

Council of American Ambassadors' 30th Anniversary: Honoring our Founders' Legacy

Abelardo L. Valdez

President Emeritus of the Council of American Ambassadors
United States Ambassador and Chief of Protocol, 1979-1981
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On May 6, 2013, Ambassador Abelardo L. Valdez, President Emeritus of the Council of American Ambassadors, presided over an awards ceremony honoring the founders of the Council and celebrating the Council's 30th anniversary. Following is an excerpt from Ambassador Valdez's remarks. The complete text is found on the Council's website, www.americanambassadors.org.

We meet this evening to honor five of our members, including one of our founders, with the Benjamin Franklin Award for their distinguished diplomatic service on behalf the United States of America and their outstanding leadership of the Council of American Ambassadors during the first three decades of its existence.

Tonight we also honor the memory of two other founders, Ambassador Henry L. Kimelman and Ambassador Milton A. Wolf, for their outstanding contributions to the Council by establishing a new award in their names. This prestigious award will be presented for the first time to three distinguished ambassadors, who, like Ambassadors Kimelman and Wolf, have made outstanding contributions to the Council during this crucial period. These awards are bestowed in keeping with the theme of the 30th Anniversary of the Council's founding, which is "Honoring Our Founders' Legacy."

RECIPIENTS OF THE BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AWARD

Ambassador William vanden Heuvel

Ambassador Keith L. Brown

Ambassador Bruce S. Gelb

Ambassador Henry L. Kimelman (*posthumously*)

Ambassador Ogden Reid

RECIPIENTS OF THE HENRY L. KIMELMAN AND MILTON A. WOLF AWARD

Ambassador Joseph B. Gildenhorn

Ambassador Glen A. Holden

Ambassador John L. Loeb, Jr.

Thirty years after its founding, the Council of American Ambassadors is a respected and thriving organization because our founders had a vision for creating a unique organization and provided the leadership for realizing that vision. They created a new organization that would enable former non-career ambassadors to continue making contributions to our country and the Department of State, and to maintain fraternal ties with their colleagues. Prior to the Council's founding, there was no organization where they could meet with their non-career ambassadorial colleagues and discuss the critical issues of American foreign policy, stay informed about world events, travel abroad together to meet with foreign government officials and enjoy camaraderie with other

Americans, who like Benjamin Franklin, left their professions and businesses, to serve our country as its highest-ranking diplomatic representatives in nations around the world and in the leading international organizations.

After completing their tours of duty, however, non-career ambassadors were almost never invited back to the Department to share their opinions on policy issues or to participate in any capacity, and there was scant recognition of their contributions to American diplomacy. The Council has changed most of that for the better, especially during the last decade. In the process, it has gained the respect of the Department of State, the career Foreign Service, and the foreign affairs community. Much good will has been established by the Council with the Department of State through several of its programs, which support the Department's mission in tangible ways.

Today the Council has an array of excellent programs in which its members can participate at will. These include the orientation program for newly appointed non-career ambassadors, established in cooperation with the Foreign Service Institute; a cooperative reserve service program that will enable members to serve as advisors to the Department on a range of issues; two fellowship programs where they can mentor young leaders interested in careers in diplomacy and international affairs; another fellowship program through which we provide mentoring and specialized training in public diplomacy for mid-level Foreign Service officers; a conference series held in Washington and around the country in cooperation with prestigious research institutions and universities; an Ambassadors Roundtable that enables our members to interact and discuss bilateral relations with members of the Diplomatic Corps; a respected foreign affairs journal, *The Ambassadors Review*, which provides them an opportunity to publish their views on critical foreign policy issues; and an online platform, *Ambassadors Perspectives*, which is another outlet for sharing their views on such issues; as well as fact-finding missions to countries around the world to meet with foreign and US officials to discuss current issues and developments in our bilateral relations with those nations.

We have come a long way during the past 30 years, and I am confident that the Council will continue to grow its membership, programs, resources, and prestige in the decades to come. Interestingly, other foreign affairs organizations established by career Foreign Service officers, such as the American Academy of Diplomacy, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and the Foreign Affairs Council are now reaching out to our Council and its members for support and participation in their programs and on their boards of directors. This is distinct turnaround from the situation existing 30 years ago, when non-career ambassadors were not perceived to be worthy collaborators or allies.

All of this progress is due to the leadership of our Founders and other leaders of the Founding Generation, and this is the rich legacy they have bequeathed to us. This is the legacy we honor.