

Thank you, Ron. It is an honor to be with you today...
...and I welcome to Texas, the Chairman of the
National Committee for the Aga Khan Foundation...
...Aziz Valliani (*pron: Az-eez Vullee-onnie*).

Mr. Valliani is not only the leader of this organization
here in America...
...but like many of you in this room...
...a successful entrepreneur.

He has distinguished himself in both the high-tech and
business finance fields.

Some of you may recall that Rick and I visited Dubai
last March.

It was our first encounter with the Ismaili
(pron: *Is-ma-E-lee*) community outside of Texas, and
we were impressed with their influence and integration
into a society that...

...for many of them...is not their native land.

The Ismaili community is a model of social integration
that should be emulated...

...and their successful assimilation is a real tribute to
His Highness, the Aga Khan, and his emphasis on
leadership by example.

Part of the trip included a visit to the nearly completed
Ismaili Center of Dubai...

...which is an architectural wonder, reflecting more
than a millennium of Muslim culture and civilization.

Texas as a whole...

...and in particular its many Ismaili Muslim citizens...

...will benefit from a similar Ismaili Center being constructed in Houston.

This center will be an iconic building that will contribute to the social and cultural fabric of our state...

...and will be a demonstration of the Ismaili Muslim values and ethics so clearly espoused by His Highness.

Rick and I had the great honor of welcoming His Highness to Texas in 2002 during a state dinner at the Bullock Museum.

And here I was meeting the man who is the religious leader of 15 million Muslims.

After listening to him for a few minutes, I saw true wisdom in his approach:...

...a spiritual leader who clearly bridges the gap between East and West.

His Highness can speak the language of the Western World...

...he can literally walk into a boardroom of any Fortune 500 company in the world and dazzle them with his worldly business knowledge...

...while also offering a powerful vision of hope for millions of impoverished people in the Eastern World.

And His Highness ascribes to a specific truth espoused by those of the Christian Faith as well:...

...that you judge a tree by its fruit.

Having just celebrated the Golden Jubilee...

...the Ismaili Muslims recognized much more than the lengthy term of their religious leader...

...they celebrated a half century of good deeds aimed toward the goal of creating a world where millions of people can live free of poverty, disease and hunger.

His Highness has created a vision for social change that can be embraced regardless of one's faith tradition.

If you are here today it is likely because you share our desire to make the world safer, healthier and more prosperous.

Some people are called to be the soldiers on the ground in the army of compassion:...

...the people who deliver the services to those in need.

Others are called to provide the resources that make that possible.

Partnership Walk...

...which started 20 years ago in Vancouver...

...allows Westerners to make a tremendous difference in places halfway around the world.

Since the 1980's North Americans have partnered with the Aga Khan Foundation to fight systemic poverty, create educational opportunities, and prevent the spread of disease in third world, conflict-ridden countries.

The Aga Khan Foundation has a long history of working in partnership with U.S. government agencies...

...such as the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the State Department...

...on development projects in countries such as Afghanistan, India, Kenya, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Tanzania.

It is a trusted organization both here in the States, and in the countries where its aid is delivered.

And 100% of the funds raised through the Partnership Walk go directly to the projects supported by the Foundation. Not a penny is spent on administrative costs.

(pause)

Following the tragedy of September 11th, there was a renewed sense of national pride in America.

And rightly so...

...for America is the most unique nation in the world...

...and the freedom we enjoy is something billions of people around the world so desperately desire.

At the same time, while we are all proud to be Americans, we share a more basic bond that recognizes no border, tribe or religion...

...and that is the human bond.

Genocide in Darfur is not an atrocity thousands of miles away...

...it is a tragedy that takes the lives of our fellow brothers and sisters.

Hyper-inflation doesn't merely cause 3 million foreign refugees to migrate from Zimbabwe to South Africa...

...it creates desperate conditions for our fellow human beings.

As a state that shares a 1,200 mile international border with a nation home to millions of people who live in dire poverty...

...we know the importance of having an informed worldview and not merely a narrow, parochial view.

We know that the problems south of our border...

...disease, pollution, joblessness and crime...

...inevitably cross our border and impact our hospitals, our air quality, our economy and the safety of our own communities.

Today our children's competition is not merely their classmates or the students graduating from rival schools...

...it is students half-way around the world in Beijing and Bombay.

We live in a globally interdependent world...

...and we are connected by free trade, the Internet, and common concerns about rogue nations....

...contagious and deadly diseases...

...and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

These challenges recognize no international boundaries...

...they are bigger than that.

That is why America must have constructive engagement in the world.

I speak not merely of the foreign policy of our government...

...but the activist mindset needed of our private citizenry.

Rick is very fond of the paradoxical statement: “our blessings are never made full until shared with others.”

What enriches us is not the material we accumulate...
...but the difference we make in the lives of others.

As a professional nurse of 17 years, I can think back on too many times where those of us in the healthcare industry were called upon to save someone's life when it was too late.

Conditions that could have been treated with basic care were untreatable by the time a patient arrived in the emergency room.

This is a tragedy that happens too often in America...
...the richest nation in the world...

...so imagine what people in third world countries face where technology and healthcare are not nearly as advanced.

The Aga Khan Foundation is a ray of light in some pretty dark places. Let me just give you some examples:

- It trains Third World healthcare workers to help reduce preventable diseases...

...improve the nutrition of mothers and children...

...and educate local populations on the importance of healthy behaviors.

- It helped build an experimental village that farms organic vegetables linked with reforestation efforts that have planted 26 million trees in the Northern Areas of Pakistan...

...both of which are part of attempts to build environmental assets that will raise the overall quality of life in remote mountain valleys.

- It supports farmers with agricultural inputs and training so they become more productive, can feed their own families and increase their incomes.
- And it works with small businesses to obtain credit through microfinance institutions that allow them to improve their income and help expand the local, regional and national economy.

The Foundation helps make our world more livable one project at a time...

...one financial gift at a time.

It is an oasis of compassion in a desert of despair.

I wholeheartedly support its mission because the Aga Khan Foundation does not focus on merely providing financial assistance...

...but helping communities become self-sustaining.

They recognize the best kind of welfare helps people help themselves.

We greatly appreciate your interest in their mission... their ideals are wholly ecumenical, and reflect the best of a variety of faith traditions.

Thank you, and God bless you all. #####