

**From Masaryk to Havel and Beyond: The Struggle for Democracy  
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Thank you Ambassador Kmoníček for your very kind words, and good morning to you all.

Mr. Ambassador, distinguished guests, friends of the Czech Republic, allies of democracy; I am so honored to join you for these discussions in commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Washington Declaration.

It is fitting that we should gather for this purpose here in this city, only a few feet from the statue of the leader who made the dream of Czechoslovak independence possible.

Though he died when I was only four months old, I always felt that I grew up with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

My family revered him.

My father worked for his son.

As a child, I saw his picture and thought, “This is how a president should look.”

As I grew older and studied his career, I felt that Masaryk set the standard for how a president should lead.

He was a teacher who never stopped learning; a philosopher who never stopped doing; a lover of peace who never shied away from a fight; and a pragmatist who never stopped believing in the better angels of human nature.

He lived at a time when prejudice of many types was almost universal.

But Masaryk was an enemy to bigotry in all its guises, including anti-Semitism and chauvinism.

He knew that not every person could be equal in ability, but argued that each was equal in rights – regardless of ethnicity, creed, or gender.

I have always been struck that Masaryk, who was married in the nineteenth century, added his wife's surname, Garrigue, to his own name.

I have also always been proud that the Washington Declaration called for universal suffrage and equal rights, and that it did so nearly two years before the nineteenth amendment was adopted in the United States.

Equality was one of Masaryk's fundamental convictions, and he applied that principle to world affairs as well.

From ancient times, kingdoms and countries have differed in size, power, and wealth.

But Masaryk did not accept the right of the big to bully the small.

He insisted that countries be subject to the law of nations, not the sword of neighbors.

For allies, he looked to his fellow citizens, but also across the Atlantic.

He thought that the sons and daughters of George Washington could make common cause with the descendants of Jan Hus.

And as history testifies, he was right.

An independent Czechoslovakia would not have come into being in the absence of Masaryk's diplomacy or without the intellectual foundation he built for a humane and democratic state.

But Czechoslovak freedom would have been impossible had not America possessed a leader, Woodrow Wilson, who believed in a new and more honorable way of ordering relations among the nations of the world.

Wilson believed that public opinion – if freely expressed – could move governments away from war and toward the bargaining table; away from the stockpiling of arms and toward disarmament; away from an obsession with the balance of power and toward a reliance on law.

In May 1916, he declared that;

“Every people has a right to choose the sovereignty under which they shall live;

The small states...have a right to enjoy the same respect for their...territorial integrity [as others]; [and that]

The world has the right to be free from every disturbance...that has its origins in aggression.”

Masaryk applauded each of these principles because he fully shared Wilson’s idealism; but he – more than Wilson – had been exposed to the inner workings of European politics; this made him aware that setting great ideas in front of the multitude is not the end of what a leader must do – but only the beginning.

Masaryk was an intellectual, a lawyer, a politician, a legislator, an author, and a pretty good athlete; but above all, he was an educator.

He devoted countless hours to helping others understand how to express their nationalism in constructive ways; to explaining why morality – not ethnicity – should be at the core of every nation’s identity; and to reminding people that what matters most about democracy is the chance it provides for every citizen to learn and to grow.

Masaryk was not the first leader, and he wouldn’t be the last, to make the case for a world that was democratic, humane, and just.

But few sought to achieve these goals with as much persistence and integrity over as long a period of time.

Under his leadership, Prague became a beacon of democracy and tolerance within a troubled Europe.

But all too soon, the light it created was snuffed out.

We look back now upon the symbols of deepest darkness: an umbrella at Munich, the names on a synagogue wall in Prague, a broken window in the courtyard of Czernin Palace, and a glorious spring that turned to winter in August.

During the Cold War, we were tempted to despair, but as my father wrote in the 1970s:

“The spark is still there. One cannot doubt it will flicker one day again into flame, and freedom will return to this land that is so essentially humane.”

And, of course, that day did come and with it new and more welcome images of—

- crowds chanting slogans and rattling keys in Wenceslas Square.
- Of bells tolling for Communism and ringing for freedom.
- And of an ex-prisoner and playwright, Masaryk's spiritual son, giving new voice to his ideals.

Some 72 years after the Washington Declaration was issued, that former prisoner, Vaclav Havel, traveled to this city as the newly inaugurated President of a democratic Czechoslovakia.

Some of us here had the honor of helping him prepare for his address to the joint session of Congress. Ambassador Žantovský even provided the simultaneous translation.

It was a remarkable speech.

The world had expected him to denounce the Soviet leaders who had long oppressed his country; instead, he requested help for the Russian people in making their own transition to democracy.

Instead of focusing on ideology or politics, he stressed the obligations we each have to one another.

Narrow interests of all kinds, insisted Havel, must give way to universal principles and concerns.

It was a very idealistic and deeply felt speech, not the sort that most national leaders would give.

But hearing it made me proud of my Czechoslovak roots, and it helped me understand how my father felt about Tomáš Masaryk.

Like Masaryk before him, Havel's leadership transformed Czechoslovakia's relationship with the world. The barbed wired was extracted from Europe's heart and the great institutions of the West began to open their doors.

I will not forget the day when the Czech Republic joined Hungary and Poland as new members of NATO, making, to quote President Clinton, "America safer, our Alliance stronger, and Europe more peaceful and united."

Nor will I forget our newly-strengthened Alliance coming together to defeat ethnic cleansing and terror in Kosovo.

We thought back then that the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century were in remission, that the outmoded concepts of imperialism and spheres of interest were discredited, and that the danger of big countries gobbling up the small had been reduced.

But the future is shaped not only by what we learn from the past, but also by what we forget.

Evil tides may be driven back, but it is in the nature of tides to return.

And today, there can be no doubt that the principles enshrined in the Washington Declaration are under attack.

Extreme nationalist movements, tinged with racism and pro-Fascist symbols, are gaining in popularity everywhere from Italy to Scandinavia.

Key governments – including American allies Hungary, the Philippines, Poland and Turkey – are moving away from their democratic heritage.

It seems as though everywhere you look – including, I regret to say, the United States and Czech Republic – there are politicians propagating conspiracy theories designed to nurture hate and fear among average citizens, who encourage followers to lash out at people who differ from themselves, and who promise simple solutions to hard problems.

Meanwhile, democracy's authoritarian enemies have become increasingly bold and outspoken.

These adversaries, such as Vladimir Putin, are turning to sophisticated new tools to extend their influence and undermine confidence in democracy.

They have put the very notion of truth under a concerted and intentional assault.

I am not one of those who believe that we are enmeshed in a clash of civilizations, but I do believe we face a battle of ideas. And democracy's friends have been ill-prepared for that fight.

In part, that is because we did not pay enough attention to leaders such as Vaclav Havel, who urged us to treat the Cold War's end not as the conclusion of a bitter struggle but as the beginning of a new and even greater challenge.

If Havel or Masaryk were here today, I am sure that they would tell us that it is not too late for us to regain the upper hand. But they would also undoubtedly assure us that we can do better.

They never wavered in their commitment to personal liberty, respect for human rights, and the defense of liberal democracy.

The best way for us to honor their legacy, the legacy we commemorate today, would be to renew our own commitment to the principles of what the Washington Declaration called “liberated mankind.”

That means we must draw a line between legitimate debate and efforts to augment power by chipping away at the foundations of democracy.

We must understand the danger that we are in. And we need to act.

All of you are familiar with the slogan that has been drilled into us in relation to the fight against terror. If we see something, such as an unattended suitcase or backpack, we should say something.

Well, when I look around the world today, I am disturbed by much of what I see.

So I have added a third element to the slogan “see something, say something” – and what I have added is “do something.”

That is why I wrote my most recent book, as a warning.

Because today, there is an urgent need for small-d democrats everywhere to stand together and vow that we will not allow the peddlers of hate to shape our future.

We will not allow them to turn us against one another or to treat our neighbors with contempt.

We will not allow them to hijack the institutions that ensure our freedom and define our democracies.

We will not abandon all that we have gained through decades of shared sacrifice.

We will not remain silent as they strive to drain meaning from words and to convince us that up is down, wrong is right, and truth is whatever they claim it to be.

Instead, in every country and from all parts of the political spectrum, we must insist on the integrity of our own minds, the importance of democratic values, the rights of minorities, and the dignity of every human being.

Because with those beliefs behind us, I am convinced that there is no threat before us against which we cannot prevail – if we heed the warning, and if we are prepared to fight.

In summoning the courage that will be needed, we should remember that the Washington Declaration came into being only because its author never shied away from a necessary fight.

Early in his career, Tomáš Masaryk took on the superstitions that had fueled anti-Semitism.

He provoked anger by challenging the veracity of certain supposedly patriotic documents.

He risked his life by exposing the hypocrisy of imperialism and embittered many by cautioning against the false gods of Bolshevism.

Along the way, he fought for the rights of women and on behalf of the dignity of every individual, irrespective of background.

Masaryk believed that only by speaking honestly in the hardest of circumstances could we lend meaning to the motto: “Truth Will Prevail.”

Today, we can see the need for such an approach wherever we look, and that is why it is so important that we are gathered here not only to reflect on the past, but to talk honestly and directly about the struggle for democracy today.

So I would like to once again thank the Czech Embassy for organizing these sessions, and I look forward to our discussion.

Thank you.

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