

**Thus Spake Zarathustra: Global Social Transformation and the Co-Creation of Development's Futures.**

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**Thanks to Su-Ming for her invitation to speak today, to Carol for helping to get me here, to Minister Kitt for his introductory remarks, and to all of you for sparing some of your own precious time to participate in this important conference. I'm delighted to be here, and I'm really pleased that you chose the theme of "Development's Futures" - in the plural.**

**To me, "Development's Futures" implies a sense of multiple possibilities and different pathways to social and economic progress, and therefore a rejection of universal prescriptions of all kinds, of magic bullets, static theories, simple equations and predetermined conclusions. That's an obvious thing to say maybe, but in the development debate it remains the most important thing we need to hear and keep repeating to ourselves. It's amazing how often this simple admonition is ignored.**

**This open-endedness also implies a set of process principles or methodological and ethical guidelines that frame how we should approach the tasks of**

understanding and changing the world, since if development is indeterminate, contested and contingent, we must approach these tasks in a spirit of negotiation, co-operation, even co-creation – with each of us contributing our own partial perspectives to a common enterprise that does not elide our differences, but enables us to move forward collectively with our differences intact. In that sense, we can think of development itself as a process of creating ever-more broadly-distributed capacities and opportunities to generate solutions, whether at the micro-level of livelihood strategies, the national level of social and economic policies, or the global level on issues like climate change or humanitarian intervention.

That's why I chose a quotation from Frederick Nietzsche's Thus "Spake Zarathustra" to spice up the title of my talk today (I'm not actually Nietzsche's biggest fan but I couldn't resist using this particular piece).

*Companions the Creator Seeks,*

*Not corpses, not herds and believers.*

*Fellow Creators the Creator seeks,*

*Those who write new values on new tablets.*

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*Companions the Creator seeks, and fellow harvesters,  
For everything about him is ripe for the harvest.*

**I think these words speak to us about the capacities and attitudes that we need at the personal and societal levels if we are to solve our problems and be successful in helping each-other to create a world worthy of ourselves and future generations. “Companions, not herds and believers” – active and critically-minded citizens capable of participating fully in the journeys that lie ahead; “creators, those who write new values on new tablets” – able to think beyond the tired ideologies that pass for much political debate and academic discourse these days; and “fellow harvesters” – recognizing the nature of development as an organic enterprise in which one tries to bring together the fruits of many different disciplines, contexts and experiences.**

**This approach represents a major challenge to the way in which we have conventionally gone about our tasks as students or practitioners of development, and implies some fundamental changes in current practice. It is these changes that I want to talk about today.**

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author’s personal views and should not be taken to represent the position of the Ford Foundation. Address for

**I realize that what I've said thus far may appear obvious to you, perhaps even banal, yet a combination of circumstances post 9/11 have cast them in a new and more challenging light. In some ways, what we are witnessing, at least in the world of development *assistance*, is a throwback to much earlier conceptions of development theory and foreign aid. There's a "can-do" spirit to much of these efforts, epitomized by academics like Jeff Sachs, celebrities like Bono, philanthropists like Bill Gates, and politicians, or ex-politicians, or perhaps future political spouses like Bill Clinton.**

**To hear them talk of the new green revolution in Africa, the production of vaccines for HIV and malaria, the benefits of the market through micro-lending and social entrepreneurship, and the possibilities for implanting democracy in other people's countries, you'd think you had been transported back to the 1960s and 1970s, before the long years that you and I and many others had spent creating in a literature on the importance of politics, culture and institutions in development. Science and technology are king, they say; and if we can push enough money through the international system to back these innovations and create new markets to take them to scale, success will be assured. Annual aid flows have risen to \$100 billion-plus, close to the**

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**promised land of the Millennium Development Goal targets though still dwarfed by the trillions of dollars lost each year in illicit cross-border flows and corporate tax evasion.**

**What happened on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 had many consequences, but one was to reverse what had become a pretty consistent trend towards deep reform in the foreign aid system, and its replacement by a different, healthier and more effective system of international cooperation in which the drivers of development and change would no longer be based around North-South transfers and foreign intervention.**

**Aid flows have rebounded dramatically as part of a much bigger project to make the world safe from terrorism (whether it does or doesn't achieve this goal is another matter), and there is clearly renewed support for aid across the political spectrum. Is this a good or a bad thing? That may seem an odd question in a conference like this, but we have to recognize that the perseverance of the traditional aid paradigm, even in its modified version of Millennium Challenge Accounts, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, International Finance Facilities, Paris-Club coherence and harmonization, and the rest of the current paraphernalia of aid reform, makes change more**

**difficult to achieve because it weakens the incentives for deep innovation by providing a continued ‘security blanket’ for current practice.**

**Although its protagonists would never say so in public, the role of the North in the “can-do” universe of the rich and famous is to ‘help’ the less-fortunate South in some fairly traditional ways (despite the hype about “innovation”); if possible, to ‘save it’ from drifting ever-further away from modernity, defined according to liberal democratic norms (heaven forbid there is a viable alternative, like Islam); and if that fails, then at least to ‘prevent it’ from wreaking havoc on Northern societies. The ‘war on terror’ exacerbates all the worst elements of the traditional foreign aid paradigm.**

**Of course, one can read this as a much more positive story, particularly when calls for aid are coupled with serious action on debt relief and trade justice. And I don’t mean to imply that investment in developing countries is irrelevant – simply that is difficult to detach the dysfunctional aspects of the traditional aid paradigm from the injection of ever-larger amounts of money by powerful national interests into societies with weak institutions and fragile systems of accountability.**

The “can-do” movement is increasingly vocal and powerful, but it doesn’t hold a monopoly on debates about development. There’s a small “can’t do” school of thought – the epithet bestowed on William Easterly by Sachs (his nemesis, so not entirely fair). There isn’t much we can do, they say, however sensitively applied, because nothing works in the general sense, context is paramount, politics are uncontrollable, social engineering always backfires, and global forces are too powerful to change. “The right plan is to have no plan” says Easterly, which is good advice but doesn’t get you very far when you are faced by urgent problems of poverty and marginalization, and isn’t really an accurate reading of successful development experience in East Asia and elsewhere. We do need to recognize the importance of context and contingency, but we don’t want to be imprisoned by them.

So what *should* we do? I think the best of the recent raft of bestselling books about development (and who would have predicted *that*?) fall into the middle ground between “can” and “can’t.” Dani Rodrik, Paul Collier (despite his unconvincing advocacy of military intervention), Ha Joon Chang, Roger Riddell (the best of the bunch by far), along with the earlier contributions from Amartya Sen and others on the “capabilities” approach, all converge on the fact that change is internally driven but that external help at critical

**moments can really make a difference. So they focus on the capacities and opportunities that are required for countries to respond successfully but in different ways to the challenges of a globalizing economy, political coalition-building and embedded social institutions.**

**The “should-do” school focus on how to make the international environment protective of the policy space required to exercise local control and accountability, which has proven to be the key element in successful development experience; how to support internal political and institutional processes that create incentives for investment and enable public and private actors to make the most of the room-to-maneuver they need to adapt to changing circumstances; and how to redistribute productive assets and protect basic rights throughout the population so that all can participate in the benefits of growth and help to secure the political stability required to keep it going into the future, because they have more of a stake. “Easterly is right to mock the delusions of the aid lobby”, says Roger Riddell, “but just as Sachs exaggerates the payoffs of aid, Easterly exaggerates the downside and restricts the scope for other policies.”**

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**The “should-do” approach takes its cue from cosmopolitan articulations of an international system in which countries – with increasingly direct involvement by their citizens – negotiate solutions to global problems through democratic principles, equitable burden-sharing, respect for local context and autonomy, and a recognition of the genuinely interlocking nature of causes and effects in the contemporary world.**

**Perhaps we think of this is a new vision, but when I worked for Save the Children in the UK during the 1990s I always quoted SCF’s founder Eglantyne Jebb, who drew up the Declaration on the Rights of The Child in 1923. “The system of world organization which has been adopted by Save the Children”, she said, “was not based on the principle of dividing up the countries into those that gave and those that received, but on the policy of requiring the recognition of the dual duty of all. We shall never truly love our own fellow countrymen so long as this love gives place to hatred or indifference at the frontier (a point I’ll come back to later on); so long as we are piling up injustices with our left hand we cannot establish justice with our right.”**



**This vision, to be successful, requires action in all of the areas in which the “can-do” school often fear to tread, namely building the capacities of others for independent action, building our *own* capacities to shape the international environment in ways that make this easier, and building *all* our capacities to live a successful life of *inter*-dependence.**

**In contrast, the study of development has been largely a study of “the other”- the study of the South by the North. This approach has led to a widespread perception that problems are the domain of the South and solutions the domain of the North. It has prioritized certain types of knowledge and excluded valuable learning across a range of development stories, North *and* South. And it has led to the conflation of development and development *assistance*, corrupting the common enterprise of working together across boundaries to understand and alter patterns of integrated social change. I think it’s time to put an end to this stage of our journey and begin a new one, a journey that can generate *much* more intellectual excitement, practical and political influence, and ethical integrity. What would that journey look like?**

**Let’s look first at the substance of what we want to understand and change. I think the first thing I would recommend is simply to rid ourselves of the**

**North/South paradigm and the political economy of foreign aid that underpins it, and replace it with a different framework rooted in the analysis of common and interlocking patterns that promote or retard social transformation at all levels of the world system. In this frame, we all become actors in a constantly-unfolding critical conversation about our competing visions of the ends and means of the “good society.”**

**This doesn't mean you can't work in Africa or India anymore, or be blind to the fact that certain problems are more acute in certain parts of the world, or among particular groups. You don't have to abandon thoughts of progress, or positive social change, or subscribe to a particular political worldview. All you have to do is to recognize that problems and solutions are not bounded by artificial definitions of geography or economic condition, and re-position yourselves as equal-minded participants in a set of common endeavors. Equality, let's remember, is the heart and soul of all healthy and successful relationships.**

**A shift away from conventional thinking would generate a better understanding of causes and solutions because they are increasingly integrated across these borders, and revolve around common if differently-**

experienced patterns of change and the capacity to control it. Social exclusion, for example, is an issue in Lahore, Lagos, Limerick, Louisiana and Leeds. A comparative perspective, with researchers from each place working across these contexts should enhance our understanding of the causes of social exclusion, and their commonalities and differences. Other examples of this approach include the rapidly-expanding global conversation about climate change; research that shows that HIV infection rates are as high among certain groups of African-American women in the US as in sub-Saharan Africa, and for similar reasons; the erosion of public spheres in Latin America that are vital for local democracy but originate in decisions made by media barons thousands of miles away in Italy, Australia and the US; the adoption of participatory budgeting by the UK government earlier this year that will give voters new powers to decide on public spending at the local level, inspired by the success of Porto Alegre in Brazil; and the increasingly differentiated interests within the larger and faster-growing countries of the South like China, India, Brazil, and South Africa, which have per capita incomes approaching those of parts of Ukraine, Belarus, Appalachia and the Mississippi delta in the United States. Or even Vietnam, where I recently learned that the poverty rate (or at least the official one) is higher than in large parts of North America.

**An increasing number of Countries in the Global South are already influential actors on the global stage; no longer can they be treated as ‘recipients,’ so instead of encouraging them to copy the inefficient growth patterns of the North, why not collaborate in inventing new and better ways of combining economic, social, political and environmental objectives through transnational organizing for deep, systemic change? Who knows, *we* might actually learn something, as the UK is learning from Brazil in the example I gave above. In this approach, each part of the world becomes just another context in which to ask and answer the same questions, and share in and benefit from the results of our endeavors.**

**I’m not sure there are huge new issues to be researched or discoveries to be made in development studies (technological innovation notwithstanding). But there are certainly better ways of looking at old and familiar issues of governance, poverty, power, difference and inequality, or more broadly, how to facilitate an inter-linked attack on inadequacies in the polity, inequalities in society, and inefficiencies in the economy, and retain the environmental integrity of the planet in the process, a set of dilemmas that confront all societies and that must be faced in the future together.**

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**In that respect I would argue for more “symphonic poems”, to use a musical analogy, and fewer endless variations on a theme – or even worse, proliferations of disassembled parts for particular instruments. I’m not arguing for more “symphonies” in development studies - more universal abstractions in other words, devoid of grounding in empirical detail - but more systematic efforts to “join the dots”, to make the connections, to identify patterns of cause and effect across time and space, to place individual experiences in their wider context, to help people sift through the costs and benefits of policies and actions, and to challenge accepted orthodoxies on urgent issues like dealing with social and cultural difference; the changing roles of states, markets and civil society; and how to build new sources of legitimate authority to create and enforce norms and regulations in the multi-polar, multilayered regimes that will govern the world system in the future.**

**I think that, where we have been successful in pushing ideas over the last ten years, it has been precisely at this level. For example:**

**Changing the terms of the debate about globalization, leading to the emergence of a new orthodoxy about the need to manage the downside of this**

**process, level the playing field, and expand ‘policy space’ for developing countries so that they can integrate into the global economy on favorable terms.**

**Cementing an intellectual commitment to participation and human rights as basic principles of development and development assistance, even if imperfectly-translated into practice, and:**

**Keeping the spotlight on the need for reforms in international institutions on issues such as unfair terms of trade and investment, global warming, Africa, and the kind of warped humanitarian intervention represented by the war in Iraq.**

**Such “symphonic poems” offer the most potential for influence because research has to be both sufficiently generalized to be relevant above the micro-level and sufficiently connected to the contextualized myths and memories, beliefs and ideologies, emotions and aspirations that drive real people to take decisions and make changes in their lives.**

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**Indeed, one can make the argument that the missing link in much of our efforts to understand the challenges of development has been our inability or unwillingness to get to grips with the drivers of social transformation at the deepest level, what Martin Luther King once called the “love that does justice”, by which he meant the cultivation of mutually-reinforcing spirals of change that link personal transformation to the creation and expansion of new institutions and practices in society, politics and the economy. Our life mission, he said, is to find out how we can translate “love into justice structures.”**

**Translating “love into justice structures” – what a magnificent phrase, signifying the creation of systems of politics, economics and international cooperation that both build on and reinforce the personal qualities that will sustain their expansion and integration into the mainstream over the next many years. “Without a revolution of the spirit”, says Aung Sang Suu Kyi, “the forces which produced the iniquities of the old order would continue to be operative, posing a constant threat to the process of reform and regeneration.”**

**This is not, I'll admit, the frame we currently use to analyze questions of development, but when you start to use it in concrete circumstances, as King did in relation to economic structures in the United States and the prosecution of the Vietnam War just before he was killed, I believe it can offer profound insights that help to move us far beyond the limitations of our current ways of thinking. Marrying a rich inner life dedicated to the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion with the practice of new forms of politics, economics and public policy is the key to social transformation.**

**Let's move on to think about the process of development studies in this "should-do" world. The most important conclusion of the approach I'm recommending is that broadly-distributed capacities for negotiation, innovation, adaptation and collective decision-making are essential to development and social transformation everywhere. And in that context we have to ask ourselves whether we are co-creators of knowledge or purveyors of detached scholarship that divides the world into producers – meaning researchers - and consumers – meaning the rest of us?**

**Is our role to deliver academic products or to utilize knowledge in facilitating the essential *public* work of democratic deliberation and problem-solving? Is our aim to strengthen pockets of knowledge connected to decision making**

**elites, or knowledge and capacity broadly-dispersed throughout society in order to underpin democratic processes of influence, problem-solving, mediation and accountability? Should knowledge be produced and owned by credentialed, detached experts, or are there many legitimate ways of knowing and multiple mechanisms that can facilitate the creation and sharing of knowledge among many different contributors?**

**My answers are clear: by opening up the enterprise of knowledge to a broader range of actors – NGOs, social movements, activists, government officials, foundations, labor groups, the media and many others - we can increase the chances of success because of the multiplier effects that flow from a larger number of channels through which knowledge connects to action and decision-making. Knowledge has a social purpose in animating the public sphere. It is not just a private activity that produces insights, increasingly on a commercial basis, for others in academia, or the sponsors of research in government and the marketplace.**

**We know that active social learning writ large is the only basis for democratic governance through deliberation and consensus-building, but technocratic approaches to knowledge breed technocratic approaches to politics, and we all**

suffer the consequences. It is no coincidence that America's public sphere has been hollowed out, elite control over public policy strengthened, and the country's ability to resolve pressing problems like health care and social security weakened, at the same time as social science in the US has steered further and further away from the public, and closer to purely theoretical concerns, especially the techniques of rational choice analysis. Some of you may have caught the excitement over just this issue that greeted Michael Buroway's Presidential address to the American Sociological Association in 2004, echoing debates over the supposed "impasse in development studies" that took place during in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

One after another, our democracies are being hollowed out and segmented in ways that prevent any genuine articulation of the public interest, reducing the chances still further of large-scale social, economic and political reform. The cultivation of critical thinking and deliberative skills among the broad mass of the population is fundamental to both democracy and development, and knowledge, of all different kinds, is essential to that task. Of course, researchers are not the only knowledgeable occupants of the public sphere – investigative journalists, advocacy NGOs, bloggers, public radio stations and many others are also involved, but academics have a particular role to play in

anchoring these other knowledge actors in the bedrock of rigor and independence, a subject I'll return to in a moment.

In terms of how research is carried out and used, I think it is important to recognize that one can't *resolve* the dilemmas of rigor and relevance in any absolute sense – just manage them more or less effectively. Once you look at these as management questions rather than existential anxieties, it's surprising how quickly you can move to partial solutions. But they will always *be* partial, since researchers and practitioners inhabit different daily life-worlds, and they impose different sets of choices, incentives, and timeframes on us, especially as the volume of information and speed of decision-making continue to increase. The trade-offs between these choices will obviously vary from one situation to another, but enough common ground and common purpose remain at the crossing points of these differences to make us valued collaborators, *if* that's what we want to be.

One of the barriers to this kind of cooperation is the persistent difficulty of legitimizing different forms of knowledge and knowing: the capacities to understand inter-personal as well as structural factors, politics as well as economics, global forces as well as local detail, history as well as the present,

**and a grasp of what is possible in the circumstances as well as what we might think of as ideal.**

**It's easy for researchers to be shielded from these questions by a shallow but persuasive cleverness, just as activists sometimes take refuge in the safe but lazy demands of constant, unreflective engagement in the world – “I'm way too busy, or too important, thank you very much, to think, read, or talk.” Amidst these false polarities it is tempting to use our skills and position as weapons to defeat or screen out the other, but in my experience the compromises involved in forging genuine partnerships, and the desire to hold fast to values of inclusion, democracy, and relevance, need do no significant damage to rigor.**

**As a non-academic, I want to make a special plea to preserve rigor and attention to evidence, which may surprise some of you. Rigor – the painstaking parsing out of problems and solutions; the interrogation of all the evidence about costs and benefits, winners and losers; the ability to identify both the individual pieces of a puzzle and put them back together again into an accurate and coherent picture; the skills of presenting and comparing different theories of change; the depth of understanding built up by studying**

the same phenomena over long periods of time; the potential for accountability that results from a deliberate distancing of oneself from a pre-determined ideological position – all these are crucial components of social learning, and none of them necessarily involves a negative trade-off between engagement and objectivity.

How knowledge is *used*, of course, is just as important as how it is *produced*. Conventional answers to this question are sequential and elitist, and that's why don't work very well – “I'll produce the outputs, and then give them to you so *you* can take some action (“you” usually being restricted to a few members of the political and bureaucratic classes). Policy will change, and then practice.” This model is completely inadequate as a basis for influence, because it ignores the real drivers of change that require policy debates to be embedded in political processes and the activation of the polity. As a recent Canadian study points out, “knowledge utilization depends on *disorderly* interactions between researchers and users, rather than on linear sequences beginning with the needs of researchers or the needs of users. The more sustained and intense the interaction between researchers and users, the more

likely it is that utilization will occur.”<sup>2</sup> In this frame, the purpose of the intellectual is not just to analyze and recommend policy reforms but to stimulate new conversations and help create a sense of possibility beyond the given.

A key lesson from successful experiments in co-creation is that success is more likely when the participants agree to accompany each-other over a substantial period of time so that they can develop trust, mutual understanding, and collaborative skills and commitments, and when they make *more* of their different skills and experiences, not less. Once that happens you can usually sort out any problems that arise along the way, and have enough collective strength and maturity to face up to the deep prejudices and limitations that often block learning at the cutting edge of social change.

It is these capacities, not just re-building conventional but under-resourced universities, NGOs or think-tanks that are important going forward. So this dimension needs to be layered over the more basic inequalities that do require our urgent attention. Institutions of higher education are crucial because they credential knowledge, legitimize certain ways of knowing, generate and

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<sup>2</sup> Landry et al 2003, cited in Daniel Cohn, 2006, “Jumping into the political fray: academics and policy-making”,

**diffuse conceptual frameworks that structure practices of different kinds, and socialize professionals, so they are vital sites for transformation, but they are also highly resistant to change in ways that more resources are unlikely to influence. NGOs should themselves be sites for knowledge-creation and utilization, but sadly they have not fulfilled their promise in this respect, bar one or two exceptions. Therefore we should be looking to nurture new institutional forms that grow from different roots, being neither conventional research groups nor NGOs but a mixture of both - “distributed networks and coalitions for knowledge and action,” for want of a better phrase.**

**I would cite examples of such networks from my own experience at the Ford Foundation including LOGO-Link (an international learning community on citizen participation in local governance based in Sao Paulo but nurtured by the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex), the International Budget Project (headquartered in Washington DC but active in over 70 countries, North and South), and the International Community of Women Living with HIV and Aids, which works to strengthen women’s role in international policy discussions. There is nothing more powerful than the direct voice of those affected by a problem when used as a lever for policy change. The “symphonic**

poems” I talked about earlier are the logical output of collaborations like these.

For both NGOs and universities, a useful way of looking at these questions is to categorize your roles in promoting “private and public reason”, or direct and indirect involvement in supporting knowledge for social change. Private reason covers the university’s traditional roles as teachers and trainers of successive generations of active citizens, and as cherished zones of rational thought and independent critique, able to exercise at least a modicum of accountability through the application of rigor to public policy problems – not a bad thing to focus on given the way the world is heading.

Public reason covers the less traditional roles of knowledge institutions as co-creators, active in the public sphere. Such roles might include an expansion of what you are already doing - strengthening intermediaries, translators, and bridges that use knowledge to influence policy and practice in directions that ultimately empower others to think and act for themselves; and increasing the knowledge-making and interpretative capacities of organizations and movements who are struggling for change so that they can be more influential actors at higher levels of the political system themselves. And it might include

**a louder public voice for scholars and practitioners themselves, requiring a much more proactive and energetic role in publishing and speaking in the public media, including popular magazines and websites like openDemocracy, and not just in specialist publications for the development set. This direct, public role has to be played very carefully lest it morph into speaking on behalf of others, but it can be done successfully.**

**To conclude, what I've tried to lay out in brief tonight is an approach to development studies that is not dependent on North-South thinking and foreign aid, but on the rights and responsibilities we all share in co-creating a better future based on love and justice, wherever we may live; an approach that revolves around the co-creation of knowledge across boundaries of geography, discipline, sector and profession; and an approach that uses our privileged position and resources as researchers or practitioners to affect deep, systemic, social transformation, rather than to deal with the symptoms of problems in ways that rarely produce long-term, sustainable changes in institutions, values and relationships.**

**We can't develop other societies or make other people happy, but we can and should support each other in our attempts to lead more fulfilling lives and help to create environments in which wholesome choices are more likely, and**

that requires a new and more democratic synthesis of knowledge and action, developed through a process of “critical friendship” as I put it on the last page of “Future Positive” – “the loving but forceful encounters between equals who journey together towards the land of the true and the beautiful.”

*Companions the Creator Seeks,*

*Not corpses, not herds and believers.*

*Fellow Creators the Creator seeks,*

*Those who write new values on new tablets.*

*Companions the Creator seeks, and fellow harvesters,*

*For everything about him is ripe for the harvest.*

**I wish you the best of luck for the rest of your conference deliberations, and thank you for listening.**