THANK YOU very much, Secretary (Estrella) Alabastro for your introduction. Dr. Culaba, thank you and congratulations on this very important conference of PAASE, and welcome to the many important Filipino scientists from the different parts of the world, especially America. Congressman (Luis) Villafuerte, other officials of PAASE, other officials of the Philippine government, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, thank you to PAASE, the Philippine-American Academy of Science and Engineering, for dovetailing this conference with the economy. And this is so fitting. I am proud to say that not only did I talk about science and technology in my last State of the Nation Address, but in my first State of the Nation Address in 2001, I declared that technology is the foundation of future economic development.

Therefore, in our medium-term Philippine development plan, among the strategic measures contained therein is to mobilize and disseminate knowledge. In that same medium-term Philippine development plan, we identified as the key challenges in science and technology the following:

- Make science and technology policies supportive of national development goals and policies. This conference dovetailing S&T in the economy fits into that challenge.
- Enhance competitiveness of the country’s human capital.
- Develop a critical mass of scientists and R&D personnel.
- Speed up knowledge creation and dissemination for greater productivity and job creation, especially to the rural areas, and improve the mechanism and programs to promote and encourage technology-based entrepreneurship.

That was in our medium-term plan and it is still there. At first, the Philippines had little of the huge funds required to meet these challenges. The first order of the day for us was to put our economic house in order and find the funds to meet those challenges.

Thanks to congressmen like Louie Villafuerte, we had our fiscal reforms, our peso strengthened, therefore, our interest spreads went down and we saved ₱30 billion last
year. Because of our savings and because of our increased funds from revenues and taxes, more funds are now being earmarked to strengthen our educational system, including in the basic grades and years, strengthening math and science in our basic education.

And because of these reforms, the Philippines today basks in glowing reviews of our fiscal and economic reforms. Just today, I came from a groundbreaking ceremony of a pharmaceutical company and nutritional company in Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Quezon) worth $80 million, and they said that they did this expansion because of our economic reforms.

The record-breaking high set by the stock market, the peak in overseas remittances, and the raging performance of the peso are clear manifestations that our economic homerun is in play. Not even the intense politicking brought about by the forthcoming elections can spoil the larger gain of the economy.

Our eye is on the ball as we aim our volleys on better-paying jobs, improved infrastructure, including technology, enhanced social services, the alleviation of poverty and hunger, fighting terror, and nurturing the environment—all of which will benefit from technology.

The Filipino people are shrugging off the past and looking forward to the fruits of steady growth, trade, and investment. We must all seize the moment to reach the summit through our unity and hard work, brandishing the Filipino team spirit that has gained renown worldwide.

The Philippines is a team to beat when it comes to excellence, resiliency, and staying power in a competitive world. But there are specific challenges we have to contend with. And if I may digress momentarily from science and technology, I’d like to take this opportunity to express that I’m saddened by the fact that the visa hold has been employed on the deployment of our Filipino nurses as a result of the nursing exams of last year.

I am instructing the Secretary of Labor to immediately look into the findings of the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) and seek all forms of relief from the visa hold and appeal for reconsideration of the decision. The government shall provide financial assistance to the 2006 nursing board passers for the retake of the exams as called for by the CGFNS with the proper body to oversee the project, including having a common review center. We shall uphold the prestige and excellence of the Philippine nursing profession as we also promote the prestige and excellence of the Filipino scientist all over the world with the plans that we can now have the funds to carry out.

In my State of the Nation Address, in the portion that was drafted by Congressman Louie Villafuerte, I said that the country that wants to be a player in the global economy needs bold and well-funded research and development initiatives of its own for in today’s global economy knowledge is the greatest creator of wealth.
And last year, I met with some of you. I met with members of PAASE along with Secretary Alabastro, ICT and education agencies, and Congressman Villafuerte. We agreed on five action plans.

First, a review of policies by a presidential coordinating body. So today, I will issue an executive order creating … there I have signed it … the Presidential Coordinating Council on R&D.

Our second agreed action plan was to expand the number of Filipino science and technology experts. This morning, I had a telephone conversation with Secretary of the Budget Nonoy Andaya. I instructed him to release ₱200 million for science and engineering Masters and PhD scholarship programs.

Our third agreement was to establish a science complex. Our supplemental budget for 2006 provides ₱500 million for a UP science complex. And as we were walking in, I asked President Emerlinda Roman, “How’s our science complex coming along?” And she said, “It’s coming along fine!”

The fourth agreement that we made during that meeting was to strengthen linkages between and among the stakeholders of S&T development to speed up technology transfer to micro, small, and medium enterprises. I am glad that Nina Alabastro and the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) will establish this year four business incubators. I've asked Nina to make one of those four business incubators an incubator for virgin coconut oil. We would like virgin coconut oil to be as famous all over the world as Italian olive oil is. And Nina said, indeed, that’s one of her major programs. And one of the incubators will be in Camarines Sur, which is coconut country.

And so indeed I hope to see these four come into fruition this year.

Our fifth agreement was to increase public awareness and advocacy for S&T. I think what you’ll be doing here for the next two days is in accordance with that. Aside from this important conference attended by some of our Filipino superstars in the science and technology field in the United States, I count on the PAASE members to regularly provide science and technology information materials to print media.

This is one of the paybacks of our fiscal reforms—that we can now move toward tripling private and public sector spending on R&D. And now that we are closer to the goal to give a bigger share of the budget for science and technology, I am optimistic that together we can fully tap the wonders of science and technology to achieve growth, preserve peace, and improve lives on the longer term.

_Mabuhay_ ang Filipino-American scientists!

Thank you.

March 22, 2007