

Jagdish Bhagwati Festschrift Gala Dinner

Remarks by Donald Davis, Chair, Columbia Economics Department

I would like to extend, first, great thanks to Jagdish for all of the things he has given me personally, as a student and as a colleague and as a mentor through all of these years. I am very happy to welcome all of you to Columbia on behalf of the Department and the University. As I said, I have known Jagdish and Padma for many years, and I think it's long overdue for us to have the extended family here. So, Jagdish... there are a few words that seem to crop up over and over again in the discussions of him – brilliance, wit, and humanity.

As a student, you get a great opportunity to see the brilliance. He works on problems that matter. He attacks them in a very straightforward, very transparent way. There are no loose ends on those models, no handles sort of sitting to the side when you've assembled them. And when you're done, you see the problem with a great transparency that you hadn't seen before, and I think that in terms of the brilliance, those are the things.

In terms of the wit, I think you can go and you can read through his books, they're very amusing, but what I think is wonderful about the wit that's there is that every point is telling. They're great jokes, but they make a very strong point.

And the final thing, in terms of the humanity, I don't think I can top what Kofi Annan said, so I won't even try. I'll try to go to a little bit more micro level, which is, again, I think that many people at the conference took a moment to speak to the fact that, as a student, you know, it is surprising, the warmth that you find from Jagdish. You go into his office, he invites you in, he's scurrying about. And he asks you, "What are you working on now?" and you begin to tell him, also quite sure that the last time that he asked you that question that he hadn't really listened, just because he had been talking the whole time. And indeed, as he's asking you, again, "What are you working on?" he, indeed, continues to talk, and the only opportunity you have is simply to talk right over him. And you get about five or ten minutes into it, and he says, "But you told me that last time." As, I think, those of us who have gone on not only to be students but to be Assistant Professors and, probably, other walks of life have known – I think that they called it after-sales service when they were speaking today – oftentimes when you head off into these new ventures, they're difficult transitions to go through; certainly life as an Assistant Professor has its challenges. And there's an extraordinary warmth and humanity that Jagdish brings to that, that he really reaches out when people need him. And I think it is, indeed, that same humanity that leads him to think hard, and carefully, and thoroughly, about the deep, important, problems of the world economy. And so, on this occasion, all of my warm regards and love.