

# The United States' Public Diplomacy Platform in Davos

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**T**he World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, is unlike any other event of its kind. Over a five-day span at the end of January each year, 2,000 world leaders, Fortune 500 chief executive officers, international media moguls and nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders gather in the small alpine village of Davos to participate on panels, in industry meetings and in “off the record” sessions. The WEF meetings in Davos have been a ripe target for public diplomacy efforts over the past 38 years, and the WEF’s founder, Dr. Klaus Schwab, has preserved the original intent of the forum in maintaining its focus as a place for informal dialogue and debate on major social and economic problems.

Compared to other annual meetings such as the G-8 Summits or APEC Leaders Meetings, Davos fosters an atmosphere where debate and intellectual exchange can occur at any time and in any place in the accessible rustic village. It provides participating world leaders with the lifeblood that they need, which former US President Ronald Reagan so famously described as, “Information—the oxygen of the modern age.” Davos is about information, both delivered and received, and the US government uses the WEF annual meeting as an ever more powerful platform to deliver key diplomatic messages and to engage our allies and partners, as well as our critics.

Davos 2008 was an important milestone for the United States. During the final year of the Bush presidency, the administration dispatched five cabinet secretaries, three deputy secretaries and numerous under secretaries to Davos. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, US Trade Representative Susan Schwab and Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Robert Kimmitt, participated in five days of panels and discussions that covered topics ranging from Middle East Peace, climate change and educational reform to immigration, financial market stability and trade liberalization. In the presence of world leaders, including Tony Blair, Shimon Peres, Pervez Musharraf, Hamid Karzai, David Miliband and Yasuo Fukuda, the US delegation not only presented a clear path forward on major social and economic issues, but it also stood up for and defended the United States and its policies whenever a misperception was voiced or an unfair criticism was leveled. Public diplomacy not only delivers positive messages to the information network, but also refutes, substantively, those misperceptions in the information chain before they are adopted as “reality.”

Embassy Bern has worked closely with Klaus Schwab and his WEF team to include US delegations that not only speak with strength and conviction on the global issues of our time, but also are internationally recognized experts on the pressing issues of the day. During the last three years, our Mission has helped shape six panels for Klaus and his team. The environment, energy security, global prosperity and Islamic outreach are among the topics on which we have collaborated with Dr. Schwab. No other nation works

so closely with the WEF on topics and participants, and no other nation has our record of success in organizing panels for key officials.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in her first visit to Davos, grasped the spirit of this year's WEF annual meeting and took charge in her opening keynote address, which Dr. Klaus Schwab described as, "one of the top five speeches in my 38 years in Davos."

She inspired the 1,200 assembled leaders in the Congress Hall with her opening remarks:

"There is not one challenge in the world today that will get better if we approach it without confidence in the appeal and effectiveness of our ideals—political and economic freedom, open markets and free trade, human dignity and human rights, equal opportunity and the rule of law. Without these principles, backed by all forms of national power, we may be able to manage global problems for awhile, but we will not lay a foundation to solve them."

Secretary Rice also recognized that the United States must work with our partners and allies through diplomacy to resolve the world's most important and pressing issues.

The Secretary's humility but supreme confidence allowed her to engage with global opinion leaders in Davos on the climate of economic and political anxiety in our world today. At the same time, she reminded all of us that the global problems we face will not get easier if we "pass" on making the hard choices. One could feel a sense of hope in the Congress Centre that evening as the overflow crowd responded enthusiastically to her remarks.

United States Trade Representative Susan Schwab has taken the WEF annual meeting and made it her personal WTO Doha mini-ministerial. Working from Wednesday to Sunday, she engaged colleagues bilaterally, multilaterally and via the media to spread the message of the US global objective of expanding free trade. Ambassador Schwab stressed that completing the Doha Round "is doable, and doable within 2008." She added that President Bush is fully committed to a successful outcome in 2008 and that the US Congress could make it possible to approve a Doha Agreement if a comprehensive agreement is completed in the next few months. Ambassador Schwab's open market message is rooted in her conviction that if a Doha Agreement generates new trade flows and cuts into existing trade barriers, then the United States is ready to make a substantial contribution and do what it takes to finish the Doha Round. This is not idle talk; her message was heard by 1,100 CEOs and media professionals assembled on Saturday. Her words, which also reached bureaucrats and officials around the world via the WEF home page and streaming video, were another highlight of the annual meeting.

Energy security and the environment were important themes during the 2008 annual meeting, as they were in 2007. Secretary of Energy Bodman was again in Davos to engage his counterparts, meet with industry leaders and talk to the press. He told the WEF audience that the United States continues to make progress to improve its energy security

and confront the challenge of climate change without undermining economic growth. Initiatives such as the Major Economies Meetings on Energy Security and Climate Change and the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate are examples of how the United States is cooperating with its partners in the effort to reach a post-2012 Kyoto Framework Agreement.

These multilateral efforts on climate change are in addition to the administration's domestic efforts to reduce emissions and improve energy efficiency. In 2006, this resulted in a 1.5 percent decrease in emissions from the 2005 level and a 4.2 percent increase in energy efficiency, the largest improvement since 1985, placing the United States ahead of schedule to meet the administration's goal of reducing greenhouse gas intensity 18 percent by 2012. These facts are generally not well known in Europe. Getting this message out is part of our overall public diplomacy effort to counter misperceptions and to change the tone of discussions.

The US delegation in Davos, with the participation of Secretaries Spellings and Chertoff, also spent significant time discussing the issues of education and immigration. These two global issues are pressing areas of concern for much of the world as nations attempt to adapt to new patterns of immigration and the associated problems and opportunities, including the changing needs of our youth in the classrooms. Secretary Spellings engaged her colleagues on how states build education systems to meet the demands of an increasingly networked world, where students are more diverse linguistically and culturally. She highlighted the importance of innovation and technology in the classroom, and pointed to the continued partnership between US public and private sectors as a model on how to best prepare students for the future. With USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore, Secretary Spellings participated in the "Partnerships for Education Workshop" alongside dozens of business and academic leaders. She also reached out to companies with active US educational and community outreach programs including Accenture, UBS, Motorola and Qualcomm.

Secretary Chertoff was engaging in his discussion on open borders and the links between immigration and US economic prosperity. He emphasized that the ability of US immigrants to assimilate and move up the economic and social ladder make phenomena such as radicalization less problematic in the United States. As I reflect on Secretary Chertoff's point, Arizona Senator and Presidential hopeful John McCain's words on immigration and the American dream ring true when he reminded us that America should be judged by the number of people trying to come to our shores, not by the numbers desiring to depart.

Engaging a skeptical world is not an easy task. Public diplomacy is vital if the United States is to correct skewed impressions. Communication and public diplomacy are major reasons for the success of the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos. Klaus Schwab has made Davos media friendly. One of his primary goals each year is to expand the media's reach. As a result, world leaders travel to the Swiss Alps to deliver addresses aimed at their constituents around the world.

The United States' best public diplomacy professional, Ronald Reagan, was given the nickname, the "Great Communicator." He was adept at talking to the press and engaged on all fronts, both foreign and domestic. The United States has taken a page from the "Gipper," and Secretaries Rice, Bodman, Spellings and Chertoff and USTR Schwab conveyed to the world in Davos that "America's best days are yet to come. Our proudest moments are yet to be. Our most glorious achievements are just ahead."

Public diplomacy abroad matters!