

## World Knowledge Forum 2013

Antonio Villaraigosa

As the United States debt ceiling and government shutdown votes loomed, Antonio Villaraigosa, former Mayor of Los Angeles, was on hand at the 2013 World Knowledge Forum to discuss the current state of US politics. The crisis in Washington was another snapshot of the issues he sees as pervasive in the US political system. A self-described “unabashed Democrat,” Mayor Villaraigosa discussed the problems of what he calls “hyper-partisanship” in the United States and how the current political situation will influence future perception and policy.

When discussing the political situation in the United States, Mayor Villaraigosa bluntly stated, “It’s broken, it’s severely broken. It’s so broken that you’ve heard commentators here and around the world chronicling what has happened over the last few years as a disaster, a meltdown, an Armageddon in America’s political landscape.”

He admitted that the issue of partisanship extends much deeper than simply the ballot box. “The fact of the matter is the country is evenly divided. We’ve been engaged in a culture war since the 1960s, really since the election of President Nixon. For [around] the last 50 years, you’ve seen the parties engage increasingly in the level of partisanship that has brought us to today.”

Specifically, he condemned the partisanship that has gripped Washington. Mayor Villaraigosa was critical of the tea party, though he admitted that the current situation could be traced to both Republicans and Democrats. “I think we can see that clearly, with the political meltdown that we’ve seen over the last few weeks and the last couple years that it’s broken on the right, I think more so, but it’s also broken on the left. We didn’t get here because of the tea party alone.”

Mayor Villaraigosa claimed he has “never seen politics as hyper-partisan as they are today,” but he did offer a potential solution. “From my vantage point, one thing we need to do is we need to really look for more leaders on both sides of the aisle that are willing to work together.”

He saw some of the biggest promise for America in its cities. He cited the success of metropolitan areas as places where local governments could work together, achieving the ability to reach across a larger electorate, and being “more innovative and practical; less ideological.” He said, “You’re seeing it New York and LA. You’re seeing it in the great cultural centers of the US.”

Mayor Villaraigosa also sees the investment of infrastructure as a key component of America’s future. After visiting the airports of Korea and China, he sees a model for the rise of America.

He stressed, “We need to be growing our economy, investing in infrastructure, investing in R&D, we need to invest in skill building in K through 12. We need to challenge the left and right to extend the school year. Kids in Asia study 30 to 40 percent longer than kids in the US. We want to compete; we’ve got to do that as well. We’ve got to focus on STEM, science, tech, engineering, math. Those are the things the parties ought to be working together on instead of these silly debates about ideology.”

Though there are problems with the US and its political system, Mayor Villaraigosa remains optimistic about future prospects. “America is still a beacon of hope and light around the world. I say democracy isn’t perfect, but I’m not sure we’ve found a better way to govern yet.”

