



INDEPENDENT SECTOR
A vital voice for us all

Remarks by The Honorable Antonio R. Villaraigosa

Mayor, City of Los Angeles

Independent Sector Annual Conference
Los Angeles
October 23, 2007

Thank you, Jim.

And thank you for your leadership of the James Irvine Foundation, and within philanthropy as a whole.

There has been a lot of talk about collaboration at this conference... and I know I personally couldn't have a better partner than Jim and the Irvine Foundation.

Early in my administration, the Irvine Foundation had the creativity and vision to bring together the best of business and philanthropy, in order to bring out the best in government.

Irvine made a major grant to fund a comprehensive strategic planning process led by McKinsey consulting that laid out my agenda in six policy areas: Education, Transportation, Public Safety, Opportunity and Inclusion, Housing and Economic Development, Energy and Environment.

That strategic planning process was state-of-the-art and unprecedented for an American city.

Not only did a "Villaraigosa Plan" emerge from this process... but so did a new Performance Management Unit that oversees all of Los Angeles' 44 departments.

This unit in the Mayor's Office has introduced outcomes-based metrics of the likes never before seen in this city!

That is the right kind of collaboration... transforming how City Hall operates, through the leadership and vision of Jim and his board at the Irvine Foundation.

Now, it's a great honor for me to be here tonight, to address group's first convention here in the City of Angels.

When you talk of “Opportunity and Responsibility”... there is no better place than LA to see these parallel forces at work.

Opportunity because LA is the most diverse, changing city in America.

More than 40 percent of our residents are foreign-born.

We have more Koreans than any other area outside Korea. More Armenians, Salvadoreans, Mexicans, Japanese...

We are a city of immigrants. A city of dreams.

This complexity of our social tapestry has created enormous opportunity – but also an overwhelming need for all of us to step up.

To step up as 50 percent of our public school students drop out before graduation.

As joblessness hits 1 million statewide... and as the oxygen of opportunity has been sucked dry in many pockets of the City.

As 73,000 homeless sleep on our streets every night.

As lines to see a doctor in the emergency room at County hospital no longer take hours, but now can add up to days.

And as our City struggles with a deficit that simply cannot meet all these needs.

In this context the spirit of the nonprofit sector is thriving in Los Angeles, as it always has.

I grew up not far from here in Boyle Heights...

In an East LA neighborhood where folks understood the value of looking out for their neighbors... even if they came from different countries... even if they didn't share the same religion.

I will never forget the kindness my neighbors showed my mother, who juggled two jobs while raising her children alone.

This compassion stayed with me, as I grew into the social movements of the 1960s and '70s.

Movements that sought social justice and equity for all our communities...

Movements led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez ... and that gave birth to many of your organizations today.

As an organizer in college and after, I was driven by the excitement of bettering people's lives at the grassroots... in the way only this “independent sector” can.

I saw the flexibility you had to make change, whether in direct services, or through community organizing, or advocacy.

You, who build community, social capital, and bring democracy alive in many communities.

You are often the gateway to civic engagement for people, through volunteerism or activism.

You help heal people, and empower them to change the conditions of their lives.

You in the independent sector are not only a vital part of our economy, at 6 percent of the jobs in LA...

You are the incubators of solutions to our toughest social challenges.

And in a society where the dominant idea too often seems to be YO-YO — You're On Your Own — the nonprofit sector embodies the notion that people want and need to feel connected to each other.

There's no getting around it:

At their best, nonprofits are the keepers of the flame -- of the long-term vision of the common good.

There's no getting around something else: Things have changed in the area of social responsibility over a generation, and you are needed more than ever before.

We have all watched the government recede from the domestic picture... and the corporate sector become increasingly transient.

Today, the home for social responsibility is the independent sector.

And in today's era of terribly limited public dollars, we must rely on the synergy of strategic partnerships.

This partnership paradigm across public and private sectors has been embedded in the DNA of my administration since Day One.

My key policy priorities rely on partnerships with the independent sector: education ... public safety... environment... housing and economic development.

The cornerstone of my opportunity agenda is education – and my bold plan, the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools – is just that.

The Partnership will entirely reform two families of our lowest-performing schools, from elementary up to high school.

We're not just working with the local school district, principals and teachers union.

We are engaging parents and bringing the community into the equation of the most important issue facing the future of our City.

We have brought to the table a range of groups: the Community Coalition, SCOPE, and the parent organizing networks fostered by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, MALDEF, and the Urban League.

Those groups know the unique needs of their community... they know the hills and valleys of the social landscape – and the issues better than any bureaucrat in an office downtown.

Their collaboration is essential to our success.

In the schools we oversee directly, philanthropic investment will preserve our independence and allow us the room to innovate.

And so will my team.

I have pulled managers from the private sector... leaders from the nonprofit sector... and innovators from the most important charter school group here in Los Angeles.

Partnership means reaching out to the know-how that's not just in government, but in the independent sector, too.

And we're gone beyond thinking like an isolated branch of one agency.

With every school reform initiative, we look to incorporate other policy priorities – like stemming the epidemic of gang violence.

It's no surprise 50 percent of our students drop out... when every day they have to cross a battlefield of gang violence just to reach the school gates.

Here, too, we are working not just with school police and LAPD to make our schools safer... but with the community groups and churches that have direct foothold in the community.

These are my partners in the prevention, intervention and re-entry programs that will stem this problem at its root.

For each of my policy priorities, there is a partnership at its base:

For my Million Trees Initiative, we have local nonprofits taking the lead to green our most tree-deprived neighborhoods.

For anti-poverty initiatives, we have a fantastic partner in the United Way...

Together we are working to “bank the unbanked” in immigrant and low-income communities who don't have access to mainstream financial services.

For homelessness, we turned to the Corporation for Supportive Housing... and the foundation leaders in LA who have prioritized this issue over the years... The California Endowment and the Weingart and Hilton Foundations.

They have led the behind-the-scenes effort to promote inter-government collaboration, and to move the paradigm from “managing” homelessness to ending homelessness – beginning with chronic street-dwellers.

We leveraged a paradigm shift. That’s leadership.

But that’s leadership that relies on partnership with nonprofits, philanthropy, and government together working to solve the big problems.

And one thing I’ve learned about this partnership model: It’s not easy to do.

It requires skilled leaders who understand about building relationships over time, and managing complexity.

I learned from my organizing days that the true currency of social change is trust.

Trust built over time overcomes difference, defuses fear and cynicism, and, knits together collaborations that produce real results.

Strategic partnerships also require smart money – that kind of “patient capital” and long-term investment that the LA’s own Conrad N. Hilton Foundation provided over a fifteen-year period developing and promoting the permanent supportive housing model to end chronic homelessness.

Strategic partnerships require intermediaries that are closer to the ground than government, but unafraid of working with government – such as the United Way and Community Partners here in LA.

At the end of the day... Los Angeles is just one city in a nation starved by the federal government for big solutions to big problems.

From children’s healthcare to immigration, education and infrastructure... The federal government has reneged on its obligations to us.

And as we cities pick up the slack, we ALL need your help.

My friend, Congressman Xavier Beccera, dropped the gauntlet on Saturday when he challenged the foundation community to spend more on anti-poverty programs.

Now, I can’t impact your tax incentives... but I, too, challenge you to work with us more. To not be afraid of government partnerships.

Things have changed.

This is no longer the governmental juggernaut of past generations.

We cities need you. And we are transforming how WE operate... to better match how YOU operate.

Remember that you are the home of social responsibility... of our shared hopes and dreams of a better world.

So are we.

Thank you for listening.