

****Inauguration of Great Decisions Program:****

The speaker humorously begins by pretending to welcome the audience to an inauguration, but clarifies they are at the Great Decisions program hosted by the World Affairs Council of Oregon. They express their enthusiasm for the program, which was established in Portland in 1954 as a grassroots global affairs program. The speaker emphasizes the importance of global citizenship and the necessity of engaging with international issues.

****Rescheduling and Live Streaming Announcement:****

Due to severe snow, a previous program was rescheduled to March 10th. The speaker informs the audience that the series is being live-streamed, allowing those who cannot attend in person to watch online. Additionally, the program is now free for members, with a nominal fee for non-members, to support broader outreach efforts.

****Partnership and Upcoming Speaker:****

The speaker announces a partnership and introduces an upcoming speaker on the European Union (EU), who is noted for his passionate and knowledgeable approach. They also mention that the speaker disagrees with a chapter in the audience's Great Decisions book, suggesting an opportunity for critical engagement.

****Collaboration with Mercy Corps:****

The speaker highlights the collaboration with Mercy Corps and introduces Najha Haider, a seasoned development expert with extensive experience in various regions, including her current role with Mercy Corps in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

****Najha Haider's Background and Experience:****

Najha Haider shares her background, starting with her arrival in the United States in 1998 and her initial work with Mercy Corps as an intern in Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule. She recounts her experiences with Mercy Corps over the years, including her deployment to Pakistan following the onset of the war in Afghanistan after 9/11.

****Post-9/11 Travel and Humanitarian Work:****

Najha describes the intense security measures she faced when traveling with her Pakistani passport shortly after 9/11. Upon arriving in Pakistan, she worked to deliver aid to displaced populations around the border areas, navigating bureaucratic challenges and coordinating with the Pakistani government.

****Returning to Portland and Continued Engagement with Afghanistan:****

After working on the ground, Najha returned to her job in Portland, which was focused on the Balkans at the time. She continued to visit Afghanistan periodically, witnessing the evolving situation and Mercy Corps' efforts to support agricultural development, water management, and youth skills training.

****Mercy Corps' Role and Programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan:****

Najha provides an overview of Mercy Corps' work, emphasizing their community-driven and market-based approach. She describes their initiatives in Afghanistan, such as promoting alternative crops to poppy, and in Pakistan, where they focus on public health programming among other efforts. The challenge of corruption in both countries is also acknowledged.