Very few Americans have been done as much for her country—and the world—as Leonore Annenberg. As Chief of Protocol, as a philanthropist, as a director of educational and cultural institutions, Leonore Annenberg has embodied the civic spirit upon which the United States was founded and depends on to this day. If there is one aspect of the United States that I consistently have heard people of other countries praise over the years, it is the freedom and passion with which our private citizens engage in public life.

We act as if the country belongs to us because it does. We believe individuals taking the initiative on their own can make a difference because we’ve seen them do it time and time again…and seldom more so than through the initiative of Leonore Annenberg and her late, beloved husband, Walter….

The fact is that in this dramatic, exciting and unsettled century, if you do not go out in search of the world, the world will come in search of you. And even though I am an optimist and a pragmatist just like [Benjamin] Franklin and, I believe, Mrs. Annenberg, I must warn you that the 21st century will test you and do so severely.

Our nation’s security and democratic values are threatened by a multiplicity of adversaries and enemies, real and potential, from rogue states and emerging regional powers to non-state actors and extremist movements. These threats respect no national or regional boundaries or borders. They are fueled by competition over resources, land, information, and ideologies. They also are asymmetric, emerging not just between major economic and military powers, but also between nation states, weak and strong, and loosely organized networks and cells of like-minded fanatics.

Terrorism remains the preeminent danger to our citizens, our homeland, our interests, and our allies. The development of dangerous weapons (biological and chemical as well as nuclear) and delivery systems constitutes the second major threat to the safety of the world community. New, esoteric technologies, such as biotechnology and nanotechnology, offer the potential for great benefit; but they also may be modified for destructive purposes. And these “two-edged” technologies move freely in our globalized economy, as do the scientists and engineers who can weaponize them.

Indeed, all nations are affected by globalization to one degree or another, and while globalization unquestionably has benefited billions of people, it does have an underside. I am referring to fierce competition for energy reserves and emerging markets, disparities between rich and poor nations, and criminal networks that create and feed black markets in drugs and even human beings. The strength of globalization—interdependence—can also be a weakness, rapidly conveying disease from continent to continent, for instance, or facilitating cascading failures in critical infrastructures such as telecommunications, financial systems, or commercial air travel.

As a consequence, we must recognize that for globalization to best serve the public, the public must engage and guide it. Here is where international careers in public service come in. To preserve our security, our prosperity, our freedoms, and worldwide respect for human rights, this rising generation of leaders—people like you—must act with Franklinesque imagination and courage….

I speak to you today as leader of the 16 agency US intelligence community, about 100,000 people strong, but the needs and opportunities I will point out to you in my sphere of responsibility pertain to more than the intelligence profession alone. Comparable examples can be found wherever you look in our nation’s foreign affairs and national security community. And there are many other analogues to be found in the realm of non-governmental and international organizations where Americans also play a vital role.

Perhaps the most stimulating truth about this new century is that leadership is no longer the exclusive preserve of those of us with decades of public service behind us. In the Intelligence Community, we need young people who are ready to lead
right now. Some of this is due to the uncertainties that beset policymakers in the aftermath of the Cold War. Both by design and default, the Intelligence Community was radically downsized in the mid-1990s. Year after year, we lost core capability—priceless intellectual capital—and we were not budgeted to replace it. The tentative thesis, or hope, was that after the demise of the Soviet Union, the world had become a safer place. And then, 9/11 happened, perhaps the cardinal public event of your collective lifetime—your Berlin Wall, your Sputnik, your Cuban missile crisis.

Almost immediately thereafter, President Bush directed an unprecedented (and urgent) renewal of the Intelligence Community civilian workforce. So for the last five years we have been hiring, training, and deploying new professionals as quickly as we can. More than 30% of our professional workforce now has five years of service or less! This means that we have had to develop a new concept of leadership—leadership at all levels—as a way of accelerating the development of our new colleagues.

We can’t wait for decades to implement this transformational approach to leadership because of another feature of our professional demographics. Almost 50% of our senior executives, senior managers, and senior professionals are eligible to retire right now. While most of these dedicated public servants don’t leave us as soon as they can because their job satisfaction is so high, we know that the clock is ticking…and we have very little “bench strength” behind them at a time when the demands of our mission have never been greater…. Service in the Intelligence Community (and throughout the federal government) is changing…. Not only do we seek a new generation of leaders, but we also seek a new kind of leader, one who can achieve results without necessarily resorting to classic, hierarchical “command and control” authority…. Old-fashioned bureaucracies were not built for the demands of the 21st century. To survive and succeed in this new era, we must transform our organizations and our leaders so that they are adaptive, intuitive, mission-focused, and bold….

One of the 9/11 Commission’s most striking conclusions was that America’s intelligence services simply failed to “connect the dots”—in large part because of the organizational, technological, and cultural stovepipes that existed at the time. Every agency had its own way of looking at the world, distinctive preoccupations, and information control practices. No wonder that so many divergent perspectives were not integrated into actionable intelligence.

That must change and is changing. Now our intelligence professionals, from the front line to the front office, are developing a perspective that is multi-organizational, multi-national, multi-cultural, even multi-spectral. We don’t want groupthink, of course. What we want is “multi-think”—an individual and collective ability to really work a problem from every conceivable perspective. How does one acquire such a broad frame of reference? In our case, through something called “joint duty.” That’s a term that comes from the Pentagon, where far-sighted senior leaders concluded in the 1980’s that future wars could not be fought and won by the military services acting separately. Now, as a matter of law, you cannot become a general officer without having completed at least one “joint tour”—that is, service in an organization where the color and cut of the uniforms around you differs from your own. For promotion to the senior ranks of the Intelligence Community, we are putting a similar policy in place…. I don’t suggest that every American should become a public servant, but I do think every American should support public service and understand its incalculable contributions around the world…. [T]his a century sorely in need of your skill, imagination, and good will.

Again, it’s been a great privilege to speak with you this evening. I wish all of you, the Annenberg School for Communication, the Annenberg Public Policy Center, the Annenberg School’s Institute for Public Service, and last but by no means least, Mrs. Leonore Annenberg herself, the very best.

Thank you very much.