

Houston Philosophical Society  
629<sup>th</sup> Meeting

March 19, 2009

Rice University

Cohen House

The 629<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Society was called to order by Vice President Evelyn Keyes who reminded members that the April meeting will be the last of the academic year and will feature Michael Gillette. She also called attention to the fact that new members will be elected along with next year's officers and section leaders.

After dinner, Judge Keyes introduced Dr. Renu Khator, who addressed the group on "The Challenges of an Urban University." Dr. Khator serves in a dual capacity as the President of the University of Houston and as the Chancellor of the University of Houston System which includes UH, UH-Downtown, UH-Clear Lake City, UH-Victoria, and teaching centers at Sugar Land and Cinco Ranch. Enrollments at these campuses exceed 100,000 students. She is the first woman to serve in this capacity and is also the first Indian immigrant to head a major urban research institution.

Prior to her appointment here she was provost and senior Vice President at the University of South Florida, capping a 22-year career at that institution. She earned a bachelor's degree at the University of Kanpur and received her master's degree and her PhD in political science from Purdue University. She is a noted scholar in the field of global environmental policy. Her husband, Dr. Suresh Khator, who accompanied her tonight, is associate dean of the Cullen College of Engineering. They have two daughters, both of whom are ophthalmologists.

At the time of her address she had been in Houston for only 51 weeks during which she maintained a hectic profession schedule. She described her role at Chancellor/President as analogous to grass over a cemetery—above many people you can't make move.

She spoke at length on challenges confronting the University. From her perspective it is uniquely situated to deal with problems and opportunities involved in globalization. Information is the key today and innovation and creativity are critical to working in this environment. By contrast India today is 33% urban while the United States is 85% urban.

Rice and the University of Houston are positioned to show the strength of urban institutions in dealing with issues of the day. Global economics are working against our efforts. Researchers, especially in science and engineering, are the key to the Tier One members to which UH aspires. Science and engineering publications here have declined from 38% to 30%, while Western Europe has increased from 31% to 36% and Asia from

11% to 20%. Some 300,000 Asian researchers in the US may go home to ride out the global recession. Research and development funds in China have doubled in recent years; there has been a 65% increase in India, and a decline in the US.

International students now have more options and US tuitions are not globally competitive in the quest for the enrollment these students.

There is not great hope in the current situation of US high school students. Every nine seconds a high school student drops out. Performance of US schools in math and science continues to decline. There are now a similar number of engineering students in South Korea and the United States.

Meanwhile there are legislative discussions that can result in a decline of funding for universities not included in the Permanent University Fund. UH is seeking a major new commitment from the state with a promise to match the funding dollar for dollar through increased fundraising efforts. Millions of dollars are needed for the move to Tier One status.

The expenditures for remedial work have reached the level of \$1 billion annually, further tightening the availability of funds to pursue excellence. Removing the need for remedial work will also involve increased funding for high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools.

Community involvement of UH is becoming more direct especially in the area of managing social issues. There are some 25 non-governmental organizations with University managers of process. UH hopes to use the vitality and dynamism of its service area to benefit diverse interests: energy, health, and the arts. Partnerships should be possible with the medical institutions of the city and there is a possible synergy of the humanities with the medical schools to further holistic treatment of patients as well as utilizing the arts to enhance human development.

During her brief tenure, UH has already become a different university. There is now more on-campus housing available and an increased number of scholarships. She is actively soliciting the support of both the community and alumni to accomplish these goals.

She concluded by indicating “Yes we can do it!”