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Keynote Speech at Annual IND Dialogue and Unity Dinner
Hyatt Regency New Brunswick Hotel, November 14, 2010

The United States of America is one of the more significant social inventions in world history. It was invented more than 230 years ago by those European colonists and their descendants and by African slaves and native peoples. Through blood, sweat, and tears, they combined their individual lives to build and shape a new nation. In doing so, they gave this country a particular identity, an identity as a country dedicated to diversity, a nation of different peoples living together as one—e pluribus unum—from the many, one.

The United States is far from a perfect society. We have more acts of violence, including homicides, than other developed countries. Often the political and ideological disagreements among population segments not only reach levels of complete mistrust of the other, but also escalate to anger and name-calling. Even so, we are a country where nearly 311 million people speak a common language, find ways to live in peace with each other, and maintain that cherished democratic heritage passed down to us through a dozen generations.

Most Americans cannot trace their ancestors to those colonists who joined together in 1776. Yet, from them—as numerous historians have noted—we have a precious legacy. Most importantly, we benefit from a long-standing cultural value about equality for all, engrained in a set of laws that the entire population lives by. Flaws and contradictions in fulfilling this concept exist, of course, but these do not diminish the ideal for which we strive. All of the diverse peoples of the United States accept that ideal. In fact, many left their homeland to live in a land where equality is the ideal. Nevertheless, the 19th-century cultural homogeneity existing at the time of this nation's beginnings is gone forever. So too is the belief in the romantic myth that we are a melting pot.

We Americans, who in the very beginning were an invention, are still being reinvented, and this process of reinvention appears to be a continuing, never-ending reality. Three waves of immigration have not just successively altered the population composition of the United States. They have strengthened the nation and given the American temperament a livelier and far richer national personality than could ever have existed without them.

Even when immigration was almost exclusively from northern and western Europe to the New World, the colonies were still a pluralist society, reflecting the cultural diversity of the European continent. Many of those first colonial settlements were religiously and ethnically diverse; New Amsterdam, New Belgium, New Sweden, New Orleans, and New Smyrna are but a few examples. New Amsterdam was itself a pluralistic settlement, with eighteen different languages spoken there daily in 1660. Even the English settlements varied, such as the Calvinists in Massachusetts, the Congregationalists in Connecticut, the Presbyterians in New York, the Catholics in Maryland, and the Anglicans in Virginia, each of them suspicious and intolerant of the others.

The success of Washington's troops in defeating the English came partly from the multicultural elite who played key roles in military training, strategy, and leadership. Baron von Steuben (Prussia), Generals Pulaski and Kosciuszko (Poland), the Marquis de Lafayette and Baron de Kalb (France) were the most prominent volunteers from Europe who were of great value to the American cause.

Just as the military leadership consisted of non-English individuals, so too did the ranks of fighting men. Over 5,000 Blacks served in the colonial forces, fighting in every major battle from Lexington in 1775 to Yorktown in 1781. Some distinguished themselves in combat, such as Peter Salem and Salem Poore at the Battle of Bunker Hill, and Lemuel Haynes at the Battle of Fort Ticonderoga. James Lafayette, a Virginia slave, was so effective in gaining strategic intelligence about the English for Lafayette's troops that the Virginia Assembly purchased his freedom as a reward.

Numerous non-English-speaking ethnic communities recruited their own companies or regiments, staffed with their own officers. Soon they mixed with other ethnic groups or those of English ancestry as they united against a common enemy. Eventually, the cultural barriers and suspicions among groups faded as they shared common dangers, common hardships, and ultimately common victories.

United by their nationalism after winning their war for independence, the colonists put aside their prejudices by institutionalizing tolerance and establishing a bedrock principle of American culture: separation of church and state. Since no single religion dominated and no one group was powerful enough to coerce the others, freedom of religion was more an act of practical necessity than of democratic ideals. A product of religious pluralism, this principle of separation of church and state is one cherished legacy from America's multicultural past.

Many of those early Americans were adventurers, debtors, the poor, or the politically and religiously oppressed. In tragic irony, as they sought the freedom and opportunity in the New World denied to them in the Old World, they brought over thousands of Africans in bondage and victimized the Native Americans already living here.

Despite the significant role of Africans and Native Americans in U.S. history, it would be almost 200 years after the birth of the United States before their descendants could begin enjoying the same rights and opportunities secured by the whites.

Yet, even though black and red Americans would strive for justice for generations, they were able to do so in a country that not only had a Constitution, but a conscience, to which an appeal could be made. This is a triumph of the idealism of freedom that is forever a tribute to the human spirit. The ideals set forth in the nation's foundation have ever since remained the promise to each generation born here and the beacon of hope to those who come.

For many who have come, the passage to America is the hardest ordeal. For centuries the ocean voyage—that trial by wind and wave, hunger and sickness—was so intense an experience that few immigrants ever forgot it. Although most simply arrive by jet today, for some the passage can be equally harrowing to those steamship voyages of yesteryear. Many older

Vietnamese in the United States have a tale of walking across Cambodia or fleeing Vietnam by boat, of attacks by ruthless pirates and long months in a refugee camp. The Cambodians have their holocaust; the Haitians their natural disasters; the Cubans their escape from a stagnant, repressive society; the Mexicans their encounters with the feared La Migra, the border patrol; and the Muslims their fleeing repression and random killings.

But no danger seems too great, no obstacle too large to stop those who are determined to come. First the name—America—begins to circulate in towns and villages. Then the idea takes hold, and the flood begins. Millions of people forsake the lands of their ancestors, and give up old dreams and old traditions to pursue new dreams and new traditions. For most native-born Americans, America has been a gift long since given; for each new arrival though, it is fresh and dynamic and not to be squandered. Each new immigrant thus re-creates the American Dream.

That dream found expression in a renowned physicist who was the son of an immigrant blacksmith and in a famous composer who was the son of an illiterate immigrant. It will find expression again in today's immigrants who bring precious little when they arrive—except for their greatest gift—and that is themselves. You never know where the next idea is coming from. And, since a nation's greatest resource lies in its people, its diversity presents an even greater treasure trove of possibilities.

And, you know, these immigrants pay us the highest compliment by coming here. In essence, they are saying, "I want to spend the rest of my life with you." And (if you'll forgive the double negative) they didn't come to join nothing; they came to join something—us at our best, us as they imagined us after a thousand movies and television shows and books and reports from relatives. Yes, they come to join us, not to keep separate from us. It may take some time, longer than some Americans' patience but, for most, that integration into the dominant culture does occur.

And when immigrants arrive, some kind of magic happens. They do extraordinary things, things they couldn't do at home. They work long hours and take risks, carving out new markets for goods and services. They go to school and pursue careers impossible to have in their homelands. They build, buy property, start businesses and become entrepreneurs. In most of our major cities, the new immigrants—many of them shopkeepers—run a whole level of the city. Nationwide the small shops that the immigrants run in our towns and cities create thousands of jobs and contribute billions to the economy. In return, the newcomers get the possibility of realizing their dreams of freedom and a better life for themselves and their children.

In the past two decades, the United States has experienced the biggest flow of immigrants in the memory of almost any living American. It has recently absorbed twice as many immigrants as the rest of the world combined. Not since the first decade of the twentieth century have so many new immigrants become Americans. About 9.7 million legal immigrants came in the 1990s and another 10.3 million in the last decade. Unlike previous immigrant waves bringing mostly Europeans, the current immigration is mostly from the Developing World. Now, 33 percent of the new immigrants come from Asia and 41 percent from Latin America. Immigration from Europe, historically the principal source of newcomers, has fallen to 13 percent. India alone sends far more than England, Germany, Ireland and Italy put together, the nations that for

the past 300 years furnished the great majority of immigrants to America. As another example, in the last decade more than 48,000 Turkish immigrants arrived, the largest number in that country's modern state history.

New ethnic neighborhoods are transforming our cities. Previously homogeneous suburbs are now infused with first-generation Arabic, Asian, and Hispanic Americans. New faces are turning up in our offices, shops, and factories. New languages buzz in our schools. This bubbling stew may seem strange to some, but until immigration was all but cut off in 1924, it was the normal condition of America.

We should not worry about the arrival of so many immigrants, for they come, as I said earlier, to be part of us. Despite the fears of alarmists, we are in no danger of becoming a Tower of Babel in the 21st century. Studies show that the new immigrants learn English as readily as previous immigrants. Their children learn in school not just U.S. history but the moral and philosophical underpinnings of their new country. They don't just learn about the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. They learn about the reasons why we fought those wars, about our deep-rooted principles of equality, liberty, opportunity and democracy. They learn the meaning of the civil rights movement and its importance in seeking the implementation of those principles too long denied to some Americans.

By learning what we were, they learn what we are, what they now are, and what they are becoming. They become part of the ever-changing American kaleidoscope, that wonderful mixture of colors, religions and national origins that has always been the essence of U.S. society.

One aspect of that diversity, religion, increased with the successive waves of immigration, as the United States changed from an almost exclusively Protestant nation into a country of three major faiths: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. Since religion is so closely intertwined with ethnicity, current migration patterns offer clues about the future religious preferences of Americans.

Latin America and the Philippines are mostly Catholic and, as major sources of new immigrants now accounting for almost half the total, they will help increase the proportion of Roman Catholics. By 2050, Catholics may increase from 25 percent to 28 percent. They might even constitute the majority of residents in such heavily populated states as California, Florida, and Texas.

Another rapidly growing religious group is the Muslims. Appealing to many African, Middle Eastern, and Asian Americans, Islam is becoming a more noticeable presence. More than 1,200 mosques now pepper the American landscape, about two-thirds built since 1981. Within a few years, Muslims will surpass Jews to become the third largest religious denomination in the United States, and by 2050, they may account for three percent of the total American population. Other Eastern religions—particularly Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs—should also continue to grow in the U.S. By 2050, they may comprise two percent of American society.

Protestants, on the other hand, will likely decrease to below 50 percent. Mainstream

denominations seem destined to decline the most, as fundamentalist denominations continue to gain new converts. Religious diversity is thus becoming ever more pronounced throughout the land as we approach a point when all faiths will be minorities in the United States.

What we are experiencing today in large-scale immigration is part of the continuing dynamics of a nation of immigrants changing its demographics, yet remaining true to its core culture. Despite fears about divisiveness, the mainstream group is more inclusive than ever before. Despite concerns over language retention, today's immigrants want to learn English and do so no more slowly than past immigrants, and perhaps even more quickly because of telecommunications and the mass media. Despite nativist anxieties about nonwesterners not blending in, this group has demonstrated its desire to integrate by having the highest naturalized citizenship rates among all of the largest sending countries.

Let me conclude by saying that diversity in America is neither new nor a threat to the stabilization and integration of American society. It is an old, continuing presence that strengthens not weakens, enriches not diminishes, nourishes not drains, a civilization whose strength and character, whose potential and promise, whose achievements and influence worldwide, have long reflected, and resulted from, the diversity of its people.

It is absolutely true: E pluribus unum.

Thank you.