

TRAILBLAZERS TALK

Q & A with Ravi Kumar S.,
President, Infosys and
Luke Bronin, Mayor of Hartford

Link to conversation: <http://bit.ly/2YMQ0By>

Q: Going back to our inauguration day in December, there were talks about Infosys starting the wave of making Hartford the new Silicon Valley and I was just curious.

Ravi Kumar S. (RK): That's the story we told for all the employees we hired from other states.

Q: Well, now I'm just curious, is that still in progress or what's the plan like now?

Mayor Bronin (MB): Well, look I don't know that we are aspiring to be the new 'any other place.' We want to be, you know, the best Hartford that we can be. I think, it's worth noting that when you talk about Silicon Valley you're talking about an area that if you overlaid it on top of the Hartford area, it would stretch from, you know, Springfield and beyond down to New Haven and if you look at what's happening in that area, in that valley, that can attract the Connecticut River Valley or the 91 corridor, which is sometimes referred to as the "knowledge corridor". There really is a tremendous concentration of educational institutions doing groundbreaking research of incredible, you know, Fortune 500, Fortune 100, Fortune 50 companies doing incredible research and groundbreaking work in many different industries. You've got a tremendous concentration of talent, you know, Brookings Institution actually looks at the Greater Hartford area and has called it one of twenty knowledge capitals in the entire world, because of the concentration of talent and research that's happening here. So, leaving Silicon Valley aside, I think what we do want to do is make sure that the world knows about what's happening here and looks at us in that broader context, because we are one economic region around here and it's a powerful one and I think that if we can harness the energy and the talent that's in this region and show some greater pride in what we are and greater recognition of what we are and sell it and promote it and work together to keep building it, then we can compete with any metro area in the country. And as I said earlier, the truth is that I don't know if I want to be Silicon Valley, I'd rather be, you know, in a place where you can be in the mountains in an hour, you can be down in the coast in an hour, you can be in Boston in two hours, New York in two hours and it's a heck of a lot cheaper to live here than it is in any of those places. So, I don't think we should define our aspirations by what others are. I think that we should look at what we have, the potential to be and keep working to do that.

Q: My question is, how do you want to roll up all the insurtech together, because, there are a lot of siloed initiatives happening across the board in Hartford and we think, you know, I think it's a good opportunity, more the merrier, but, at the same time, I feel, you know, at least from an insurtech perspective, things are getting diluted in that sense unless, you know, we want to hear your perspective about how do you bring all of them together, so it could benefit the industries?

MB: Yeah, so I don't know if I agree that the insurtech piece is getting diluted. I think, you know, that's a pretty concentrated focused effort. Of course, all the companies that are involved in the insurtech accelerator are also doing their own innovation work at their own companies. But, I think the most important thing is just creating an environment where people who are working on exciting new ideas can have those, you know, unexpected serendipitous interactions that get them thinking about something that they weren't thinking about before and that's about creating a community. I think, that a lot of that's starting to happen naturally, you know, when you look at it, it's not just insurtech, it's also advanced manufacturing and it's the other areas too, you know, if you look at the broader Hartford region, this is a center, a global center, of aerospace manufacturing and of advanced manufacturing in general. I mentioned Stanley, Black and Decker, they are really at the leading edge of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and, you know, they are doing a lot of their innovation work and groundbreaking work on, you know, additive manufacturing, 3D printing, you know, new packaging, all kinds of things. They're doing it here but again I don't think it's about, you know, forcing people together or trying to combine it all into one formal thing, it's about creating a community where enough stuff is happening that people can spark other ideas in others.

Q: Hartford has some challenges out in the neighborhoods as well. How do you manage that balance? You're growing and you basically are re-growing a metro area while serving the neighborhoods and what role do you think companies like ours should be playing in that balance?

MB: It's a great question. And, I see this as one unified mission, you know, a lot of our economic development work hasn't been in the downtown, it's been an hour out in our neighborhoods and actually if you look at where investments are happening right now, a lot of it is outside the downtown core, you know, you have historic neighborhoods like Blue Hills and Upper Albany, where there's a tremendous amount of activity happening right now. Down in Coatesville, which was, you know, the old center of the first Industrial Revolution where you have

that old, what was vacant dilapidated massive industrial complex that is now kind of back to life as both residential and commercial right next to where the soccer team's gonna be coming in. You've got neighborhoods like Parkville which are one of the most diverse and exciting neighborhoods I think in the city that's also right along the busway where there's a tremendous amount of energy in some economic development efforts down there. So I think you know we're trying to look everywhere at our opportunities to grow. We're also trying to take advantage of this new legislation on Opportunity Zones. Opportunity Zones create tax advantage for investing capital gains in traditionally distressed areas. We have ten census tracts in Hartford that have been designated Opportunity Zones and we're pushing hard to make sure that investors out there know about the opportunities here but then the other thing and this is maybe the most important thing is, making sure that, back to the conversation that Ravi and I had, that there really is a pipeline to opportunity for those who live here and are growing up here. I'm excited about the partnership between Infosys and Trinity. I'm excited about, you know, the partnerships between a lot of companies and our community colleges like you know Capital Community College right in downtown Hartford but really making sure that our companies see it as part of their mission to not just be part of a growing ecosystem but to help make sure that Hartford's rise is one that everybody can share in regardless of where they live.

RK: We're actually now getting the foundation to come here and be a part of the development of computer science education and K-12 schools and we want our employees to be involved in the journey. You know, in some sense, Infosys lends a part of its financial capital to the foundation. We now want, we now think we can lend our intellectual capital by involving employees in the hubs, so that's something we'll do now.

Q: I have a question around public works involvement. Basically, so a young generation, like high schoolers, do you foresee any plans for the high schoolers getting involved in government public works and not through organizations like Lions Club or something that definitely get involved and then only higher levels at Lions Club have direct contact with Mayors like, you know, but there are high schoolers who want to do something or future attorneys like, you know, people who want to become attorneys. But they want to get to the platform where they can get involved at this age in the public works?

MB: Well, I think there are lots of ways to do it, you know, one way of getting involved is getting involved in politics, and regardless of, you know, where I'm not gonna make a partisan speech but, you know, regardless of where you get involved we've got a participatory electoral process and that's an exciting way to learn about it, and exciting way to start getting involved. There are also internship opportunities, I mean we have interns every summer from Hartford in Hartford City Hall, you know, giving young students an opportunity to see what kind of work they could be part of. Our city council President actually, Glendowyn Thames, often talks about the effect that a similar internship like that had on her that it opened her eyes to the possibility of work in public service and how meaningful it could be and it wasn't what she had originally planned but something that she discovered through an internship program like that. So, we're doing that. I wish we could do it at a much larger scale. Going back to the other question, by the way, that's another way that companies can help, by making sure that they are building those internship and apprenticeship programs to help young people get involved and discover what opportunities are available to them. I know, I'm departing from your question right now, but just thinking about the question before this and the broader conversation. We have to recognize the reality that as hard as we're working and as important as it is to build this innovation ecosystem and to revitalize the core of our city, we have thousands, many, many thousands of young people who grow up in the shadow of large office towers like this and can't imagine having the opportunity to work there and don't see the path to get from where they are to working there. This is for them too.

RK: Thank you so much, let's have a round of applause for the Mayor.

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