



DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY

MINI- NEWSLETTER – SPECIAL: MARCH 20, 2010

PUBLIC POLICY FORUM, WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH

HEALTH CARE: ANALYSIS AND OUTLOOK

DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY HOSTS 2010 PUBLIC POLICY FORUM: EDUCATION POLICY, ECONOMIC RECOVERY ARE CORE TOPICS

Dialogue on Diversity, joining forces with the American Islamic Congress on Friday, March 12 at the GWU Marvin Center, Washington, D.C., presented its very timely 2010 Public Policy Forum, passing in review a lineup of public policy issues with a series of top-flight speakers on American political and economic life. The program took on a special significance as an observation of the annual March marking of Women’s History Month. Dialogue on Diversity is a non-profit educational organization fostering constructive dialogue and interchange among the diverse ethnic and cultural communities of the Americas. The American Islamic Congress, founded in 2001, under its assertive motto: “*We are Passionate about Moderation!*”, seeks to build understanding among the U.S. Muslim population and the larger American culture, of which the Islamic communities are part and parcel, and specially with the Jewish and Christian religious communities, both of which share a common history with Islam as parts of a many-faceted Abrahamic faith tradition. The Dialogue has collaborated with AIC in previous Forums and has proudly shared the stage with them in the 2010 Public Policy program.



Ma. Cristina Caballero, Clare C. Giesen, Zainab al-Suwajj, Harriet Fulbright, Susan Scanlan, Heidi Hartmann, Gabriela Lemus

The 2010 Forum again brought Dialogue on Diversity Board member Bettie Baca, long a leading figure in the country’s Latino civic life, to serve as the legendarily efficient MC.

The Forum agenda itself first explored the condition of women in the civic and economic life of societies around the world. Ma. Cristina Caballero of Dialogue on Diversity reviewed the state of affairs in Latin America as women emerge from a centuries long cocoon of domestic shelter [read: confinement] into the bracing atmosphere of a competitive economic environment and springing full-panoplied into the political process. Women have been elected president, after all, of no fewer than five Latin American counties, among them the economically advanced southern-tip powerhouse countries of Argentina and Chile.

Zainab al-Suwajj, Executive Director of the AIC, expounded the progress and the challenge of the women of Iraq and other Middle Eastern locales. A recital of the known disabilities under which the women, in many places and at many times, are subject – the confinement to one’s house in the absence of permission of a man kinsperson, or indeed accompaniment of such a chaperone. The want of license

to drive cars, etc. And the permission to vote, which is granted in a few places (ed. note: the remaining places showing themselves to be as backward as the U.S. of a century ago).

In their Iraq operations the AIC staff work with women in small settlements, in villages that dot the landscape, it a mix of low tech and very high tech. They train the women, who are often little literate and meagerly skilled, in such tasks as hairdressing, fashioning simple crafts products, but in all these lines of production, their students have recourse to computers to organize the work, market their wares, and form networks of contacts and interlocutors over the country and indeed beyond.

Esther Aguilera of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute detailed the Institute's long tested programs of identification of leadership material among Latino youth and their subsequent internship experience under CHCI tutelage in Washington.



This portion of the agenda was capped by the appearance of Ms. Harriet Fulbright, president of the J. William and Harriet Fulbright Center in Washington, an organization dedicated to the ideals of the much revered late Sen. Fulbright. Ms. Fulbright describes the far-flung work of the Center in its creative educational efforts, which foster the conditions underpinning a long-run era of peace around the world. Mrs. Fulbright related the facts of a recent Center project strikingly illustrating the salutary effects that arise in person-to-person encounters, in this case a t

wo-week total immersion experience among young Cypriot students, ages 14 to 17, drawn in equal numbers from both the Greek and Turkish moieties of that troubled island – in Ma. Cristina Caballero and Harriet Fulbright whom attitudes of suspicion and animosity had not terminally hardened. Once the students perceived that their opposite numbers were people like themselves, with like sentiments, fears, and desires, their relationships came to be respectful and amicable. In frank discussions of the hostilities between the two ethnic parties, the students found themselves simply embarrassed in the presence of the others to reproduce some of the attitudes of their elders back on the island – one to which they were to return, much for the betterment, it may be hoped, of their compatriots. This account drove home the notion that well targeted educational effort, and persistent work, especially with young persons, may have its effects, in large ways and small, for the cause of peaceable relationships around the globe.

The Education Seminar, the centerpiece of the afternoon Forum agenda, led off with an exposition by Rita Jaramillo, Minority Outreach at the National Education Association, on the state of urban schools across the country, the excellences and the challenges. National success is linked closely with the success of the public schools, Rita Jaramillo stated at the outset of an impassioned account of the deficiencies of the state of education in America. It is the high school drop-out problem that most conspicuously is destined to create a society of two tracks, one of the well-read, affluent, savvy in the ways of the modern world; the other of the ill-trained, often scarcely literate, poor from a want of the fundamental tools for orienting oneself effectively in the midst of the dizzying progress of the contemporary world. The schools bear much of the blame: although there is sufficient blame to go among the elements of U.S. society, all of which are deeply implicated in the debacle. Indeed the 12% of the high schools that are generating the bulk of the drop-outs are known, identified by name and location. These notorious “drop-out factories” should be closed, but only if there are the resources to place their students in fresh, creative learning settings, with skilled teachers – a project of vast social import, whose value will justify the dramatically greater cost of the investment.



Rita Jaramillo, and Giselle Lundy-Ponce

Giselle Lundy-Ponce of the American Federation of Teachers followed with a compelling account of the meagerness of efforts, a sorry patchwork of under-funded measures, toward effective pre-school education in contemporary America – this in the face of cogent data,

distilled from innumerable studies in every part of the country, evidencing the crucial import of intensive efforts with children in the 2-5 year bracket. One study has suggested that a thoroughgoing system of training for these children, often living in homes where little verbal stimulation and little acquaintance with the outside world is to be had, would ultimately enlarge the country's GDP by some \$2 trillion per year. This benefit is exclusive of the non-money returns by way of domestic and individual satisfaction to be attained with a fuller integration into the vitality of modern society – for which the basic linguistic and interpersonal savvy that only early intervention may afford is a precondition. In any discussion of the American educational system and its woes, attention is necessarily centered on the continuing gap in the educational efforts – now sadly wanting in intensity, financing, and targeting – directed to the crucial years of early childhood – the “treasures in small packages” ages 2 to 5, the period



when malleable minds can be either sharpened or blighted. The environment of the child's household and, if that is wanting in richness, the nurture of outside educational efforts of the most intense and pervasive (and costly) kind, can rescue a generation.



Irma Fernandez Harahush of the Census Bureau discussed the high aims of the current decennial Census, and its attack on the most evident of the present problems – that of a reluctance among immigrants and others to respond, and respond accurately, to the Census queries. It is a simple set of data that is sought, and the Bureau is bound to maintain their confidentiality. The Bureau has been at pains to assert that even the terms of the “Patriot Act” will not permit breach of this wall of confidentiality.

The final panel dealt with the difficult times the country is traversing – both in income and employment and in its civic and political strains.

Heidi Hartmann, the famously shrewd analyst of women's economic lot in American society, and head of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, holds forth on the strategies for women as they strive to emerge from the economic hardships of the last two years, and on their ability to power recovery in the economy as a whole in the face of a lingering slowdown. Women have been cushioned against unemployment somewhat more than men, although both have suffered. Unemployment, again, is more severe as one considers younger and younger age cohorts. As for the penumbra of persons not working but probably interested in doing so, and of the only partially, or fitfully employed, none of



Hearers, a Moment of Respite whom show up in the narrow definition of labor market, Dr. Hartmann stated, in response to queries, that while the numbers are not as solidly tabulated, to all appearances this penumbra is of much the same demographic composition as that of the persons within the officially defined, narrow-concept labor market. It is the meticulously gathered and analyzed factual composition of the labor market, with its unemployment phenomena, such as that generated by the IWPR, that often reins in the speculations of economic analysts, whose concepts may as often as not take off into the wild blue yonder, unmoored to the gritty facts on the ground.

Susan Scanlan, a Washington Hand of the best credentials, and the busy head of two non-profits, reviewed the state of political power and noted that in Washington, if you are to be effective, you find that “you are either at the table or on the menu.” The role of women, if that is gauged by women's weight in the legislative branch, leaves much to be desired. The Scandinavian countries lead on this score. The U.S. is far behind, with 17%, tied in 24th place with Turkmenistan. But this is progress since when Ms. Scanlan began her Washington career, the figure was only 4%, among whom were the illustrious Barbara Mikulski and Olympia Snowe, both now in the Senate. In the Senate women have gained entry to some of the important committees, though not to the powerful posts as committee chairs. It is the Appropriations Committee that in a sense is the arbiter of the mix of programs in the federal

repertory – programs in great variety, and with great nobility of purpose, can be enacted right and left, but nothing happens until funding is granted by the money committees in the Congress. In this National Women’s History Month (which, it should be mentioned, Ms. Scanlan was instrumental in establishing when she worked on the staff of the late Rep. Charlie Wilson) reminds us all of the far from achieved history of women as figures of equal worth and dignity in the upper reaches of the American political power structure.

The practical side of politics, as a part of women’ proper work, was sketched by Clare C. Giesen, who made her reputation by political feats of note in the Houston, Texas arena, and is now at the high intensity center of the action, as head of the National Women’s Political Caucus. Women have their own style in political and other roles, which are often set in childhood. In school the teacher asks, Ms. Giesen observes, what is two and two. The girls set about thinking and ciphering. The boys instantly offer answers: three. The trouble is the quick answer, as often as not, is wrong. In politics, interestingly, no one tries to talk women into running for office. A woman’s entry into politics is not bowing to persuasion, but an assertion of primal will. The communications media, moreover, are observed to “diss” women candidates to a degree and on grounds that are not applied to men candidates. The articles give relatively short shrift to the woman candidate’s policy logic and concentrate on the color and quantity of lipstick, the cut of the gown, etc. The papers make of women in politics a body, of the men a cerebrum. At least, the heart is part of the body.



From the Department of Labor, representing Secretary Hilda Solis, Dr. Gabriela Lemus, who has been associated with Dialogue on Diversity, as a member, Director, and speaker at various times for more than a decade, reviewed some of the Department’s concerns with the fact of extensive unemployment and with the condition of women in the labor market generally. It is the special vision of this

Dr. Gabriela Lemus Secretary, who has been seasoned in the policy disputations by years in the State (California) and Federal legislative bodies, that

every person inclined to enter the labor market should have the opportunity for employment – and at that a decent employment at a sustaining income level. Sad to say, many workers, or want-list workers, have, as a practical matter, given up. One avenue to a brighter labor market scene is the growth of “green” industries, notably the health care industry, where “green” hospitals are the not too distant goal, with posts for new physicians and nurses, but also IT people and other crafts playing their several roles in the larger health care picture.

Note: an analysis of the U.S. health care system, with commentary on proposals for its reform, is to be found on Dialogue on Diversity’s Internet Site (www.dialogueondiversity.org). Readers are invited to visit the site and consider the observations presented.

ABOUT DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY: Founded in 1991, Dialogue on Diversity is a international network of women entrepreneurs, actively promoting constructive dialogue among Latino and other ethnic and cultural communities, with especial emphasis on their economic viability through entrepreneurship. America’s minority entrepreneurs are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. economy. They promise to be the backbone of American economic strength in the 21st Century. Dialogue on Diversity’s annual Entrepreneurship programs both celebrate and advance that promise.

Telephone: [FfxVa] 703-631-0650, Fax: [FfxVa] 703-631-0617 e-mail: dialog.div@prodigy.net www.dialogueondiversity.org
Dialogue on Diversity is a 501(c)(3) Organization. Contributions are tax-deductible.