



DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY REPORT

March 6, 2009

Media Contact: Clarissa Mendez 703-631-0650

DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY HIGHLIGHTS ECONOMICS SLOWDOWN, EDUCATION, IT, AND IMMIGRATION IN 2009 PUBLIC POLICY FORUM:

WASHINGTON, D.C. March 6, 2009 – Dialogue on Diversity, gathering on Thursday, March 5 in the Rayburn Building’s beehive of Congressional activity, offered its lineup of top-flight panelists in a series of seminars on several salient policy areas.

The theme was sounded by Dialogue president **Ma. Cristina Caballero**, opening the morning session with a fast overview, hammering home the fiscal policy mantra that underlay all the varied policy discourse to come – stimulus by the rule of the three Ts – Timely, Targeted, and Temporary.– the magical incantation that is easier to say than to effect, as the Congress has sufficiently proved. She remarked: *“The country is challenged – as we really do not need reminding – on a number of fronts in this unsettled year. From the economic slowdown and the fitful attempts to find remedies, to the still far from resolved predicaments of the immigrants, most from Latin countries, who are our economically hard-pressed neighbors and at once the targets of anti-immigrant sentiment in many quarters of domestic society. In the meantime the chronic deficiencies of the country’s education system present a new set of marching orders to our Latino and other diverse population groupings as we strive to set the youngest generation off on a better prepared basis than that of their parents.”*

The direction and shape of the internet, and telecommunications generally, was the subject of an opening two-hour panel. **Brent Olson**, AT&T’s resident expert on the crucially important nexus of technical transmission capabilities and the welter of regulatory and economic exigencies, discussed the much bruited concept of “net neutrality”, and sketched the emerging consensus on the mass of niche Internet applications that have to co-exist with ordinary e-mail traffic and informational flows – and the volume of costly investment, a daunting amount, that has to be brought to bear if the infrastructure is to afford the capacity needed to keep the exponentially growing aggregate internet traffic moving. There are, for one thing, many more users each year than the last, but the main factor is that they are sending video content, which is vastly more voluminous. **Deven McGraw** of the Center for Democracy and Technology outlined the delicate balancing act, crucial in medical information technology, between putting maximum medical information in the hands of providers in real time, and at once fending off potentially embarrassing or damaging information leakage to others; while **Jules Polonetsky** of the flagship privacy organization, Future of Privacy Forum, offered a run-down of the myriad privacy issues that arise when a novel medium, complex in itself, invades a multi-faceted social milieu such as that of contemporary America. **Jim Harper** of the Cato Institute discussed the proposals for broadband extension, suggesting, quite provocatively, that no conclusions firmly set in concrete are called for, least of all by the government’s channeling of investment toward current technology for broadband installation (as the new spending campaign just launched by the federal powerhouse attempts), but that a variety of innovative approaches, employing novel



David Honig, Deven McGraw



Mr. Olson



Jules Polonetsky



Mr. Harper

technologies, may well, if permitted to grow, afford more ample and rapid modes of transmission. The panel was moderated by **David Honig**, of the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council.

Perhaps the most trenchant insight of the Forum came with the midday session's Education Roundtable and in a special Keynote presentation by **Prof. Leonard Greenhalgh** of Dartmouth, both tying pre-school (ages 2-5) educational practice to the larger economic and societal outcomes over the next half century. Needed: a massive program of culture-literacy-social-health-care immersion experience for these very young children, often in the stark absence of just these forms of mental nurture, sound nutrition, and health care in their homes. Prof.



Prof. Greenhalgh

Greenhalgh warned, driving home the point with closely reasoned economic argument, that it is this crucial lacuna in all previous educational efforts, a gap that ripples through the educational system, that is swiftly and inexorably producing a persisting, potentially restive underclass, and putting the U.S. out of the contest for economic success in a global age. The sources of possible economic vitality, moreover, lie chiefly with the persons likely to be left behind by the dismal education policies and practices of the present era, and among these are disproportionately women and the ethnic minorities – the Latino and African American communities, and a variety of others, since it is from the start-up companies, the small enterprises that are the characteristic business forms of these innovators, that the real initiatives historically powering American economic life have flowed. The titans of American industry as little as 30 years ago were U.S. Steel, RCA, and the like. Now these have shrunk or vanished, while Microsoft, leader of the new knowledge economy, now at the summit of the economic pyramid, was then a shed in Mr. Gates's back yard. Time puts down the mighty and lifts up the able who are in tune with the time.



Maria Neira

Maria Neira, of the American Federation of Teachers, emphasized much the same: a crying need for extending efforts down the age scale to the era in human growth when kids' minds are word and idea sponges, their perceptions and their social and intellectual beginnings most malleable and sensitive; it is then that vacuity or plenitude in understanding, sound or destructive social attitudes are fixed. Kids from deprived household milieux have learned some 1,500 words by age three or 4, those from privileged, highly educated households know more than double that. Finally, Ms. Neira pointed out, there may be something to the often heard slogan: you can't solve problems by throwing money at them. There is doubtless some truth to that –

but not much. Problems cannot be solved without serious and large-scale investment in research, in ample salaries to draw the highly skilled in large numbers, and in schools with paint that is not peeling and roofs that do not leak. Enough said. **Maria Tukeva**, principal of the newly formed Capital Heights Educational Campus on the plateau running from Meridian Hill north in northwest Washington, has taken a neighborhood of immigrant children, from the poorest homes, those least acculturated to the rhythms of U.S. urban life, and produced 97% high school graduation rates and, harder yet to believe, similar on-to-college rates. She outlined the techniques and principles that have worked. Do not, she stressed, let up on the product-oriented press forward with all students for excellence. Do not fall into blaming the kids, their families, the city; press forward and don't look back. Teachers who are not willing to join in the spirit need not apply. Further reflections on the methods of education were found in the thoughtful remarks of **Alma Morale Riojas**, President of MANA, on the contributions that are made, through sometimes very highly formalized, sometimes quite informal initiatives launched by



Maria Tukeva

individuals and especially organizations mobilizing the concerned interventions of neighborhood groups and ethnically demarcated communities, such as those powering her own very active national network. **Rep. Rubén Hinojosa of Texas**, who chairs the House Subcommittee on Higher Education, Life-long Learning, and Competitiveness, described model schools with similar achievement stories in his State and around the country – rare, unfortunately, in their occurrence, but in fact powerful beacons showing to the hopeful the route to educational success. Thus the second half of the Forum program forcefully directed attention to two key goals: comprehensive and massive pre-school health and literacy interventions, and intensive progress-oriented teaching at the K-12 levels.



Rep. Rubén Hinojosa



Tamar Jacoby

Dialogue on Diversity, as in past Public Policy Forums, zeroed in on its signature issue, the integration of immigrants into the Nation of Immigrants -- the national motto: E Pluribus Unum. The audience were reminded that President Roosevelt, early in his Administration, had opened certain remarks to the DAR convention: “Fellow Immigrants . . .” The reminder may well be the corrective that public discourse on this subject is repeatedly in need of. **Tamar Jacoby**, making her fourth appearance as a Dialogue on Diversity headliner on the immigration topic, and the source of much of the intellectual force behind the present immigration reform movement, reviewed the prospects for action by the Congress in the near future on any species of comprehensive immigration reform legislation, a bill, that is, that would realistically come to terms with the limbo-ized, partially underground existence of the massive numbers of undocumented persons now settled into the U.S. economy, and providing, through legal admission rates, for varying, probably increasing, business demand for labor in time to come. The practical political question is whether the necessary fixation of public attention and legislative effort on the economic malaise removes from the political space all the oxygen that might otherwise support an immigration initiative, or whether such proposals might be seen as themselves conducive to revivifying the economy. The question is arguable in any of numerous directions. The important thing, Ms. Jacoby stressed, from the point of view of those inclined toward a comprehensive solution, is to keep the issue alive in public consciousness, with the hope that sooner rather than later it will emerge alive and well as a viable legislative project. **William Ramos**, who heads the Washington offices of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), reviewed some of the considerations bearing on the legislative temper, and was similarly inclined to continue discussion, at both municipal and state levels as well as the federal level, on the many political points of contact where a voice for reason and moderation might slow the occasional anti-immigrant enthusiasms of local politicians. After all, he points out, the electoral success of anti-immigrant campaigns has been meager. The general public, it appears, are not apt, even in a year of economic stress, to be much roused by the Latino bashing that public figures at the fringes of the political spectrum had relied on.



Mr. Ramos

The panel on the economic slowdown that is visiting a hail of acutely felt impacts on many, if not all, segments of American society, was the subject for another of the midday panels. Along with commentary by Prof. Greenhalgh, participants were **Andrew Jakabovics**, Associate Director for Housing and Economics at the Center for American Progress, and **Timothy Sandos**, President of the

National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals. Both laid a heavy emphasis on the ills of the housing industry and its associated financial and domestic markets. Mr. Sandos detailed the very distinct profile exhibited by certain ethnic communities, specifically the Spanish speaking, in the U.S.



Mr. Jakobovics

economic picture. These people are, in the first place, largely without credit histories, not that their credit is bad, but that they have historically shunned loan financing, relying instead on their own savings joined with monies informally acquired from a circle of friends and kinspersons – all, by the way, supposed to be the classic habits of old fashioned virtue. This very fact has invited somewhat unorthodox financing procedures when members of this population were drawn into the home-ownership picture over the last decade – the consequences of this movement, since in many cases it was carelessly carried out, are now evident. These populations, for all that, constitute a

powerful force for recovery in the housing market – home-ownership, he argued, remains a valid and powerful ideal for the success of these ethnic communities. Mr. Jakobovics discussed the remedies for the flood of defaults now plaguing the markets in housing. The foreclosure device, from most points of view, amounts to a perverse and self-destructive means of dealing with default – the process is administratively costly, socially destructive, and almost surely conducive to loading up the banks with often ill-tended houses, a conglomeration of assets the bottom of whose value is dissolving beneath its new owners. The role of a reasonable governing authority in the premises is to give legal cover for the financial system to alter loan terms and work out deals – the best that can be cobbled together on short notice – for exacting at least some funds from the beleaguered borrowers. The housing situation, while the origin of woes, has come to be only a corner, and perhaps a minor one, in the totality of stresses affecting business, industry, and commerce around the globe.



Mr. Sandos

The following notes are organized by reference to the presentations of each panel. Each section offers several conclusions or recommendations developed in questions and discussions among audience members and speakers.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- Compile and organize health records by electronic technologies.
- Make more band width available (perhaps via power lines), with option to expand and upgrade installations.
- Incentivize investment and innovation/research-development to keep information infrastructure enabled to carry exponentially increased internet and telecommunications traffic
- Regularize privacy regulation for commercial uses; encourage consumers to read and act on privacy statements.
- Institute a position in government: Chief Privacy Officer [Privacy Czar]. This position could work toward developing techniques for safeguarding privacy while at the same time employing data in greater volume, depth, and speed to serve population.

ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN AND HOME OWNERSHIP

- Explore development of non-traditional credit model (e.g., use utility bill pay records in place of bank loan experience for Hispanic and other communities that traditionally have not used banks or long term credit).

- Develop means for preventing foreclosure proceedings on residential properties (prevent hardship for families, maintain integrity of neighborhoods and housing stock generally, steer banks away from loading up with inventory of badly “shopworn” properties. Refine and adequately broaden reach of programs now being put in place.
- Continue to develop means for establishing home ownership for minority and ethnic households, but with workable financing arrangements. Maintain home ownership as a cultural ideal and as a mean of anchoring persons with tangible wealth in a potentially unstable society.
- Improve educational systems and access, with special care for pre-school education/health care for children in economically/educationally/culturally disadvantaged areas of the larger society.
- Encourage entrepreneurial activity, as the seed bed from which historically the vital new firms and industries have their origin.
- Invest in supplier diversity programs, again to advance entrepreneurship in those ethnic and cultural divisions of the society in which small enterprises are most apt to spring into existence.

IMMIGRATION

- Comprehensive immigration reform should be kept on the agenda whether or not politically in the cards in the current short run. Revision of legal quotas to satisfy reasonable business demand, provision for regularizing status of persons now undocumented and existing “in the shadows”.
- Redirect enforcement actions pertaining to undocumented migrants to center on proceedings against abusive employers, not employees.
- An immigrant workforce, both highly skilled at the top end and largely unskilled at the bottom, is broadly and pervasively integrated into the U.S. economic system. It should be recognized as an element central to any mechanisms of economic recovery.

EDUCATION

- The Federal government should work with Governors and state education authorities to improve educational systems by state.
- Inaugurate reforms and school infrastructure development as part of cyclical fiscal stimulus plan.
- Massively enlarge pre-school educational/health care services (children 2-5 years). This will make or break U.S. economic effectiveness and the country’s global standing.
- Increase services (mentoring, support, tools) for teachers).
- Instill in both teachers and students a cultural expectation of greater achievement.