

February 21, 2017

Building Bridges by Crossing Borders: How Citizen Diplomacy is Creating Global Stability



On Tuesday, February 21st, 2017, the East Asia Institute (EAI) hosted Ron Nirenberg, San Antonio District 8 Councilman, who delivered a lecture entitled “Building Bridges by Crossing Borders: How Citizen Diplomacy is Creating Global Stability.” Students, faculty, as well as many community leaders in San Antonio attended the event to listen to what Councilman Nirenberg had to say in regards to his trip to Wuxi, China to participate in the 8th annual Sister Cities International forum back in 2015

Sister Cities International is a nonprofit organization that promotes peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation. There are currently 10 international sister cities of San Antonio. The ones in Asia include Wuxi, China, Kumamoto, Japan, Gwangju, South Korea and Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

Councilman Ron Nirenberg studied at Trinity University as an undergraduate student and later obtained his

Master’s from the University of Pennsylvania. He was first elected as the District 8 Councilman in 2013. He is chairman of several critical committees that work to build a resilient city on the national and local levels. Nirenberg is also the Vice Chair of the Sister Cities International Board of Directors and board member of the World Affairs Council, Experienced in business and policy, Nirenberg is a former program director for the Annenberg Public Policy Center, where he developed and directed award-winning civic engagement programs in cities across the United States, most notably in San Antonio.

Before the lecture, a private reception was held in honor of Councilman Nirenberg. Dr. Wangxiang Yao, director of the East Asia Institute, opened the reception through showing gratitude to the special guests who attended this event. UTSA Vice President for Community Services, Dr. Jude Valdez also extended his warm welcome to the Councilman.





From left: EAI director Dr. Wanxiang Yao, Councilman Nirenberg, Dr. Lisa Montoya, Associate Dean, College of Business



Audience at Councilman Nirenberg's lecture



Councilman Nirenberg and UTSA students after the Q&A session



Councilman Nirenberg and lecture attendees after the Q&A session

After the reception, Councilman Nirenberg and the guests moved into the lecture hall to begin his presentation. He shared his story about participating in the Sister Cities International Forum in China where he was given the opportunity to deliver a keynote speech about the innovative work San Antonio has engaged in to preserve our natural resources: in particular, water. "Water is an extraordinary issue for not only San Antonio, but also the world," said Nirenberg. "Last year was the first time in history that San Antonio had more people living in urban communities than rural. One of the biggest challenges San Antonio faces is to have potable water sources for life and city development for the future."

While Nirenberg was attending the conference, he also visited various cities in China. In Shanghai, Nirenberg had an opportunity to observe its water system. "While San Antonio is focused on conserving water for the betterment of San Antonio, Shanghai has a more global view on water and believes that it is a human right, not only for the residents of Shanghai but for the rest of the world as well," observed Nirenberg.

In addition to Shanghai, Nirenberg also visited Nanjing, a city that is similar to San Antonio in both design and infrastructure. "Leaders in Nanjing are also interested in San Antonio's economic development, and both cities hope to work together and continue sharing ideas," said Nirenberg. "The core issue is how we best manage the need to the global population."

Despite the cultural differences between San Antonio and China, Nirenberg stated that "we all share the same goal, which is how we can make our community better." After the trip, he came to the conclusion that our challenges are to face rapid urbanization and continued population growth while keeping the steady economic growth. Nirenberg believes that can be achieved by cities helping one another, and accentuated on what it means to be a "global citizen".

Nirenberg highlighted the audience Sister Cities International's slogan, "Let the first strike be a knock on the door." What it mean to be a global citizen in

Nirenberg's words was, "The opportunity around the responsibility that we all have to recognize is the common value of people across the world." He ended his lecture with a quote, "You are a citizen of the world, and our world does best when we share, when we collaborate, when we learn, and when we grow."

After the lecture, there was a Q&A session for the attendees. Many asked questions related to San Antonio's water and energy conservation tactics. "For sustainability and economic reasons, it's cheaper when we are more sustainable as a community," replied Nirenberg. "For the energy side, that is an area we are still working on. There is a lot of learning to do in regards to sustainable energy in the country." One asked, "There is an alliance with China, and we are exporting sustainability of ideas, what are they exporting to us?" Nirenberg responded, "We explore ideas through business exchange. San Antonio is a growing economy, and 80% of the growth in our GDP over the last 10 years has been from foreign direct investment and exports from businesses abroad."

"Nirenberg's lecture was very insightful and helped the audience understand the importance of global sustainability as I teach a lot about urban geography and sustainability," said Dr. Nazgol Bagheri, professor of Geo Politics at UTSA, "One take-away from the lecture is that we need more mutual learning," commented Mary Toland, a UTSA student.

"Global citizenship is a major issue in our modern day society. If we do not hear the opinions of those who have different backgrounds from us, we cannot expect to grow," said Nirenberg

Dr. Wanxiang Yao concluded, "This is why organizations like Sister Cities International, and lectures like this are so important. They remind us to expand our world view, and gain ideas from those with other unique perspectives"

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