

The Tenth Anniversary of the Council of American Ambassadors' International Affairs Fellowship Program

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Ten years ago, the Council of American Ambassadors established its International Affairs Fellowship Program. I was honored to have been asked by Ambassador Keith L. Brown, then Council President, to establish this program, prior to the Council's 20th Anniversary Gala in 2003, and subsequently to raise funds and recruit a cadre of Ambassador-mentors to carry out this initiative. The commitment and dedication of our mentors, which have included Ambassador Julia Chang Bloch, Co-chair of the Program, Ambassadors Keith L. Brown, Timothy A. Chorba, Stuart W. Holliday, G. Philip Hughes, Thomas P. Melady, Paul A. Russo, M. Osman Siddique, Robert D. Stuart, Jr., Timothy L. Towell, Aldona Z. Wos, M.D. and the late Patricia Lynch Ewell, with the support of our other Council colleagues, has made it possible for this initiative to flourish and accomplish impressive goals. Our Executive Director, Carolyn Gretzinger, and International Program Associate, Angela Norcross, have provided excellent staff support in conducting the Program every year. I am grateful to all of these individuals for their contributions to this noble endeavor.

A small portion of the proceeds from the 20th Anniversary Gala funded the first year of the Fellowship Program. For several years thereafter, I raised funds from individuals and foundations to keep the Program going. In 2007, I called the Executive Director of the Annenberg Foundation and solicited a grant in the amount of \$500,000, which was approved by its chair, Ambassador Leonore Annenberg, who had succeeded me as US Chief of Protocol and was a member of our Council. Her late husband, Ambassador Walter Annenberg had also been a Council member. With that grant, the Fellowship Program's long-term viability was assured. We are deeply grateful for this generous support.

Since the Program's inception, we have had a cooperative relationship with the Department of State in conducting the Fellowship Program. As a sign of the priority that the Department of State assigns to the Program, every Director-General of the Foreign Service serving during the last decade has addressed each class of Fellows at our annual Welcome Dinner. During their internships at the Department, the Fellows worked with and learned from career Foreign Service Officers. Through meetings with Council members, the Fellows received valuable mentoring about careers in diplomacy and international affairs. In addition to their internships at the Department and mentoring by our members,

* *Editor's Note: Ambassador Valdez is the Founder of the International Affairs Fellowship Program and served as Acting President and President of the Council from 2010-2012. He currently serves as President Emeritus of the Council of American Ambassadors.*

Fellows also pursued academic courses in international politics and economics through our partnership with The Fund for American Studies.

The Fellows are rising seniors selected from State's pool of summer undergraduate interns, all of whom are invited to apply to our program. They are selected based on several factors: strong commitment to pursuing a career in diplomacy or international affairs, demonstrated leadership ability, academic excellence, and pursuit of academic majors in international relations or related subjects, and study abroad experience and/or fluency in one or more foreign languages. The Fellows are truly outstanding young leaders, who hail from all parts of the country and are studying at public universities, Ivy League schools, and private colleges. They are some of the most outstanding young leaders in the United States and have great potential to make important contributions to our country.

On May 6 and 7, we will commemorate the Council's 30th Anniversary and the 10th Anniversary of the International Affairs Fellowship Program. The Fellowship mentors will host a leadership conference for the Fellowship Alumni to celebrate the Program's achievements to date and plan for the future. Fifty-four Fellows have graduated from the Program during this first decade, and many of them are well underway in their post-graduate studies or careers in diverse occupations dealing with diplomacy and international affairs.

The International Affairs Fellowship Program was conceived with the conviction that the most valuable legacy contribution that American Ambassadors could make to our country was to help develop young leaders for careers in diplomacy and international affairs. Ten years later, as the United States is attempting to end two of its longest wars and contend with a host of economic, political and military challenges around the world, leadership in diplomacy and international affairs is more important than ever before. We are convinced that the graduates of the Fellowship Program will make valuable contributions to meet these challenges.

Our Council members have served our country during careers in both the public and private sectors. Now our goal is to help to develop the next generation of American leaders in international affairs and diplomacy. We hope that the Fellowship Alumni Association, with the support of the Council, will foster a strong sense of unity, camaraderie and cooperation among the Fellows as they move forward in their careers. As I have said to each class of Fellows, this program is not just about an intensive summer mentoring experience with Ambassador-mentors, but rather a lifelong relationship as a member of our Council family. We remain fully committed to support our Fellowship Alumni in the development of their careers in service to our country.