

“In diplomacy, we often hear the adage that “countries have no eternal friends, only eternal interests.” While this may generally be the case, I sincerely believe, based on my 20 years of experience working on U.S.-India relations, that the United States and India share both common interests and genuine friendship.”

U.S. Ambassador to India and Keynote Speaker at the IACCGH 20th-anniversary gala, Kenneth I. Juster, in a brilliant address, put a lens on the strength of U.S.-India ties as well as the long-term growth potential for the two nations to work together to address challenges and confront issues.

At the event held at Hilton Americas on 15th June, Ambassador Juster addressed a packed room of over 900 attendees. He pointed out four future challenges India will have to face: managing the rise of China, countering terrorism, promoting economic growth, and modernizing its military. Ambassador Juster spoke of protecting a free and open Indo Pacific and limiting the scourge of terrorism. The United States, he stressed, wants to be a major partner in India’s economic growth and has given India STA-1 status – a license given only to our closest allies for the sale of high technology products. India, Ambassador Juster continued, is projected to spend \$150 billion on military modernization in the next decade. The United States is keen to assist India’s efforts in building up its indigenous defense base and capabilities, and major U.S. defense companies are in India producing components for complex defense systems.

Describing the relationship as one of the natural allies, Ambassador Juster remarked that the two countries will face any challenges with the strong people-to-people ties between the two nations.

LyondellBasell CEO Bob Patel, who did the honors of introducing the Ambassador, described him as “eminently qualified and the right man

at the right time.” He pointed out that Ambassador Juster’s appointment was unanimously confirmed in two months, which is “lightning speed in Washington DC.”

Master of ceremonies and Chamber Past President Sanjay Ramabhadran welcomed the gathering, which included several elected officials from the Federal, State, and Local level. He drew attention to the “visionary leadership of the Chamber founders” and offered interesting figures about U.S.-India trade ties. In 1999, when the Chamber was founded, trade between the United States and India was pegged at 12 and one-half billion dollars and unflatteringly described as “flat as a chapati.” Today, it’s a whopping \$140 billion and growing exponentially. Texas accounts for about 15% of the trade, while the Houston-India trade stands at \$6.6 billion.

An Executive Director who “lives and breathes” the Chamber, Jagdip Ahluwalia spoke of the Chamber’s efforts in helping Houston and India “discover business opportunities” but added that the Chamber is also about local job creation, investment in the local economy, connecting small & medium enterprises, professionals, and businesses to global corporations.

As a member of the trade delegation led by Mayor Sylvester Turner to India in 2018, Chamber President Swapan Dhairyawan highlighted the considerable bilateral trade contacts derived from this visit and the “durable friendships and strong economic impact” the mission would have in the Mayor’s Office, Greater Houston Partnership, Houston First, NASA, Houston Airport System, and Station Houston.

Brief remarks were made by David Minceberg, Director, Houston First, and Ambassador Juan Sosa, Dean of the Consular Corps. Guest of Honor Mayor Turner acknowledged the work done by the Chamber for

the “vibrancy and vitality of this city,” and noted that progress can happen only “when everyone gets a seat at the table.”

Consul General Dr. Anupam Ray, whose “accessibility has endeared him to the community,” appreciated the friendship between India and the United States and said it was not “a transactional one but one based on trust.” Twenty years from now, India, he remarked, will be known as “a rich and powerful country, but should also be known as a kind, gentle and tolerant nation.” Spotlighting the outstanding contributions of community members, the Chamber presented Former Harris County Judge Ed Emmett and Dr. Durga Agrawal with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Council member Himesh Gandhi was honored with the Rising Star Award, while the Business of the Year Award went to Hilton Americas, Houston. In a tribute to nurses, who form an integral part of the healthcare system, the Chamber presented Moani Thomas, a nurse who arrived at American shores 50 years ago and paved the way for many others, with the Trailblazers Award. The award was accepted by Thomas and Accamma Kallel, President of the Nurses Association.

President-Elect Tarush Anand, who described himself as a “second generation member” – his father and uncle are longtime Chamber members – stated that his efforts as President would be directed at bringing in the next generation in meaningful ways to ensure the continuity of the Chamber’s relevance. The National Anthems were rendered by Serene Kaggal and Eesha Dhairyawan. An energetic dance by Infused Performing Arts and a Mashup sung effortlessly by Ishya Kachru formed the entertainment segment.