do you think that your talk about slavery does any good? Why I don't care any more for your talk than I do for the bite of a flea." She replied, "Perhaps not, but the Lord willing, I'll keep you scratching!"

Thank you.