

Welcome to Iowa's Mosaic Diversity Conference

Good morning. On behalf of Iowa State University and Iowa State University Extension, I wish to extend a warm welcome to Iowa's Mosaic Diversity Conference. It a pleasure and an honor to be here with such a distinguished and, might I say, diverse group.

I awakened on October 8th to the news that President Obama had won the Nobel Peace Prize based on his diplomacy for embracing the “values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world’s population.” But there was another phrase that stood out in the announcement. It stated that Obama’s “diplomacy is founded in the concept that those who are to lead the world must do so on the basis of values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world’s population.” It occurred to me that the Nobel Foundation was looking beyond Obama’s diplomacy and anti-nuclear proliferation work; that it was a basic acknowledgment that the diverse, heterogeneous population of billions of people on this planet has value regardless of poverty, wealth, resource, race, gender, or religion.

At Iowa State University we acknowledge and embrace the multiplicity of human expression and characteristics. We recognize that race, ethnicity, and gender historically have been markers of diversity in institutions of higher education. We further believe that diversity includes additional categories, such as socioeconomic background, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, veteran status, nationality and intellectual perspective. We especially value the wide array of perspectives that come with these differences. At Iowa State we envision a more inclusive, global community and we are working to make that vision a reality here at our university, throughout our state, and far beyond its borders.

Today’s conference’s program theme, “REDISCOVERING AMERICA - THE INSIDE JOURNEYS” provides an opportunity to adapt the saying that “charity begins at home” to “diversity begins at home.” To that end, I would like to acquaint you with ISU Extension, the outreach arm of the university. A key strategic objective of Extension is to expand the diversity of people, ideas, and cultures in Iowa, and nurture an environment in which diversity thrives. Such diversity is paramount to Extension’s mission — supporting healthy people, promoting healthy environments, and advancing healthy economies throughout Iowa and the world. The need for healthy people, healthy environments, and healthy economies trumps any differences among our citizens, and the core issues that we address in Extension are important to all Iowans —regardless of where they live, or what they do, or who they are.

If Iowa is to be the welcoming, thriving state we all know it can be, every citizen and every institution must be actively involved in identifying and dismantling the barriers that separate us from one another. Let Iowa's Mosaic Diversity Conference be your opportunity to get to know each other and begin to build stronger communities.

Many of you may be asking, "How long do we wait for change?" I respond that you never have to wait for change. It's always happening. Moreover, ladies and gentlemen, we don't need to search for diversity. It's all around us. What we need to do now is to embrace it. What you will do and learn here today is to figure out how to manage that change and try to push it in positive directions.

Some of the questions that I'm sure that you will explore here today are, "Can we ask Iowa and America to now follow the world to value the diversity of our population as a symbol of the highest values in ethical life? Can we find a way to knit together a country, which has become fractured? With the election of Barack Obama, we got world credibility for dealing with our collective racial past. Do we have the same courage to deal with the present? Can we take a line from Obama's speech to the United Nations and promise "to take our share of responsibility for a global response to global challenges"? *Can we? Yes, we can.*