

VITAL SPEECHES

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THE BEST THOUGHTS OF THE BEST MINDS ON CURRENT NATIONAL QUESTIONS

IMPARTIAL · CONSTRUCTIVE · AUTHENTIC

build economic prosperity—to bring about change for the better by using our judgment, perspective and experience. What we do today can define the future, and launch a new generation that recognizes the importance of innovation, invention and having the energy and skills to be entrepreneurs.

I am confident that in both the short and the long term, there will continue to be opportunities for new businesses to form that capitalize on our capabilities as a nation. Our support for those businesses—more than any regulations, laws or stimulus packages—will drive economic activity so that growth settles back to a sustainable rate.

A year ago, we all watched fast-moving and dramatic conditions unfold in the domestic and global economies. We knew instinctively we were watching enormous and

unprecedented events—history in the making.

And we're still watching history unfold—it's just that the pace has slowed and the fear has eased. The current round of challenges is playing out in a less dramatic, but equally powerful fashion.

We now know a lot more about our world—the causes and effects, the players and their roles, the opportunities and the risks.

Whatever happens in the next year is likely to be just as significant as what we have seen in the past 12 months. But, I hope we will learn our lessons and not go back to the questionable practices that brought us to the edge. Instead, I hope we can move solidly forward—better and wiser for what we've been through.

Thank you, and I look forward to taking your questions. ♦

An Urgent Call to Action for Study Abroad Alumni to Help Reduce Our Global Awareness Deficit

“I ... ENCOURAGE YOU TO GLOBALIZE YOUR LOCALITY”

Address by MATTHEW COSSOLOTTO, President and Founder, Study Abroad Alumni International
Delivered to the Wisconsin Study Abroad Re-Entry Conference, Milwaukee, Wis., Sept. 26 2009

Thank you all for that kind welcome.

I want to congratulate Russ (Braby) for exhibiting such good judgment and wisdom by inviting me to be your keynote speaker today.

But I think there was some confusion. Somehow I got the wrong idea about this “re-entry” business.

I thought I was going to be able to re-enter the study abroad program. Hey, I'm ready to go. My bags are all packed.

But now I see the conference is about *your* re-entry back to the US after studying abroad.

Well ... I'm delighted to be here anyway. I have a real passion for the subject of study abroad. I could speak for hours on this topic. But don't be alarmed. I'm not from the Moammar Khadafy school of public speaking ... so I'll keep my remarks relatively brief.

I hope we'll have some time for questions.

Russ was kind enough to mention my new nonprofit organization ... Study Abroad Alumni International—SAAI.

That's the proximate cause for my being here. That's the most recent thing I've done in this area. SAAI is an international organization of study abroad alumni ... not just the US. And I'll tell you a bit more about SAAI later.

What I want to do is weave through various points in my career ... sort of retrace my steps beginning as a study abroad student at the University of Lund, Sweden, and then link several of my career milestones to my

study abroad experience.

I thought this might be useful and interesting for you—having just come back from your study abroad experiences—maybe help you think ahead. I might be an object lesson about what NOT to do ... or perhaps what you should do ... in terms of your career choices and making the most of your study abroad experience.

You're a unique group of people. Sadly, very few American college students study abroad. I'll be saying more about that later on. Part of my purpose today is to congratulate you for making the decision to study abroad and leave your comfort zones here in the U.S.

But I also want to challenge you to go beyond that. It's great to have a re-entry program. It's great to network and explore how to market your study abroad experience. But there's more that I'd like to challenge you to do ... sharing your experience ... proselytizing about your experience ... and helping to create a more global society here in the United States ... and worldwide.

We hear a lot of talk these days about deficits. Especially about the federal budget deficit and the trade deficit. But we don't hear anything about what I call the Global Awareness Deficit.

I hope you'll use your international experience to help us reduce the Global Awareness Deficit here in the United States.

In the course of my remarks you'll be learning something about me ... but I'd like to get to know you a little

better right now.

By show of hands, how many of you spent a year abroad ... a full academic year? Not too many. And how many spent six months, or a semester? Just about all of you.

Our daughter spent a semester in Prague and then she participated in another program this past summer. So you'll probably find that you'll have additional opportunities to do more study abroad programs and I encourage you to do that.

How many of you had a parent or parents who also studied abroad? What would you call that ... second-generation study abroad people? Not very many of you.

And how many of you had to convince your parents this was a good idea? I mean, really had to talk them into it? Not too many. That's a good sign.

So how many of you really had supportive parents who strongly encouraged you to study abroad? That's a vast majority and it's good to see.

And finally ... Was this study abroad experience your first trip abroad, your first trip to another country? Not very many. Raise your hand if you had already traveled abroad before this? Wow! Most of you.

That's really interesting. And it shows how times have changed since I studied abroad. Studying abroad was my first trip overseas. And I want to give you a little bit of a flavor for what happened when I went to Sweden ... and how study abroad affected my career experiences afterwards.

I remember vividly it was a sunny June day in San Francisco when I boarded a plane bound for Paris. Our group spent a few days in the City of Light. Then on to Copenhagen and an overnight ferry to Oslo. Followed by a bus from Norway into rural Sweden. We spent three weeks in a small town called Malung in Dalarna.

It really is an amazing thing to do. Think about it. If you've never been overseas.

Then we went to this small village called Löfvånger in the extreme north of the country ... where the sun never really sets and we had to hang blankets over the windows to try to keep the light out so we could get some sleep at night ... and the mosquitoes were as big as golf balls. Maybe I exaggerate a little.

Then we went to Göteborg—or Gothenburg as we say in English. Altogether we spent nine weeks of intensive foreign language study and cultural studies during that eventful summer. And I tell you ... just talking about it now makes me want to go back and do it all over again.

One of the things I really want to do today is to encourage you to appreciate this experience. Take time. Think about it. Record it. Write about it. Savor it. Especially tell other people about it. Because, again, you're a select group. You're in the vanguard of people who can actually help to "globalize your locality."

Globalize your locality in our global age. It's an important idea. I noticed on the flyer for your conference the term: "Think Globally, Act Locally."

Well ... I'm going to suggest something a little bit different. I call it T.A.B. Think ... Act ... Be.

Think Global ... Act Global ... Be Global.

Increasingly ... local is less significant than it used to be. With travel and technology ... so much has changed over past few decades ... just the past few years. We can actually act globally now with the speed of a keystroke on a laptop or blackberry. We can communicate globally ... instantly ... in ways that we could only dream of just a few years ago.

I'm just planting that T.A.B. idea with you now ... and I'll come back to it soon.

Let's return to my trip to Sweden ... already in progress.

I'm learning about the language and culture and history ... and while I'm in Sweden ... the Swedish parliamentary elections take place. My Swedish was fairly decent so I was able to follow the campaign on TV and in person. I attended a debate between the prime minister Olof Palme and Thorbjörn Fälldin, the leading candidate for prime minister from the center-right coalition.

I visited a few polling places and watched people cast their ballots. That's when I saw the party list proportional voting system in action for the first time. This voting system is used in many countries in Europe and it has some advantages that I'd like to see us consider here in the United States.

That was my first exposure to proportional voting. I later went on to write two books about European politics and to become the founding president of a nonprofit organization called The Center for Voting and Democracy www.FairVote.org, dedicated to educating Americans about alternative voting systems.

These are direct threads that link my study abroad experience with later developments in my career.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

About a year after returning from Sweden ... after having this personal experience involving the Swedish elections and the voting system ... I found myself working on Capitol Hill for a US Congressman from California. And this member of Congress ... Leon Panetta, now the CIA Director ... served on a presidential commission on foreign language and international studies. And I had the privilege of doing staff work for Congressman Panetta related to his work on this commission.

Yet another link to my study abroad experience.

And I'm sure you'll be talking about this in your workshops ... but how I got to Congress as a staff person is instructive. As a student at UC Berkeley, I had volunteered in the office of the California State Assembly—Leo McCarthy was his name. And unbeknownst to me his chief of staff recommended me to be an intern on Capitol Hill.

So a few days after I graduated I got this phone call from the chief of staff of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. And he asked me if I wanted to come

to work as an intern in Congress ... AND GET PAID FOR IT? I actually got paid! That's not very common.

I don't know if you can actually negotiate getting paid, but if you get the chance to be an intern ... even if they don't pay you ... you should do it. If they pay you ... you should jump at the chance.

So you can take that approach. Do an internship with your local member of congress or a state official and maybe you too will be able to work on some of these international areas. In my case, I was fortunate to work for a Member of Congress who was working on these very issues ... foreign languages and international studies. And I was able to help develop legislation in these fields.

And then I also did some work with Paul Simon ... the Senator from Illinois, not the singer. Garfunkle was nowhere to be found!

Senator Simon was a longtime champion of international education. And I did some staff work for him when he was chairman of a House education subcommittee. I also worked for House Speaker Jim Wright ... and had the privilege of helping him with several international initiatives, including legislation to provide scholarships for students from Central America.

So in several ways, over a number of years, I was able to get involved in legislative efforts to encourage international studies.

Looking back ... I'm really not sure how much of this was by design. I think I kind of drifted ... maybe it was kismet. It just kind of happened.

I also had a good deal of involvement with staff-level international exchanges during my years on Capitol Hill. In the 1980s, I was active in a group called the Congress-Bundestag Staff Exchange program ... and I served as co-chair of a delegation of congressional staffers during a study trip to Germany—West Germany at the time.

On a couple of occasions, I was invited by the U.S. Information Agency to speak about American politics to various audiences in Europe.

On one trip—to Sweden in fact—I found myself being interviewed on Swedish TV ... in Swedish ... discussing the results of the U.S. presidential election on election night in 1988.

I also vividly recall being a delegate of the American Council of Young Political Leaders to observe the elections in France and Denmark. We attended campaign events and spoke with a wide range of political leaders and party activists in both countries.

I remember being surprised to learn that there were eleven political parties represented in the unicameral parliament—the Folketing—in Denmark. Eleven political parties in parliament ... for a country of about five million people!

That's one result of proportional voting ... the proliferation of political parties. And it's something I think we

could use a little more of here in the U.S. But that's a long story for another time.

I remember one day, when I was working for House Speaker Jim Wright, the Speaker was supposed to meet with Prime Minister Carlsson of Sweden. But the Speaker's schedule changed at the last minute and he couldn't break away to meet with the Prime Minister.

So Speaker Wright—remembering that I had studied in Sweden -- asked me to meet with the Prime Minister in his place and express his regrets.

Well ... I'll never forget what happened. I entered the room ... and there were various staff people standing around the Prime Minister ... and then I approached him and started speaking Swedish.

The look on his face was ... well ... as MasterCard might say ... priceless. He was startled ... to say the least. Pleasantly surprised I hope. Maybe it was my accent?

I'll bet anything that the last thing he expected during his visit to Capitol Hill was to have somebody from the Speaker's Office speaking Swedish to him.

And I'm sure he's told this story many times. "I was on Capitol Hill and this guy from the Speaker's Office spoke Swedish with me."

It's remarkable how important it is to be able to speak even a few words in another language. It makes a very big difference in terms of making friends and improving relations.

Toward the end of my tenure in the Speaker's Office I had an idea—to write a book about the politics of Western Europe. I spoke with Michael Barone, author of *The Almanac of American Politics* to see what he thought of the idea of a European counterpart to his well-established series of books. He said he liked the idea and he hoped he could beat me to it!

Well ... I didn't want that to happen ... so I hurriedly completed a book called *The Almanac of Transatlantic Politics*—which was published by Brassey's—and then Congressional Quarterly asked me to prepare an updated edition called *The Almanac of European Politics*.

The Swedish Embassy actually sent me to Stockholm to conduct the initial research for these books. And I'll always be grateful for their support.

So just to recap ... not long after leaving Capitol Hill, I had written a book on European politics and I was elected founding president of the Center for Voting and Democracy.

Most of these experiences I've mentioned simply would not have been possible were it not for the solid foundation of international awareness and curiosity that I had laid during my study abroad experience in Sweden.

Now I want to fast-forward to 2003 ... and my service on the NAFSA Task Force on Education Abroad. At some point during the work of this task force I had one of those "aha" moments. An idea literally hit me out of the blue. What about forming an international association of

study abroad alumni?

It sounded so obvious. But as far as I knew such an organization did not exist. I thought to myself ... What better advocates for the study abroad experience than alumni of these programs?

I talked about this idea with other members of the task force and received a good deal of positive feedback. The day the task force released its report, I phoned former Senator Paul Simon ... who had served as an honorary co-char of the task force. I wanted to see what Senator Simon thought about this idea of forming a study abroad alumni organization. Not just for U.S. alumni ... but for study abroad alumni worldwide.

Senator Simon agreed this was an excellent idea. He said in his deep baritone: "It's a great idea, Matthew. You should do it."

Tragically, Senator Simon passed away suddenly about three weeks after that phone conversation. I have since launched Study Abroad Alumni International and I have said many times that I regard the formation of this group as my personal tribute to Senator Simon. I doubt seriously that I would have taken this step without his strong encouragement several years ago.

Study Abroad Alumni International is still very much in the early stages of development. We're a fledgling organization. A work in progress.

Our main goals include providing financial assistance to students who want to study abroad but don't have the money to do so. I wish I had enough money myself to be able to send students abroad, but sadly I don't.

But by pooling our resources ... with our membership dues and other contributions to SAAI ... we will be able to help others study abroad.

The potential is enormous. There are millions of study abroad alumni around the world ... all with a strong emotional connection to the study abroad experience ... all potential members and supporters of SAAI.

We also want to showcase the study abroad experiences of well-known, influential, even famous study abroad alumni. These alumni could serve as role models for others to study abroad. They could help make studying abroad the cool thing to do. Just imagine if ten percent of American college students studied abroad, instead of only one percent. What if 50 percent studied abroad?

All of which brings me to the challenge I spoke about earlier. The challenge of closing the global awareness deficit. That T.A.B. challenge I mentioned: Think, Act, and Be Global.

Why is global awareness so important?

Well ... two nights ago I attended the awards dinner at the Clinton Global Initiative in New York City. And one of the Clinton Global Citizen Awardees this year was Peter Bakker, CEO of a multi-billion company called TNT. In his acceptance speech, Mr. Bakker cited this alarming statistic ... and I quickly jotted it down.

He said: Every six seconds a child dies of hunger in the world.

Think about that: Every six seconds a child dies of hunger. I think we all need to be aware of this ... and we need to do something about it.

Here's some more evidence of the need for greater global awareness. You've probably seen stories about this. Every few years there are surveys of 18 to 24-year olds. In 2006, National Geographic and Roper found that 75 percent of this cohort could not identify Israel on a map of the Middle East.

In a 2002 survey, 30 percent couldn't locate the Pacific Ocean on a map of the world.

We're literally drowning in global ignorance!

In the 2006 study, only 14 percent of 18 to 24-year olds thought speaking another language is a necessary skill. Only 14 percent!

On the subject of foreign languages, I want to share a quote from a good friend of mine—Sherry Mueller—president of the National Council for International Visitors. Sherry is also the co-author of *Working World* and a member of the SAAI Advisory Board.

Here's what Sherry writes about the importance of foreign language skills:

"I believe employers are looking for people who are fluent in several languages, not so much because they need those languages on a daily basis—though in some cases, of course, they do—but because mastery of another language often reflects the cultural competence and political sensitivities many international jobs require. The willingness to study another language, in most cases, is an indication that a person has the genuine desire to learn about another country and culture that is the primary prerequisite for success—that capacity for authentic curiosity is vital for people whose jobs necessitate interaction with international colleagues."

Sensitivities ... competence ... authentic curiosity ... genuine desire to learn ... these are all important success skills in our interconnected world. Let me ask you a question. What percentage of the American population has a passport? What do you think?

Well ... the State Department estimates that about 27 percent of Americans has a passport. About 60 to 70 million people.

Here's the scary thing about this statistic. What this means is that only 27 percent of the American people have even *thought* seriously about traveling overseas. Only 27 percent.

There is some good news. The number of undergraduates who study abroad has been increasing in recent years. In 2007, about 240,000 college students studied abroad—more than twice the number ten years earlier.

That's the good news. The bad news is, even with this sharp increase, only 1.3 percent of U.S. undergraduates have studied abroad. Only 1.3 percent.

That's paltry. That's a measly number. We really need to increase the number of study abroad participants.

I want to share this quote with you. This comes from a conservative political leader in the U.S.—a former Speaker of the House. He seems to have been reacting to a speech Barack Obama gave in Berlin in which he referred to himself as “a proud citizen of the United States, and a fellow citizen of the world.”

Well ... this former Speaker reportedly declared: “I am not a citizen of the world. I think the entire concept is intellectual nonsense and stunningly dangerous.”

Which makes me wonder. If he's not a citizen of the world, does that mean he's on this planet illegally?

And how can we go about deporting him?

I mean ... how can you NOT be a citizen of the world? It doesn't make any sense.

The fact is the world is changing. I spoke about Thinking Globally and Acting Locally. What's happening is the Global part is shrinking. The world is getting smaller ... with travel and technology and over six billion people.

That song at Disney World is true: It's a small world after all.

And the Local part is expanding. There's a kind of convergence happening between global and local.

That's where the T.A.B. concepts come into play: For the first time in history we can actually Think Global ... Act Global ... and Be Global.

Technology is playing a big role in making this possible. Just think about it. There are over four billion cell phones in operation today. Over four billion!

And three-quarters of these cell phones—mobile phones—are located in developing and emerging countries. In the past few years ... India ... China ... countries in Africa ... they've all experienced enormous growth in communications. Rural farmers are receiving text messages about weather conditions and what crops to plant.

By 2013 something like 2.5 billion people will be connected to the Internet. And that's going to make it much easier to Act Global with a mere keystroke on a keyboard or a blackberry.

In a world with global access to YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and yes even SAAI's social network ... the idea of Local will continue to lose influence. It won't disappear entirely, of course. But it will diminish in importance.

There are pros and cons to this. I'm not saying this is all positive. It's just reality. And we need to adapt to it ...

and make the most of it.

So yes you should have this re-entry program. Yes you should network and explore international career opportunities. That's all good.

But I also encourage you to Globalize Your Locality. I urge you to Think Global ... Act Global ... Be Global.

This is an urgent call to action ... for you and other study abroad alumni ... to help us reduce the global awareness deficit.

You can do so by becoming involved with SAAI ... and other organizations such as the National Council for International Visitors, Sister Cities, or Rotary International.

You can speak to local schools and community organizations about your study abroad experience and the need for more global awareness.

When you studied abroad, I'm sure you were told many times that you would be serving as unofficial ambassadors of the United States ... your campus ... and even your community back home.

Now that you're home again, I hope you'll become ambassadors for the value of the study abroad experience and for the need for greater international awareness.

In wrapping up ... I'd like to leave you with this image ... just picture in your mind's eye that iconic photograph of planet earth. I'm sure you've seen it. Taken over four decades ago ... in December 1968 ... on the Apollo 8 mission to the moon.

The photograph—dubbed Earthrise—shows our small, blue planet rising above a desolate lunar landscape. This photo was a true watershed in human history ... marking the first time earthlings ... fellow global citizens ... had traveled outside earth's orbit and looked back on our lonely planet.

The widespread publication of Earthrise had a lot to do with launching the worldwide environmental movement. It's no accident that the first Earth Day -- on April 22, 1970 -- took place so soon after the publication of this remarkable photograph.

We're all privileged to inhabit this same small planet—truly an island in space. And voices to the contrary notwithstanding ... whether we want to admit it or not ... we are all, undeniably and by definition, citizens of the world.

The only question is: will we accept the responsibilities of global citizenship?

Your future ... and perhaps the survival of the planet ... just may depend on how many of us answer yes to that question. ♦