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**“The Metro Moment”  
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**Introduction**

Thank you, Dean Pagano for that introduction.

And congratulations to all of the graduates here, and the family and friends who have supported you along the way, for a job well done.

I know these are difficult times to enter the job market. The Great Recession has left an indelible imprint on tens of millions of Americans.

But I want to assure you that the profession you have chosen has a bright future because cities and metropolitan areas have a bright future.

You begin your professional career at what can only be described as a Metro Moment, in the United States and throughout the world.

Metropolitan areas, cities and their surrounding suburbs, exurbs and rural communities, are the world’s essential communities.

These places are the engines of national prosperity.

They are on the front lines of demographic transformation.

They are the vehicles for environmental sustainability.

They are the vanguards of innovation ... in technology, in business, in government policy, and practice.

If this is a Metro Moment, then it is also a time for individuals who are engaged in building strong cities and suburbs.

Professionals who plan, design, finance, develop, retrofit, manage, implement in ways that affect the lives of metro citizens every day.

Like metros, your profession is on the front lines, of a revolution in thinking and practice.

The traditional ways of specialized disciplines and siloed bureaucracies are giving way to holistic thinking and integrated solutions. This, in turn, is fuelling a burst of creativity and imagination.

These are not your parents' metros and this is not your parents' urban planning profession.

So let me situate your work in the complex dynamics of metropolitan America.

**Broad forces have positioned metropolitan areas as the engines of national prosperity.**

Thomas Friedman has famously taught us that the world is “flat.” But the spatial reality of modern economies is that they concentrate intensely in a relatively small number of places. Strictly speaking, there is no single American economy, but rather a network of highly connected, hyperlinked, and economically integrated metros.

The real heart of the American economy lies in the top 100 metropolitan areas that take up only 12 percent of our land mass, but harbor two-thirds of our population and generate 75 percent of our gross domestic product.

These metropolitan areas dominate the economy because they gather and strengthen the assets—innovation, human capital, and infrastructure—that drive economic growth and productivity. The Chicago metropolis, for example, is home to 67 percent of the population of Illinois, but contributes 78 percent of that state's GDP.

Metros punch above their weight.

The true economic geography, here and abroad, is a metropolitan one, enveloping city and suburb, exurb and rural town. Goods, people, capital and energy flow seamlessly across the metropolitan landscape. Labor markets are metropolitan as are housing markets and commuter-sheds. Sports teams, cultural institutions, and media all exist in metropolitan space.

As we emerge from this devastating recession, metropolitan economies will undergo a radical shift.

They are likely to become more export oriented, less consumption oriented.

They are likely to make a slow but critical transition to lower carbon, through renewable energy sources, the manufacture of sustainable infrastructure and sustainable products, and changes in buildings and the built environment.

And they are likely to be even more dependent on innovation as the catalyst for growth and more reliant on educated and skilled workers.

For today's graduates, the point is this: The U.S. economy is going through a substantial restructuring with enormous implications for every aspect of the work you are about to do.

**If metros are the engines of national prosperity, then they are also on the front lines of demographic transformation.**

This Sunday Brookings will release a signature new report, the State of Metropolitan America. The report, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, examines the demographic trends that have affected the top 100 metropolitan areas so far this decade, covering the year 2000 through the year 2008.

We find a nation in demographic transformation.

We are a growing nation. Our population exceeded 300 million back in 2006 and we are now on our way to hit 350 million around 2025.

We are a diversifying nation. An incredible 83 percent of our growth this decade was driven by racial and ethnic minorities.

We are an aging nation. The number of seniors and boomers exceeded 100 million this decade.

We are a nation riven by educational disparities. Whites and Asians are now more than twice as likely to hold a bachelors degree as blacks and Hispanics.

We are a nation divided by income inequities and a growing gap between rich and poor. Low wage workers saw hourly earnings decline by 8 percent this decade; high wage workers saw wages rise by 3 percent.

America's top 100 metropolitan areas are on the front lines of our nation's demographic transformation. The trends I've identified—growth, diversity, aging, educational disparities, income inequities—are happening at a faster pace, a greater scale, and a higher level of intensity in our major metropolitan areas.

Let's take diversity and immigration as an example of the leading role of metropolitan areas.

Racial and ethnic minorities accounted for an astonishing 83 percent of national population growth this decade.

As a result, Hispanics now make up roughly 15 percent of the nation's population. African Americans comprise a little over 12 percent of the nation's population.

Racial and ethnic minorities make up an even larger share of the population in the top 100 metros: nearly 19 percent of metro populations are Hispanic; nearly 14 percent African American.

We are well on the path to becoming a majority-minority nation and metros are leading the way.

Seventeen metropolitan areas are now majority minority, compared to 14 in 2000 and just five in 1990. Thirty-one metropolitan areas have children populations that are majority minority.

The growing diversity of America owes primarily to the natural increase in racial and ethnic populations that were already present in the U.S. in 2000. But new immigrants continued to come to America this decade, accounting for roughly 30 percent of national population growth. In metro America, the pace and volume of immigration was faster, with the share of growth approaching one third.

As a result, one in every six metropolitan residents is now foreign born compared to one in eight Americans in total. This share is larger than the share experienced during the other great wave of international migration in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Like that earlier period, immigration is one of the most contentious issues in our nation, best illustrated by Arizona's recent actions. Yet the benefits of immigration—and diversity more broadly—are immense: New markets; new ideas; new workers to replace those that retire; new connections to emerging markets outside the U.S.

So we have a central challenge: How do we embrace diversity and adapt to being a majority minority nation? How do we particularly focus on educating and training the future, diverse workforce of Americans, so that they can compete and succeed globally?

**Metros are not only engines of prosperity and on the front lines of demographic transformation... they are also vehicles for delivering environmental sustainability**

The low-carbon economy, like the export-oriented economy, will be primarily invented, financed, produced and delivered in the top 100 metros.

The investment base for the green economy is intensely concentrated; 94 percent of venture capital comes from the top 100 metro areas.

The most innovative aspects of the green economy will cluster around major, largely metro-based, research institutions. Fifteen of the 21 national labs run by the Department of Energy are located within the top 100 metropolitan areas.

Making our old and new homes, office, retail, and commercial facilities energy efficient will primarily be a metropolitan act, given the heavy concentration of our population, buildings, and businesses.

As metros move forward, they will need to make some hard choices about development. Despite the resurgence of many cities and urban cores, sprawl remains alive and well in the United States, which helps explain why the U.S. has double the per capita carbon dioxide emissions of other modern economies like Germany and the United Kingdom.

During this decade, cities and high density suburbs grew a little under 5 percent while less developed counties grew at more than three times that rate. By 2008, more than 40 percent of metropolitan population lived in spread out areas, creating a distended “autoscape” in place of the traditional landscape of human habitation.

One of the most difficult challenges before us, for both environmental and economic reasons, is to move away from a sprawling, distended landscape to communities that connect jobs, housing, and transport for people and firms.

**Final point: America’s metros are confronting the super-sized challenges of our new global order with energy, invention, and creativity.**

Challenged by continuous economic restructuring, metros are finding new ways to bolster innovation whether by financing wind energy and fuel cells in struggling, industrial metros like Cleveland or by connecting new entrepreneurs to money, markets, partners, management, and other resources in prosperous metros like San Diego.

Confronted with a diverse, less educated workforce, metros are laboring to elevate human capital by preparing disadvantaged workers to excel in such global hotbeds of employment as logistics in Louisville, life sciences in the Bay Area, and health care in both.

Burdened by concentrated poverty, a new wave of housing developers are producing mixed income housing in America’s poorest neighborhoods—in Pittsburgh, in Chicago, in St. Louis—as a catalyst for modernizing and improving neighborhood schools. The result is not just quality, distinctive housing but, more importantly, neighborhood schools that work and sharp improvements in student performance.

Faced with rising congestion, exploding gas prices and aging systems, metros are designing and implementing market-shaping infrastructure investments to reconfigure freeways in Milwaukee, modernize water and sewer systems in Atlanta, build out region wide transit in Denver, and install fiber optic networks in Scranton.

And, confronted with what Strobe Talbott calls the “existential threat of global warming,” metros like Seattle and Chicago are taking ambitious steps to create quality, sustainable places by promoting green building, transit oriented development, urban regeneration, and renewable sources of energy.

What knits these policy efforts? It's their embrace of a new style of governance that brings together city and suburban leaders around common purpose, cuts across conventional lines of government, business, university and philanthropy and deploys systemic market and environment shaping investments and interventions.

**In essence, a new ethic of metro building is emerging in the U.S. which is not only transforming communities but the professions that govern, manage, and develop communities.**

At its core, this new ethic recognizes that cities and their metros are complex and interdependent. As such, they require multi-dimensional, integrated and holistic interventions.

This is a sharp break from past practice which deified specialization and often operated mechanistically, at the wrong scale, and in hermetically sealed policies labeled “transportation” or “education” or “housing” or “economic development” or “environmental protection.”

The emergence of this ethic is a challenge to everyone in this room as you embark upon your chosen career, whether you take a job in the public, private, or voluntary sector.

Unlike prior generations, your work is likely to cut across disciplines, programs, practices, and professions.

Given technological innovation, you will be tasked with perfecting new ways of “reading” metros, and deploying new metrics and measures to diagnose metro assets and ailments and gauge metro progress.

You will likely be compelled to be fluent in multiple city “languages”—architecture, demographics, engineering, economics, and sociology—and be cognizant of theory and practice.

You will be a generation of generalists rather than specialists, who see the connections between challenges and work to devise and implement policies that advance multiple objectives simultaneously.

You will not do this alone.

Already we see a palpable shift at the federal level to create programs and policies that champion integrated and holistic thinking.

Since housing must be a platform for opportunity, new housing policies are connecting to education, child care, and transportation policies.

Since transportation must promote mobility and advance sustainability, new transportation policies are expanding choices and embracing dense transit-rich corridors of mixed residential, retail, and employment uses.

Since employment growth must benefit low-income workers, new economic development policies are including workforce development as a central feature.

In the new metro order, making linkages and connections between policies will be the norm not the exception, reinforced by incentives and new structures and systems.

We are, borrowing from the law enforcement's adoption of "community policing," focusing on the "co-production of solutions" across disciplines and professions.

Slowly, gradually, the vertical, silo driven bureaucracies of the past century are being laid horizontal.

In many respects, closing the divide between related but separately administered policies is as important as bridging the partisan and ideological divides that characterize our nation and undermine urban success.

## **Conclusion**

This Metro Moment, in short, telegraphs where we as metro builders need to go.

We need to break down the barriers between specialized and self referential disciplines, professions, and bureaucracies.

We need to link learnings and share innovations across networks of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, across the developing and developed worlds.

We need to build cities and suburbs that are prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive.

The Metro Moment has meaning and import far beyond those few of us who observe metros or build metros or govern metros.

This is truly a call to this generation to build a different world of metro opportunity and possibility.

A Metro Moment requires that we act, with vision, imagination, and confidence. Will we seize the possibilities before us?