CARNEGIE CENTENNIAL

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

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SPEAKER:
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JESSICA T. MATHEWS: An organization that after 100 years has stayed true to its initial charter, has stayed relevant to the present day, even cutting-edge, has stayed institutionally healthy, intellectually vibrant and financially sound, is one that is truly worth celebrating. And that’s why we’re gathered here today – (applause) – and it’s my happy task for a few minutes to talk about that achievement.

We didn’t know it when we reserved these rooms for today’s occasion, but it turns out that it’s an almost eerie twist of fate that it was at this hotel on December 13, 1910, that Andrew Carnegie stayed in order to address a conference on the peaceful resolution of international disputes when the word spread that the announcement would come the next day about the creation of his new peace trust.

I can’t do justice, and I won’t try, to 10 decades of work in these brief remarks. Even the short book that you have in the bags at your place doesn’t do more than to gather together a few particularly lovely sprinkles from the surface of a quite large cake. I recommend it though because the stories it tells make fascinating reading for anybody with a taste for history and an interest in how organizations like this one can shape the course of events.

What I want to do instead is just to say a few words about the Carnegie Endowment’s beginnings, its transformations over the years, the forces that have shaped it, and how it now looks to the future.

It’s well-known that Andrew Carnegie was passionately devoted to this idea of binding treaties of arbitration as a way to eliminate international war. And as he undertook a tidal wave of personal philanthropy, creating, as the video said, 2,000 public libraries that have shaped the history of this country, and more than 20 other institutions spanning science, music, art, social science, the first private pension system for teachers, and so much more, that he did not move on international affairs until after the election of President Taft in 1908 when he thought that at last, the climate had been shaped to move forward on his idée fixe of international mediation.

It’s worth noting that with this – as we honor this extraordinary man for all that he did, including, among other things, together with John D. Rockefeller inventing personal philanthropy, organized personal philanthropy, to remember this odd contradiction in his character – because here was a man so tough in the business world, so shrewd, so hard-headed, so smart in negotiation and in judging other people, and so naïve when it come to – came to thinking about the public sphere that he truly believed that mankind was not hardwired for aggression.

Yet, believe it he did. And his so-called peace trust was created not just with the mission of working towards this grand but impossible vision of what he called “the speedy abolition of international war,” but with some very concrete, practical purposes of working hand in hand with the Taft administration and on Capitol Hill, drafting treaties of binding arbitration and helping to push them through Senate ratification.
To that end, he took the list of proposed trustees for the new institution and submitted it to President Taft for his approval. At least one of those names was not approved; this was not pro forma. The administration’s – sorry, the endowment’s offices were created just across the park from the White House in some buildings that are now part of Blair House. The president would regularly walk across the park in the afternoon for tea and conversation – it was a different era – (laughter).

The institution’s first leader, Andrew Carnegie’s choice, was Elihu Root, who had been secretary of state, secretary of war, and was at that time a senator from New York.

So this institution was created to work very much inside the power elite – indeed, almost inside the government. Though civil society was at that time a small sliver of what it is today, the lines that are now so hard-edged between government and anything outside government were then blurred so that institutions like this one had access to and in government in ways that would be unthinkable now.

John Foster Dulles’ personal stationery said “senator from New York, chairman of the Carnegie board.” Dwight Eisenhower stayed on the Carnegie board when he commanded NATO forces. To take a much more recent example from another institution and another political party, when President Kennedy asked Dean Rusk to serve as his secretary of state, Rusk told him that he could not afford to take the pay cut that would be necessary from his job as president of the Rockefeller Foundation. So Kennedy picked up the phone, talked to a few of the Rockefellers, and the Rockefeller Foundation agreed to make up the difference in Rusk’s pay while he served, which he did. (Laughter.)

It is worth pausing to make explicit here what these names – Taft and Dulles and Eisenhower and many others – suggest: And that is that throughout its life, the endowment has worked directly and intimately with both political parties as the parties’ international alignments and policies and inclination towards international engagement have shifted. And it will always continue to do so.

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But the key point is that partaking of elected and appointed power, and the ability to engage the top man – and they were then all men – in the country’s intellectual and political elite enabled a very few organizations like the endowment to have a direct impact on policy that civil society organizations would not begin to have as a group until the late 1960s and 1970s when the sector exploded with the founding of civil rights and environmental and anti-poverty and women’s rights organizations.

The early years were not just about doing. The organization was deeply steeped in research. In the interwar years, it produced a 22-volume work on international law that helped to define that field. And it produced a 150-volume economic and social history of the world war – World War I. This dedication to first-class scholarship has not changed, but I’m very glad to report that the predilection for great length has. (Laughter.)

The tension, though, between doing original research and more direct engagement in shaping policy directly defines the endowment to this day. A think tank, as I said on the film, is a bridge institution; it bridges government and academia, government and business, business and science and academia in all combinations. Where it positions itself on that bridge at any given time depends on what the – or should depend on what the times and the issues demand.

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The essence of success for an organization like this one is first developing a sense of smell to know when an issue is ripe, and then finding the right place on the spectrum somewhere between basic research at one end and defining the details of front-burner issues at the other, and all along, the space in between them.

One of the remarkable stories in that book in your bag is that of Carnegie scholar Raphael Lemkin, who invented the concept and the term “genocide.” It was only four years after Lemkin’s paper was published that the United Nations made genocide a crime under international law without a single dissenting vote. That was an issue that was ripe.

Perhaps because a massive world war followed almost immediately on the heels of its founding with a mandate to end war, the endowment developed a very rare institutional quality, and that is, it was never afraid to change. Over the years, it has reinvented itself many times as the world around it shifted.

As dozens and dozens of new countries emerged from colonial status, for example, it provided graduate training and job training for these countries’ fledgling new foreign service officers and civil servants. It rebuilt war-damaged libraries and produced its own radio broadcasts.

When the United Nations was founded, and it looked for a moment as though the U.N. would become the center of international affairs, it picked itself up, took itself to New York, and created new offices across the street from the U.N. headquarters. It closed its office in Paris and moved to Geneva. When it became clear that this was not to be, it closed the Geneva office and moved back to Washington.

So I see together three qualities that define this very special institution: first, a dedication to excellence in its scholarship, finding the very best people and giving them the resources to support their work; second, an alertness to changing global circumstances and an openness to changing with them – in institutional life as in personal life, this is what keeps you young; and third, a commitment to making a concrete difference in the world.

Our mantra comes from a desk sign that belongs to one of my colleagues. It says, outputs do not equal – the mathematical symbol with equal sign and a bar – outputs do not equal outcomes. Research is fun, and it almost always has some value; publishing is satisfying. But we – what we ask people to do in planning their work is much harder, and that is to tell us how the world could be different as a result of what they want to do.

Our most recent and perhaps most important reinvention was the idea developed in the middle of the last decade to try to create the world’s first global think tank. We saw a world that had been redefined by globalization, and think tanks on international affairs all rooted in a single, national outlook.

We saw a United States that was still a vital world leader, but in the aftermath of the automatic alignments of the Cold War, we saw it defining policies that often failed to attract the necessary followers.

We saw a world in which more and more issues, from energy policy to human rights, had moved from primarily domestic to international issues.

And while we recognize the value, we also saw the great shortcomings of trying to meet these circumstances through individual one-off research projects, even those with an – small international membership.
And so we saw immense promise in the idea of a single institution made up of research organizations rooted in, and with a permanent physical presence in, the societies that they studied: staffed by local experts, operating in the local languages even where elites speak English – but all of them colleagues in a single, cohesive institution, working together over many years.

Such an organization, we thought, would improve Washington’s policymaking by bringing to Washington in a compelling way how others think about key issues, and how others define their own interests. U.S. policies so informed, we believed, would be better policies then because they would enjoy a greater chance of success.

On the other side, such an institution would also improve others’ understanding of the global hegemon, helping to remove fear, distorted views of U.S. intentions, and distrust. Such an organization, we thought, would help meet global challenges that needed solving, prevent misunderstandings and ease the path to settlement of serious disputes, and through all of these preserve and promote peace.

So it has proved – we now have thriving research centers in five cities. We publish our work, do our research, hold events and operate complete websites in four languages and three alphabets.

Measuring success in an organization like this is never very satisfactory; it’s terribly vague effort to engage in. But one absolutely reliable indicator is the quality of the people that an idea attracts. As the recruiter-in-chief of this institution, I can tell you unequivocally, by this measure, what we call the global vision has been a huge success. Those of you who were here this morning and heard the panels, I think, know that this is true.

In many ways, those who have the hardest job in building this pioneering kind of institution are those who are planting the model of how to do independent policy research in distant places, and often in very difficult political circumstances. I’d like just to introduce in person those you met on the video: Dmitri Trenin, who heads Carnegie Moscow – (applause); Paul Salem, who heads Carnegie in the Middle East – (applause); Jan Techau, who heads Carnegie Europe – (applause); and Paul Haenle, who heads the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center in Beijing – (applause).

I also want to pay tribute to my two predecessors who are here, Ambassador Mort Abramowitz, my immediate predecessor, and his predecessor, Tom Hughes. We stand on their shoulders. (Applause.)

I should add that it was Mort’s vision to create the Carnegie Moscow center, which was the kernel from which all this has grown.

We are not yet wholly global, of course, though we have achieved, I think, a critical mass in being in most of the world's key countries and regions. Our hope and our intent is to take this forward, this big idea, and what we think now a proven idea in the years ahead by adding international centers one by one without sacrificing either the quality or the coherence of the organization as it is today, and as it becomes financially sustainable to do so.

To close on a personal note, as you can imagine, it has been an enormous privilege for me – someone said yesterday, a dream job – to lead this remarkable institution. I have spectacular colleagues, a board of trustees that is good enough to run the world; and I’ve had the great good luck to work with four wonderful board chairmen: Bob Carswell, Bill Donaldson, Jim Gaither and Dick Giordano, whom you met today.
I thank them for all that they have done for the institution, for all that they have thought – have taught me. I also want to thank a wise and generous friend and mentor, president of our sister organization, the Carnegie Corporation in New York, Vartan Gregorian. (Applause.)

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In closing, let me say that with the inestimable support of donors, friends, constructive critics and colleagues around the world, the staff and board of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is embarking on a second century filled with pride in what we have built so far, and with both excitement and determination to build something far greater in the years ahead.

I thank all of you for coming. It meant a great deal to share this day with you. Thanks. (Applause.)

Thank you very much. I really – (applause) – thank you so much. That’s very kind. I hope you will stay with us for the next wonderful panel on the future of the Middle East and the meaning of the Arab Spring, which is taking place beginning very shortly downstairs, being televised for world distribution by BBC. So we hope to see you downstairs. Thanks so much.

(END)