**Giardina Speech [EZ Speech No. 16573]**

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Remarks by Mr. Frank Giardina at an Association of Yale Alumni Round Table Discussion on Multiculture Inclusion.

thank you, akosua; i’m enormously pleased that you asked me to participate in this discussion.

needless to say, the topic today is a terribly important one, not just in my hometown of chicago, but all across the country. in many respects — and certainly in chicago — the racial and socio-economic divide among our residents, and especially among our youth, has frankly not been signficantly narrowed in these last many years. i was raised by blue-collar, immigrant parents, and was the first to graduate from college. But even as I was making my way up the socio-economic ladder, i saw way too many of my peers — kids who didn’t have the opportunities that I had — get into trouble, get into drugs, get into crime, and finally get into jail.

in chicago, as in cities across america, we’re dealing with a population of young men and women who find themselves holding the short end of the stick, in terms of jobs, education, training and — perhaps most important — in terms of positive role models and mentors. and frankly, while there are many city, county, and state agencies involved in helping at-risk and unerpriviledged youth climb out that circle of povery and hopelessness, it’s clear to me that a ton more needs to be done.

and i don’t think we can depend on the public sector to do much more than they’re already doing. many well-meaning agencies and organizations in the chicagland area have tried, but clearly they haven’t made a meaningful dent in the overall problem. so i think the private sector’s gotta step in a take on a much, *much* greater responsibility for addressing this problem.

and of course, the industry i’m in — the construction and rehabilitation industry — is perfectly situated to contribute in meaningful ways to the solution. for if there’s one thing the sinatra company has, it’s jobs, especially summer jobs, when the building industry’s humming at its most intense level. that’s why my company is considering a number of possible initiatives aimed directly at helping kids at the lower end of the spectrum. One program we’re looking into in particular is an initiative we’re calling “*hammers of hope*,” which will be based on that old notion of “give man a fish, and he’ll eat for a day; teach a man to fish, and he’ll eat for the rest of his life.”

it’s one thing to proactively seek out underprivileged kids, hand ‘em a tool belt and send ‘em out to a job site. but when the construction season ends, they just hand in their tools and go back to the same old, debilitating lifestyle they’d been living before. but what if, instead, we took those kids off the job an hour before quitting time, paid them for that hour, and then brought in a bunch teachers and trainers who would show these youngsters how to make the most of the skills they’ve been exposed to? what if we could provide some training and mentorship that would inspire them to see these summer opportunites not simply as jobs, but as stepping stones to a real career? what if we gave ‘em not just a hammer, but a helping of hope, as well? that’s why we’re going to reach out to the various building trades and public schools in our area and see if at least some of them would be willing to partner with us in staffing our *“hammers of hope”* initiative with volunteer instructors.

think of it: just one hour a day, for six days a week — we don’t take weekends off in the construction business if we can help it — for a whole summer. that adds up to six hours of training times the 13 weeks of summer, and *that’s* close to an 80-hour hands-on educational curriculum. a kid could learn a lot in 80 hours!

now a single program like *“hammers of hope”* ain’t gonna solve the problem by itself, by any means. the problem’s clearly too big for one company and one summer to solve. but as a model program that perhaps others in our industry — in chicago and across the country — could emulate, i think it’d be a damned [darned] good start.

thank you.

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