



INDEPENDENT SECTOR
A vital voice for us all

A Changing America: Bridging the Divide

Independent Sector Annual Conference
Los Angeles
October 22, 2007

Opening Remarks

- Lorie Slutsky, President, New York Community Trust

Moderator

- Hodding Carter, III, Professor of Leadership and Public Policy, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Panelists

- Ralph Everett, President and CEO, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
- Tamar Jacoby, Senior Fellow, The Manhattan Institute
- Janet Murguía, Independent Sector Board Member, President and CEO, National Council of La Raza
- Dr. Richard Land, President, The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Southern Baptist Convention
- Stewart Kwoh, President and Executive Director, Asia Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California
- Ismael Ahmed, Director, Department of Human Services, State of Michigan
- Jennie Chin Hansen, President Elect, AARP
- Rabbi Douglas Kahn, Executive Director, Jewish Community Relations Council, San Francisco
- Matt Miller, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress
- Gregory Rodriguez, Irvine Senior Fellow, New America Foundation

MS. SLUTSKY:

During this next panel discussion of the conference, "A Changing America: Bridging the Divide," we will spend an hour exploring how our sector can work together to bridge some of the deepest divisions we face in this country, economic, racial, political, and religious.

It is my honor this afternoon to introduce to you the man who will be leading us through this discussion, Hodding Carter.

Hodding is currently the professor of Leadership and Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. During his long and distinguished career as a journalist, public official, civil rights activist, and as president of the Knight Foundation, Hodding has encouraged Americans to put aside differences for the benefit of building community and serving the greater good. As a keen observer of American politics, culture, and history, we are delighted to have leading us in this discussion, Hodding Carter. Please welcome him.

[Applause.]

MR. CARTER:

Thank you, Lorie.

It is particularly a pleasure to be back with Independent Sector, an organization with which I was so happy to be associated for some years, and I am particularly happy to be chairing this particular session which, going with the theme of this conference, is going to be as much about trying to define a way ahead as it is to describe the topography of the now.

The now we hear about constantly, "Who are we?" asked Samuel Huntington. "The Disuniting of America," replies earlier, Arthur Schlesinger, and the litany of despair and rage and disunity is one with which we are afflicted every day we turn on our television, our cable shows, and listen to the incessant screaming of the Gong Show advocates telling each other that hell awaits each and every other faction in this great mosaic.

Today, we have a number of people on our panel who are well able to speak from perspectives of various sorts that represent the America in which we all live, but who are going to try as well to speak to the America that we would like our children and grandchildren to inhabit and to inherit. Our topics are ones which are familiar to us all: the questions of racial and ethnic diversity and disunity; of economic vast gaps as well as vast opportunities; of political polarization and all of its forms; and of course, the whole religious and cultural divide and yet the great religious and cultural opportunities that is here.

Our panelists are well described in your programs. They represent an extraordinary mix. I am not going to repeat the program. I am simply going to introduce them by name and the slightest designation, starting on my far right, your far left:

First, Ismael Ahmed, director of the Department of Human Services for the State of Michigan, and until recently, the executive director of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services;

Ralph Everett, president and CEO of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington;

Jennie Chin Hansen, president elect of AARP;

Tamar Jacoby, senior fellow with The Manhattan Institute and author of *Reinventing the Melting Pot*;

Rabbi Douglas Kahn, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco;

Stewart Kwoh, president and executive director of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California;
Dr. Richard Land, president of The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and author of *The Divided States of America?*;
Matt Miller, senior fellow with the Center for American Progress and author of *The Two Percent Solution: Fixing America's Problems in Ways Liberals and Conservatives Can Love*;
Janet Murguía, president and CEO of the National Council of La Raza; and
Gregory Rodriguez, Irvine senior fellow with the New America Foundation and a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*.

You are going to have a breakout session after this is over at which time your thwarted ambition to ask questions will be rewarded. It will, however, not be rewarded in the following 52 minutes. The discussion is going to be among the panelists only, and I shall wander around the stage like a lost soul trying to, if nothing else, act as a traffic cop as the various folk come across the interactions of theory and fact and hope.

The Joint Center's record in the whole field of chronicling change in America's racial divide is well known. Ralph Everett is only recently running it, and yet has been thinking about these subjects himself for sometime.

As you survey the landscape today in which diversity racially is as great as it has ever been and greater than most of us have ever seen, how do you see the shape of that landscape?

MR. EVERETT:

Well, I see the shape as improving an America, but I think that, first of all, I would just like to thank Independent Sector for putting such a diverse panel together, because a lot of times we as Americans tend to talk only to people who are just like us. We don't talk to various diverse people because, frankly, it's boring to me to talk to everybody who thinks exactly like me. I prefer to talk to people who think differently than me, so I can understand why they feel the way that they do.

We need to do a much better job of learning about other cultures as we are changing in this country, and have more dialogue about our differences so that we can, as Wade Henderson said this morning in terms of forming different coalitions, be sure that we understand each other. So I think that America is moving in the right direction.

I grew up in South Carolina under segregation and went to all segregated schools until the time I was at Duke University Law School. So I have seen tremendous changes and tremendous opportunities in America.

MR. CARTER:

And yet, would you describe the state of the conversation today in America as being one—and this is for all of you—in which we celebrate the change for the better or in which we emphasize the changes which are considered negative?

MS. JACOBY:

Everyone in the room knows we are at a point of political polarization, of a kind that I think most of us are unable to remember, where people only read and watch what they agree with.

Some of the people who live next to them or down the street in town are only watching and reading what they agree with. The challenge is to find a way to start talking to each other again and get beyond the "gotcha" and get to problem solving.

Of course, it is very easy for us all to say that. It turns out to be extraordinarily difficult to do. How do you get people to read something that isn't what they agree with? How do you publish magazines about that when people aren't necessarily going to read them or go to those websites?

I think the challenge of the day, and certainly the challenge for all of you, is for all of us is to figure out how to get beyond having people just read what they agree with and talk to each other and get back to problem solving. That, more than racial difference, is really the issue.

MR. CARTER:

The hands are coming up all over the room. Janet?

MS. MURGUIA:

Well, I worry about the level of discourse and how words are also changing and dividing this country. For the first time, you have a segment of our population that is here in this society, and they are being referred to as illegals. They are being used as a noun. Well, you can have an act that is illegal, but now people are talking about a whole segment of society, and it is very dehumanizing.

When we start to see the discourse dissolve in a way where behind these faces, people aren't seeing the real pain, the despair, and the hope that they have when they come to this country, we are starting to see a discourse that is disintegrating, and that is creating a huge challenge. How we communicate is as important as what we do. I would argue that how we communicate can help us get to the real root of these matters and the division that we are facing.

MR. CARTER:

We are going to need to go much deeper into that particular perspective, but for the moment, let me see if I can hold us just on the question of where are we when it comes to racial discourse in this country, racial alone and ethnic and what have you.

So, Richard, were you going to go there?

DR. LAND:

Yes, I was.

MR. CARTER:

All right.

DR. LAND:

My book *The Divided States of America?* has a question mark.

MR. CARTER:

I tried to say it, but I couldn't.

DR. LAND:

Well, the question mark suggests that we aren't as divided as we are led to believe we are by the media, particularly the electronic media who are extraordinarily lazy and who try to find the people with the smallest brains and the biggest mouths and the most extreme views to yell at each other. They think that that is discourse or they think that is balance.

All of us, I would guarantee you every one of us on this panel, have been prescreened by literally scores, if not hundreds, of interviews, because when we were interviewed, our views were considered too nuanced. Our views were considered too balanced. What they wanted was an extreme view arguing against an extreme view.

It is very difficult in America to find places today where you can have the kind of discourse, where you can reach for common ground, and then begin to talk about the differences.

It is so bad, for instance, that I was at a New Hampshire Institute for Humanities conference, and I had a number of people come up to me and say, "Well, you know, I agree with you, but you are not a typical evangelical," and I said, "Well, how many evangelicals do you know?" Well, they didn't know any.

[Laughter.]

DR. LAND:

I said, "I am elected by the Southern Baptist Convention. If a majority of Southern Baptists didn't agree with my perspectives, I wouldn't hold this position."

Bill Clinton said it very well when he said it is very difficult to construct places where we can have honest and open and frank dialogues about race and ethnicity in America, and I think that that is not going to happen without intentionality.

My own personal experience has been that there is a vast reservoir of ignorance on the part of whites, for instance, about the level of prejudice that African Americans and Hispanics face every day. There is also a vast reservoir of ignorance on the part of minority populations that most whites would be deeply offended if they knew the ethnic slights and the ethnic slurs that these people face every day. We have to get together and talk about those things.

MR. CARTER:

And the way to do this is?

MR. KWOH:

I think there is a tremendous racial and ethnic change in America. I have seen some studies that said by 2040 or 2050, America will no longer have a majority racial group. So there is this tremendous change, and it is true, as Richard said, that the media will focus on the negative almost 99 percent of the time.

But I would say that all of us have a responsibility to talk about others. I will give a short example from a few years ago. We were celebrating the Martin Luther King holiday, and a young Chinese American reporter said, "Well, why should we celebrate that? What does

Martin Luther King have to do with me?" And I said, "Well, when did your family come into the United States?" He said, "Oh, 1970-something," and I said, "Brother, if it wasn't for the civil rights movement changing the racist immigration laws, your family would not be in the United States today."

We have an obligation to educate our own people about the histories of others and the interconnection of our communities.

RABBI KAHN:

I think working on the community level there is a paradox. On the one hand, I see more willingness than ever to reach across the racial divide, the religious divide; and on the other hand, it feels as if there is less time than anybody would want in order to go outside of one's own house.

So many of our religious communities are dealing with mega issues racing our denominations. So many different parts of America are dealing with issues that are overwhelming their own communities. Finding the time, in addition to finding the top leadership to engage in a way that really transforms the dialogue and the collaborative efforts, remains a challenge at the very time when there is greater willingness than I have ever seen.

MR. CARTER:

Do you see that willingness?

MS. HANSEN:

I think there is willingness, but I think there needs to be a forum to allow this to occur.

I am thinking about what has happened in the fast food world and how we have started to shun that kind of eating process. Instead, there is the whole "slow food" movement, which is about enjoying the food itself, enjoying the conversation, and enjoying the sense of community.

Perhaps in some of these areas it may take something less divisive about the issue of race or the issue of religion, to talk about what we all have in common—the sense of a "communal commons" where we can begin to see each other in the dignity of our being people and then look at some of the issues that we can build up to in terms of how we look at things differently. But it does speak to the need for face time. I think that is an important element.

MR. CARTER:

I know the summit.

MR. AHMED:

This discussion is not just an American discussion. It is a worldwide discussion. Polarization, both ethnic and political polarization, is taking place across this globe. There are people who will not live in the way that they have had to live in all parts of this world, and so the discussion about diversity—the discussion about how we will get along together—will become even more important for America. No matter how many barriers we put up and what laws we put into place, America is going to change. It is going to change

because it is an economic, political and cultural power, and the results of its activity across the world will both attract and anger other parts of the world.

What we learn at the ground level will make a great difference not only for what we do in our neighborhoods, but for this world.

MR. CARTER:

Let me ask a representative of the debased culture of media.

MR. RODRIGUEZ:

I was waiting to see what the end of your sentence was.

Janet mentioned the debasing of language, and obviously, that is absolutely a factor. There is also the inadequacy of language. The way we are talking about race and ethnicity in America tends to be very old and very antiquated. More and more Americans actually don't live in these imaginary, monolithic, separate communities with their own CEOs and their own leaders, who you mentioned, are supposed to talk to each other. That's a sort of "brokerage politics," of "taking it to your leader" politics, but it doesn't really trickle down anywhere. It just seems to make funders happy.

We are talking about a country in which we live in concentric circles. All of us here live in a variety of communities, as men, as women, as Latinos, as gays—whatever our communities are—and we are not talking that way. We are talking in big, boring, gray blocks, "Oh, you are a member of the Latino community. Glad to meet you."

I don't think that is the way we are going to understand or get along. We are supposed to break down, make interaction as organic in our civic lives as it is becoming more and more in our private lives.

So at civic organizations, funding is lacking, and creating any organic talk about race because it is all self-conscious at this point.

Let's talk about race, Hodding. How does it feel to be white?

MR. CARTER:

Increasingly beleaguered.

[Laughter.]

MR. EVERETT:

The point you make is a good one, though, in that race is a subject that nobody wants to talk about because it is controversial. It makes people uncomfortable. It is not the dinner conversation that we would have around the table.

So this discussion today, hopefully, will lead us toward more of a conversation towards racism. The rabbi talks about folks being really busy and staying in their own communities. Perhaps we should invite people who are different from us to our churches, to our synagogues, to other places, so that we can get to know them better?

MR. CARTER:

That is a transition that is going to take me, and go right ahead, since you are the only man that hasn't come in.

MR. MILLER:

I agree with Richard that we are not as divided as the elites and the media make us seem, but I don't think it is just the media. I think politicians have an incentive in the same way the interest groups have an incentive; in the same way to raise money and exaggerate the polarization that I think exists among people. If we are thinking about what the Independent Sector should do about this, it comes down to me to—maybe it is an empathy campaign or maybe it is through the education system.

It can't be a series of conversations alone. You have to instill across the culture in a way that involves lots of advocacy and lots of changes in public attitudes and public will; something about the importance of empathy and dialogue as a simple but powerful idea that gets us past the caricature and conversations that we have in public life.

MR. CARTER:

I am struck by our willingness, each of us, to talk about the need for lowering the temperature or lowering the rage in the dialogue and what have you. I remember some of the things I wrote myself over the years which are not exactly models of restraint when it came to political discourse.

I look at a number of you, and I know the organizations you represent, and the mass mailings that go out for much of our work is not exactly constructed along the thesis of "let us all reason together as brothers." It is "the devils are coming, and we have got to save ourselves from the devil," or "we have to free ourselves from the restraints that have been put on us." It is a natural enough thing, but I would just suggest as we are thinking about bringing somebody home to dinner or the hardest thing of all, bringing somebody home to our church, God forbid, that we might really try hard to see through what it is we are doing ourselves first.

Now, it is a question of religion and of culture which, in some ways, is considered to be the most divisive issue right now in America. While not everybody necessarily believes this, plenty of people do see this as the killer issue for any number of reasons.

Do you want to lay out some of the reasons why that might be seen as such a major issue?

DR. LAND:

Well, I think, first of all, if people are religious, they –

MR. CARTER:

Which most of us are in America.

DR. LAND:

That is – I mean, 85 percent of Americans said they believe in God, 85 percent claim to be Christian, 91 percent said they believe in God. It may be Jefferson's God, but they believe in a supreme being.

We are a very religious country, and religion makes people nervous because it is about absolute allegiance. It is a loyalty that transcends national loyalty. It transcends party loyalty. It transcends family loyalty. It is about ultimate values, and we have seen in other parts of the world where this has led to violence.

In fact, the genius of the American system is that it most often has not led to violence, and the reason is because of the pluralism, and what I argue for is principled pluralism.

There is no reason for religion to be a source of division in our culture if we understand that everyone has the absolute right to the autonomy of their belief. Our founding documents are very clear about that: that we have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that there will be no governmental establishment of religion. We all have the right to worship or not to worship as we please, and no one has a right to interfere with that.

Roger Williams said that for any human authority to try to interfere with another person's relationship with God is "soul rape," and I think he is absolutely right about that.

Unfortunately, political parties are no better than they have to be. They are intensely human and flawed organizations who are organized to try to get just a few more votes than their opponents, and they will exploit ethnic groups. They will exploit citizens. They will exploit economic groups. They will exploit religious groups if we allow them to do so.

I think that's where a lot of the problems and misunderstanding has come in. I think that, unfortunately, we are awfully willing to talk about people of different religious faiths that we don't know much about. We need to know more, and we need to talk to them more and about them less.

MR. CARTER:

Well, let's go to that because that is a constant theme that is going to probably move across here, but let's talk from the perspectives of various folks. What would you say to that?

MR. AHMED:

I agree with you. The application of religious belief to politics is where the rubber hits the road, and I think much of that has been exploited, again, not only at a local level, but on a world level.

We are led to believe that the Arab world is full of these Muslims who are so different than us. In fact, our Abrahamic history shares almost all of the same tenets, yet they are a great danger to this country, maybe the number one danger to this country.

I think what we need to do is begin the dialogue at the religious level to assure that this kind of exploitation of our beliefs does not become a political tool.

MR. CARTER:

I really am glad that we are stressing the way we get past the hard ones, and yet the hard ones are what we have to confront.

My church is, of course, being torn apart, as many are, on the issues of sexuality, and these are issues which you don't just sort of pass your wand over and say, "Can't we all love one another?" It turns out we can't.

How do we get through these cultural religious divides which tend to be cast necessarily for some in absolute terms? How do we live in a society in which these are absolute values in a democratic society?

RABBI KAHN:

I would add a couple of ideas to the conversation.

The first is I don't think we do a sufficient job of accenting the common religious themes that tend to unite us. They may sound so basic, whether it is a belief in a greater being that drives us toward good, whether it is the idea that all human beings are created in the image of God, or whether it is the notion that all of us have an individual responsibility for our community. I think that we tend to gloss over those because we are almost worried that we will be accused of naivety in a growing cynical society when we emphasize these forces for good.

I mention that because there are many religious collaborative efforts dealing with all sorts of issues to try to make communities better, but they often tend to be weaker than they should and not include an element of key community leadership to really have the impact that they should have. The potential contribution that could be made by the religious community is often seen as more marginal than it ought to, given the importance of religion in American society.

MR. CARTER:

And you are trying to say, Tamar?

MS. JACOBY:

I am just saying that there isn't enough talk here about making our politics work. We are talking about empathy, about getting along, and we are talking about understanding each other. I am sure that is all important, and we do need to do that, but historically, the place in America where we mediated these differences is in politics. The problem is that the politics are so polarized now and so broken, egged on by the media.

So it is less about empathy and understanding and more about problem solving and compromising at the political level. The problem is that that has become so difficult, and the challenge is to figure out how to make that work better—whether it is a level of civic participation, redistricting, or the way the primaries work. Politics isn't enough about problem solving and medicating anymore. It is too much about "we are right."

MR. CARTER:

Well, let me try this on all of you, and we are going back and forth a little bit on categories, but it doesn't matter.

When I was growing up, my father's big emphasis was that we live in a country in which the two major parties are big tents, and that all sorts of people live within both, and they mediate within the parties and then meet across the battlefield of parties.

Suppose I say to you that we have a two party system, one of which is ideologically in sync 100 percent and the other is a collection of tribes. Would that be your understanding of the two party system?

MS. JACOBY:

They are both. They are both.

MR. CARTER:

Talk to me about that because it may give me more faith in the ability of the system to talk across each other.

DR. LAND:

Well, first of all, let's look at the Republican Party. It is made up of a coalition of libertarian conservatives and social conservatives who loathe each other in private.

[Laughter.]

DR. LAND:

And then you have the neo-cons, the economic conservatives, and the small government conservatives. You have the Reagan conservatives who look at government as a necessary evil that ought to be as small and as unintrusive as possible, and you have the Bush conservatives who think that government can play a role in empowering people to make better decisions for themselves.

Trust me, they are not a monolith. They are far more diverse than they perhaps seem from the outside. I would like to go back to the point she made about the breakdown of the political system and the political process. I will just give you one example.

After the 2006 elections, the Democrats for Life caucus in the House doubled. Fifteen of the 30 new Democratic congressmen are pro-life congressmen and campaigned as pro-life congressman. Lincoln Davis, who was a Democratic congressman from Tennessee, is in a neighboring district from where I live. As the chairman of this caucus, they have proposed what they call the "95/10 Solution," which are policies that they want to put in place to try to eliminate 95 percent of abortions in 10 years without any restrictive laws. Solutions include providing public funding for sonogram machines, so that sonogram machines would be virtually ubiquitous in health clinics. We know that women who see their babies on a sonogram machine are five times less likely to abort.

Well, at The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, we have wholeheartedly embraced the "95/10 Solution," and we have been beaten about the head and shoulders by Republicans who say, "You can't do that, Richard," because if it works, the Democrats will get credit for it, and I said, "I don't care who gets credit for it. I want to do what I can to try to assure as many babies as possible get here."

That is a breakdown of the political process. When you can't work on bipartisan common ground because you are afraid the other side will get credit, then you have got a breakdown of the process, and most politicians are like your children. They do what you inspect, not what you expect, and we need to do a lot more inspecting.

MR. CARTER:

I got to hold you right on that one. A great line.

Let me ask all of you something. One argument that can be made is that the new America shares tremendous values about family and about allegiance to their own religious faiths in ways that are classic in the old American sense. Rather than being destructive forces when it comes to the notion of a shared narrative in this country, they are very much a part of it. Is that true or also untrue?

MS. HANSEN

No, it's true.

MR. KWOH

Yes.

MR. RODRIGUEZ

Absolutely true.

PANELIST: Absolutely true.

MR. CARTER:

Right.

MS HANSEN:

Without a doubt. Whether we are talking about the New Americans or any human being, there are some shared core desires, such as the ability to ensure that people have an income level that is supportive; the ability to have access to health care when you need it; the opportunity to be part of a community, whether it is your own most comfortable community or a larger community; the ability to feel that your heart is something that you can contribute to; and then finally—even though I made this earlier comment about food—it is not meant to be taken in a real superficial way. It is a sense that we enjoy some things together. Oftentimes, in our ability to come together as people here in America, if not worldwide, can we get the religious component coupled together with the secular, but real life desires of all people who exist.

This is where we have things far more in common. I imagine that somebody living in poverty would love see their children receive a great education, as well as somebody who has an income of \$100,000. So can we figure out the common denominators that we can agree to, both in a spiritual sense, but also in a secular sense?

MR KWOH:

A lot of times, as nonprofit people, we see the political system as two parties. But I think it is very important to see the opportunity that our independent sector has at this moment in history, not to tag along with the parties or the elections necessarily, but to build movements of low income people, to convene nonprofit groups that never really get together, to explore collaborations in a way that we never have done, and to really mobilize in a non-partisan way for people to express their interests.

I think this is the time that we have a tremendous opportunity. If we just are outsiders looking at the gridlock in our political system, we will miss that opportunity to build the base of people who know what issues they are concerned about, to find the common ground that unites them, and to improve the livelihoods of their families.

MR. CARTER:

Janet, how much time can you devote to the idea of bringing disparate groups together as opposed to pursuing the absolute needs and requirements of the folk you represent?

MS. MURGUIA:

Well, I think the two are correlated.

I think right now, what people have seen as emerging as this big divide on immigration policy really is asking a larger question. What we are seeing people address is: "What does it mean to be an American?" There are a lot of people who have different ideas about that. We have to reconcile those ideas, but ultimately, I think we need to understand that we need a common sense, rational, comprehensive solution that addresses individuals as human beings. We also need to recognize that as much as an issue of immigration policy that we are dealing with, this is a broader issue that is going to define the content of this country and our character as a country. We need to step up and decide how we are going to renew America's greatest values. That is really at the heart of a lot of what is happening across these different divisive issues, but I see it on the issue of immigration especially.

We have to decide what it means to be an American and look at the values that we want represented in that definition. We also must decide how to resolve some very practical issues when it comes to dealing with these folks, who are oftentimes in the shadows. How do we allow them to be brought out of their shadows in a way that is consistent with our traditions, our values, and our principles?

MR. CARTER:

In the year 2007, in the year of great diversity, of great religious diversity, of great ethnic diversity, of great diversity politically, is it possible to recreate an American creed, a common notion of a common nation, to have that? Is that possible?

MR. RODRIGUEZ:

Absolutely.

MR. CARTER:

How?

MR. RODRIGUEZ:

There is a reason why people come to this nation, and there has always been this give and take. We talk about religious pluralism. It has largely worked in the history of the United States in part because people have actually toned down their religious fervency when they came to the United States. We have a religious culture of the lowest common denominator in the United States. That is how we have actually gotten along. Wouldn't you agree, Richard, on a certain level?

DR. LAND:

Well, partly, and I think partly is the fact that we have never had government coercion. De Tocqueville pointed out that the one reason why religion has flourished in America is because people have been afraid to do it the way they want to do it, and they don't have government sponsorship.

MR. CARTER:

He means the Episcopalians lost a long time ago when we stopped being the state religion.

[Laughter.]

MR. RODRIGUEZ:

The point is that for the last 40 years, we have properly emphasized tolerance and cultural pluralism. We should have done it. It was good to do it. Now that 12 percent of our population is foreign born, we are getting close to the 15 percent highs in 1980 and 1910. We have to start thinking about the center again without losing our understanding of the need of tolerance. We need to be talking with our new knowledge that civic assimilation does not require cultural assimilation.

The new knowledge that we have learned over the last 40 years is that they are not in competition, that we can be a tolerant culturally pluralistic nation with a wholehearted embracing sense that we have a wonderful political tradition that we all share.

MR. CARTER:

What are we to do about one of the other great sources of division in this country which, as always, revolves around the great American symbol of the dollar: the notion of our economy. The economy is so rewarding in its general application and it has such disparate effects upon various folks in its specific application. As a man who has thought about this a great deal, what are we to do in this moment?

MR. MILLER:

We all know the problems. We know there are widening gaps between the rich and the poor. We also know that there is a demoralizing gap at the very top now. As the very, very top pulls away in ways that are often unrelated to performance or any notion of merit, I think that is really corrosive for capitalism and for the consensus around market capitalism, which is really the ethic of our economy.

In terms of what nonprofits should be doing on this, again, I think it comes down to advocacy. I think there is a huge hole in the American debate that will not deal with certain things that are going to happen one way or another.

Taxes are going to go up as a share of GDP—as a share of the economy—over the next 10 or 15 years. That is going to happen as the Baby Boomers retire. It is going to happen if we ever get serious about an agenda for non-elderly Americans, the 50 million uninsured, the 10 million kids languishing in high poverty schools. One of the myths of the debate is that taxes in America hurt the economy and that they are always too high. That is simply not true.

If given the choice, everyone would like to pay less taxes. But if you look at other economies around the world, and if you look at the evolution of our own history, higher taxes at those levels are not inconsistent with us still being a more cowboy economy than France or Sweden. But this doesn't mean we are becoming a social democratic state. There is no advocacy or discussion at all because the Republicans obviously are for lower taxes—that is their base—and the Democrats are too cowed to talk about this stuff, so they can't do it politically.

The nonprofit sector could promote a lot of work in advocacy to legitimize the conversation in America that higher taxes, which are inevitable, are still consistent with a high growth, robust economy that we have always had.

We will never solve the problems of poor schools in America so long as the Federal Government acts as if it was written in the Constitution that the Feds can only provide nine percent of total K- 12 spending. But that idea is totally taboo in American politics.

If you listen now to what is going on in the campaign trail, you can listen to the Democrats and you can listen to the Republicans. The most fool proof applause line on the campaign trail is to rail against Washington bureaucrats and to mettle with what parents and communities know best.

You do not have to threaten the good things about local control of schools. In fact, if you talk to educators, there are ways to liberate schools who now feel incredibly bogged down in red tape from the State level, the local level, and the Federal level. If we went to the right national role on standards for all kids and on finance, we would avoid having these shocking gaps between rich and poor neighborhoods that are entirely tied to the idea that taxing is a local matter.

The nonprofit sector is probably the only sector in America that can put these ideas front and center on the American agenda if we want to get serious about problems like this.

[Applause.]

MR. CARTER:

I think there are going to be a lot of responses to this provocative thought, and I just want to let everybody in. Do you want to come on this one?

MR. AHMED:

I think this question of the American creed and also some of the things that have just been said now allow us to look at the giant elephant in the room: class.

That is the dirty word. We don't say it anymore, but the truth is that if we want the kind of America that works, class is going to be important. It is reflective of color, not fully. It is reflective of power. As a person who was in an advocacy organization, our work to assure a safety net is important, but assuring that the electorate reflects the people of this country at the low end is decisive.

MR. CARTER:

All right. Yes, sir. Go ahead.

RABBI KAHN

I was going to comment on this question about taxes and say that, in part, I think Americans' extraordinary distaste for increased taxes stems from a pervasive view that so much money is wasted at every conceivable level. One role that I think the nonprofit sector and the independent sector can play is to really elevate to a much greater consciousness, the public/private partnerships that are happening at so many levels. These partnerships are addressing social service and health care needs around this country where extraordinary and qualitative differences are being made in people's lives. In many cases, government funding used wisely is costing overall far less than if people needed to go into other general welfare programs. Since the news about those public/private partnerships is not widely distributed, there is an incredibly important role to play there.

In addition to that, there is an opportunity for the independent sector to highlight and celebrate the experimental successes that are going on in communities around this country. Extraordinary models have been developed to address or target the economically disadvantaged young people in our communities and to find ways to take that cohort and work with them until they become ready for college. These models extend beyond college to give young people the support system they need. I am struck by how many different examples I hear and how almost none of them have any resonance outside of that particular community.

There is an incredibly opportunity to spread the word on both counts.

MR. CARTER:

Yes, sir.

MR. KWOH:

I agree with Matt's point about advocacy, but I think that there is a major opportunity for nonprofit leaders to encourage that advocacy to be done collaboratively.

It would be a horrible situation for us to fight over the crumbs than to fight interracially or between groups for small programs and small gains when we have an opportunity to increase the collaboration.

For example, a year or so ago, MALDEF, the L.A. Urban League, and my center agreed on a five year partnership to work on parent and youth leadership and to advocate around educational changes in Los Angeles. I encourage us to reinforce collaborations in this advocacy fight.

Globalization is the other dimension that is missing, particularly when we talk about economics and economic justice in the nonprofit arena. The way globalization has occurred thus far is unsustainable. It is creating billions of poor people. We are losing the middle class in this country, and we see a few more billionaires being created. In the nonprofit sector, we have to put this on our agenda. It is starting to get on the agenda in terms of global warming.

I think for nonprofits, to think locally and to act locally is passé. We have to really think globally and perhaps act locally and act nationally, but we cannot look at just our own neighborhoods and try to solve problems without understanding what those global forces are that need a larger policy change. We could be part of that.

DR. LAND:

I think the late great Senator Patrick Moynihan said the conservatives are right that values are really important, and the liberals are right, and that government can make a huge difference.

Stephen Carter put a modern gloss on that when he said he despaired that we were going to solve the massive problems of urban poverty anytime in the near future. Republicans weren't willing to spend the money necessary, and Democrats weren't willing to address the social dysfunctions of people in poverty with illegitimacy rates that are astronomical. I think the independent sector can move beyond those and say, "Look, we can speak truth to power," and if we do so often enough, as Elie Wiesel has said, we can end up giving power to truth. The fact is, Moynihan and Carter are right. As long as we have this yin and yang thing, it isn't going to work.

Government resources alone, we have thrown billions and billions and billions and billions and billions of dollars at some of our most vexing social problems with little to show for it. I'm not saying we don't need government resources. We do, but we must also address some of the societal dysfunctions. The independent sector can bring some consensus to the need to do both and can prod the process to do that.

MR. CARTER:

Janet?

MS. MURGUIA:

I just wanted to jump on that very point because I do think that a direct challenge to the independent sector is to get out of the comfort zone when it comes to advocacy. We need to start seeing dramatic changes in policy, and yet we see so many in the nonprofit, or maybe in the foundation, world trying to figure out how they are going to direct sources. But what we really need is a strong voice.

We need leadership when it comes to changing policies that we know will open up more doors of opportunity, and yet I still see so many who are afraid. I know they oftentimes interpret this fear as being too political, but we need to start seeing some courage demonstrated out there and take a stand, maybe in some safe zones where we know that your voices, independently or together, can help start creating changes in policy. That is not

about government resources. That is about changing the direction of laws that affect our very people.

[Applause.]

MS. HANSEN:

I would like to add another, almost operating dimension to this. When you brought up the example of how much money is wasted in school inefficiencies and things like that, in the health care arena, where we spend as a country almost twice as much as other developed countries for our health care, we still have close to 50 million people uncovered.

I wonder if, in addition to the advocacy that we need and the courage to have that, we also need to commit to building an infrastructure of greater effectiveness in delivering on what we promise to do.

We must have the ability to get out in front, but we also need to be on the back end to deliver. That also means operating with clear direction, being accountable to what we are going to do, and willing to give up the things that are not effective. It has to be about the value that we bring to the civil society that we are looking for.

It is probably an operating challenge more than it is a call to arms. We have to figure out a way to use the money on the table with greater functionality, efficiency, and results on behalf of the people that we are committed to serve.

MR. CARTER:

One more hit in this area, and we are down to five minutes, which is hard to believe. Was there some more that you wanted to add?

MR. MILLER:

I agree totally that we have to spend the money we spend more effectively. This will be tough. Health care is the perfect example because what you said is exactly right: every dollar of health care wasted is somebody's dollar of income. That defines the political problem with trying to reform this.

There is no question that there is a lot of money wasted in the Federal Government. I work there. I mean, 75 percent of big government goes to seven things: Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, military pensions, civil service pensions, defense, and interest on the debt. That is big government. The other quarter on the dollar is a million other things that most of us support.

Most people support doing something for elderly financial security, therefore the billions and trillions that have gone there have eliminated elderly poverty in the United States. The billions and billions that have gone into Medicare have eliminated the awful injustice up until the '1960s. Most of these programs actually deliver something that matters to lots of people, which is why both parties are very reluctant to touch them.

I am not advocating higher taxes. I am telling you it is a fact. As the Boomers retire, they are going up. Newt Gingrich will tell you the same thing. How we do it makes a difference.

We need a major drive to make what we do publicly more efficient because, as you said, that is going to be the whole ball game. There is a limit to what you can actually do.

MR. CARTER:

Anything on this last bit of subject? I am reminded as we go along that another great Southern Senator once remarked in terms of the globalization of his time, John C. Calhoun, that the South was the serf of the system caught by an economy over which it did not have any control or any ability to handle. That notion of being constantly the serf of the system runs like a fine thread through American history in all groups.

Anything else on this subject? Because at this moment, if you don't, we are going to have some last bits of wisdom which we are offering up to this crowd, which will be a call to go forward and do good and do right and do well.

So, you have been trying to get there, Tamar.

MS. JACOBY:

Yeah, I have been trying to get in for a while.

When I was preparing for this panel, I started to think about the idea of difference and divisions in the perspective of American history, and if you look at almost any other time in American history, except maybe the '1950s, divisions were bigger. North and South, Protestant and Catholic, even going back to the 13 colonies. We are not at a time of unprecedented divisiveness. In fact, we are at a time when there is a good bedrock of a middle class norm and shared values, but we don't emphasize them enough. We talk about our differences, and it has always been a balance. Difference is what makes America great and always has, but I think there has also been a sense that what we have in common is more important than those differences.

And I'm with Gregory. For 20 or 30 years in this country we have talked about how our differences are what make us great. That is good, and we don't want to lose that. We don't want to go back to melting or homogenizing, but I think we could start to talk a lot more about what we have in common on all of these things, not just ethnicity and race, but political polarization and values. That is where all of you are playing an important role in trying to create situations where we can remember what we have in common, and that these commonalities are more important than our differences.

MR. CARTER:

That is where you came in, Ralph. You've got somewhere you want to go out?

MR. EVERETT:

If we continue to talk to each other, we will find out that we do not have as many differences as we think that we have. The independent sector should continue to be bold, continue to live on the edge, and do things that are unexpected. At the same time, try as much as you can to diversify your organization so that you can learn more about others. If we continue to invite other folks to join in your sector, then I think that will make the world a better place.

MR. CARTER:
Rabbi?

RABBI KAHN:

I alluded early in the discussion to the idea that I think there is more willingness to sit together and try to develop collaborations, but often there are time constraints. There are preoccupations that exist.

My hope is that all of you have the ability to determine who is not at the table and identify strategies to make sure that those who can be agents of change, who are collaboratively working on the tough issues in our communities, are represented around the table.

MR. KWOH:

Well, Wade Henderson was very articulate this morning about the Civil Rights movement and his history. Many of us still see the gains, and we try to defend those gains in this current time. I think the questions for the nonprofit sector are: "What is our movement of today?" What are we doing to build that movement, whether it is of low income families or health folks? What is that movement, and what contribution can we make to bring people together, not just professionals, but the very grassroots people with whom we work and partner and fund?"

To me, that is the question for Independent Sector and our gatherings of foundations and nonprofit leaders.

DR. LAND:

I think that the independent sector can do a tremendous amount to help harness what I believe is a reservoir of goodwill out there. In addition, it can help harness the frustration that we are not getting more done, and that what is being done is not better publicized. I think that we can really work on encouraging people.

The most valuable thing that any of us have in the year of our Lord 2007 is time. We have less of it. We are the slaves of our labor saving devices. We have less discretionary time than we have ever had before, and as a result, we need to, with intentionality, help people to carve out time to get together. We need to help people foster a better understanding of each other and action that comes from that understanding.

MS. HANSEN:

I would like to actually build on that very point. I think the independent sector is raising the question as what is the role of this sector. Perhaps what we need to do is bring together government and the corporate sector, to help refine what it is as we all move toward a civil society in this country vis a vis other countries as well.

What is it that we uniquely bring to the table that will foster a sense of well-being, justice, and wealth broadly? In this combination of corporate, independent, and government sectors, what is it that should really move along to see what this society should be like in the next 20 to 50 years?

MR. CARTER:

Janet?

MS. MURGUIA:

I look at this panel and I see its diversity, and I think what a great perspective. Many would argue diversity in this country is a fact. The reality is that they see it as the strength of this country. As I look out at the independent sector as a whole, I think that if we are going to deal with the problems, the challenges, and the opportunities we have going forward as a country, I don't see that diversity reflected in the independent sector, either in the leadership or as you develop your institutions. We have to have an affirmative effort to see what we can do to make sure that we are creating a sense of diversity within each institution and within that independent sector. Not only will it help you deal with the opportunities and challenges that this country will face in the future, it will also make sure that you reflect this country. I think it will make your institutions great, too.

[Applause.]

MR. CARTER:

Well, that means you won't have me to kick around anymore.

It has been a terrific panel. I want to thank each and every one of the participants for being willing to give their time in thinking.

[Applause.]

MR. CARTER:

One last note, I had breakfast with a very wise woman, an old friend of mine, who remarked something that you would appreciate. She said, "You know, the one bad mistake that Bill Clinton made when he was running was to try the idea of a slogan and to drop it almost immediately." It was a great slogan. It was the New Covenant. His polling told him it wasn't quite going to resonate with people, who would be terrified it was some kind of Baptist thing, but the New Covenant is what we are really talking about here, folks, the idea of a new shared platform for cooperation.

Thanks again.

[Applause.]

[End of session.]