

Opening Remarks

By Mike Nichols (Immigration Summit Co-Chair)

At a wedding last week in which two young lawyers were married, the Rabbi said: " Judaism views the law as an instrument for human dignity, justice, and equality. The whole Bible is a hymn to justice – it's a hymn to kindness to the weak on the part of the strong and to voluntary renunciation of the privilege of power. The Bible is a hymn to charity and to the notion that if there is no justice, there is no peace, and no foundation upon which to build our society and transform that world that is into the world we pray will someday be. But prayer alone will never change the way things are. God needs us to discern and seek justice, and to strive for what's right under the law."

On behalf of the American Jewish Committee and the Kinder Institute at Rice University, we welcome you to the 2012 Immigration Summit. I am Mike Nichols and my wife, Marcia and I are co-chairs of this summit. Thank you for being here. Your participation and your willingness to learn with us are the first steps in finding fair and equitable solutions for the immigration issues facing Houston and Texas.

First, We wish to welcome those elected officials who are with us today. Will the elected officials and staff from the US Congress, the State Legislature, Harris County, the city of Houston and HISD and other governmental entities please stand and be recognized. Thank you for being here and for your willingness to learn with us.

I would also like to thank the AJC's Bridging America Task Force, the Board of the AJC, and the staffs of the Rice University, the Kinder Institute, and the AJC who made this event possible.

So many times we have heard the quote from the movie Apollo 13, "Houston, we have a problem". Today at this Summit, we must say, "Houston, we have an opportunity."

I will open the summit with three facts:

Fact 1 Texas has 1.7 million undocumented residents of which over 600,000 live here in our metro area. That means if we filled 8 Reliant Stadiums, there would still be undocumented Houstonians waiting in lines outside.

Fact 2

Our current immigration system is completely broken and causes millions of otherwise law abiding American to have broken the Law because there are no current legal answers to those moral dilemmas such as what do you do when you find out that a woman whom you trust with your children and who your children love is an undocumented worker or when you find an employee who has worked in your plant for more than a decade has a mismatched social security card. Did you know that there are less than 30,000 green cards available annually for semi skilled workers from Mexico to stay legally in the United States and this includes family members, as well as the actual workers? According to data compiled by Forbes Magazine, a 30-year old Mexican with a high school education and a sibling who is a U.S. citizen "playing by the rules" and applying for a green card **could** mean waiting in a line that stretches back an estimated

131 years!

Fact 3

Just because shortsighted partisanship has crippled the US Congress' ability to solve any major problem, does not mean that Texas is unable to find its own solution. Unlike Arizona and Alabama that have implemented politically popular yet ineffective and mean spirited immigration laws, Texas has the creativity, the moral fiber, and the long-range vision to develop legislation in our citizen's true self-interest. Today, our Governor has the power, with the stroke of a pen, to establish a program to document and tax undocumented residents bringing these hard working Texans out of the shadow economy while raising billions of needed tax dollars. Did you know that because we have failed to implement a fair immigration system, the US government is unable to collect 4.5 billion dollars in income and employment taxes?

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have so much to learn. Let us start today **committed** to separating the facts from the fiction.

I urge you:

First, listen to our experts with an open mind

Second, write down the objective facts that detail the cost of our failure to implement a working immigration system.

Third, write down questions for our experts on the index cards distributed at your seat and give them to one of our volunteers for the q and a period at the end

And fourth,

Think about our next steps and give The Bridging America Task Force your suggestions.

It is my pleasure to introduce Randy Czarlinsky, the Director of

the Houston Regional Office of the American Jewish Committee