

Remarks of Madeleine K. Albright
(as prepared for delivery)

National Democratic Institute 2011 Democracy Dinner
Washington, DC, November 7, 2011

Thank you Ken, and congratulations on your continued superb leadership here at NDI.

Excellencies from the diplomatic corps and Capitol Hill, distinguished guests from overseas, friends and supporters of NDI, good evening to you all.

Not long ago, when I was wondering what to say tonight, I noticed one of those newspaper articles we often see entitled, “Five Myths” about one topic or another; I think in this case it was the G-20.

Such articles usually attempt to show why five things that we never thought were true are in fact false, thus leaving us no wiser but still somehow feeling smart.

If an article of this type were written about NDI, I suspect that the first myth would be that our organization’s role is trying to impose democracy across the globe.

That is of course not the case.

We invest the majority of our time and resources in countries that have already chosen the democratic path.

Our mission is to help fragile governments overcome such obstacles as poverty, disease, disunity and crime; to strengthen the muscle and sinew of their democratic institutions; and to deliver on the promise of political freedom.

It’s true that we also take an interest in Cuba, Burma, Belarus and other lands where courageous democrats are still struggling – in the face of repression -- to establish their rights.

But by definition, democracy reflects the popular will – it cannot be forced on any country.

So make no mistake, in any society under any circumstances – dictatorship is an imposition – democracy is a choice.

This distinction is vital because – increasingly – autocrats try to use NDI and its partner organizations as scapegoats; they would like the world to believe that such novel ideas as fair elections and freedom of speech would never occur to their citizens if not for outside meddling.

There is an old Czechoslovak expression for this kind of thinking: balderdash.

My advice for any such government is to invest in a mirror and clean up its act.

Because the democratic tide, that some thought had been receding in recent years, has in fact returned.

From the city squares of Tunis and Cairo, to the crowded neighborhoods of Damascus and Sana, to the sun-scorched streets of Manama and Tripoli, the desire for freedom has emerged – not because of any foreign hand but because the yearning to express one's views without fear comes as naturally to people who dwell near the Mediterranean or Red Seas as to those living along the Potomac.

Arab Spring has evolved into a movement for all seasons, a resurgence of historic dimensions that is not yet fully defined in scope, shape or outcome.

Much depends on choices that will be made in the months immediately ahead – choices that can only be made by people who live in the region.

But as it has done so many times in the past, NDI offers help to those who desire help -- to share our expertise, our training, and the knowledge gained over more than a quarter century of supporting democratic practices and civic engagement across the globe.

In that time, NDI – like democracy – has had good days and not so good.

Because of developments in the Arab world, this year has been among the more encouraging and fascinating.

But the past months have also been a time of loss.

Since our last annual dinner, we have said goodbye to three very dear friends, who were among our nation’s most prominent and beloved champions of democracy.

It is appropriate that we celebrate their contributions tonight by designating them as recipients of the highest honor NDI can bestow: the W. Averell Harriman award.

I don’t know about you, but there are some moments that I will recall for as long as I live.

And right at the top of that list is hearing these words:

“I am Geraldine Ferraro and I am running for Vice President of the United States.”

To many of us, the very name “Gerry Ferraro” is a synonym for democracy.

As a politician, and as a leader for human rights, she cared more, fought harder, and talked faster than just about anybody else.

When she was on a mission; it was best to stay out of her way – for she was the embodiment of a trailblazer.

I was privileged to travel with Gerry during much of the 1984 campaign which, as some of you may recall, was a bit of an uphill fight.

The economy was booming and Ronald Reagan was a formidable opponent.

Meanwhile, there were many people in the media who had trouble coping with a woman candidate.

Either they wrote about Gerry's hair and choice of jackets, or they tried to trip her up by asking arcane questions about weapons technology.

But every time they attempted to patronize her – she turned the tables and embarrassed them; because she was as tough as they come and she knew her stuff.

As a campaigner, she was amazing; parents would lift up their daughters – and sons – just to catch a glimpse; she made her audiences laugh and cheer and think deeply about the future direction of our country.

The crowds were so enthusiastic that – right up until the last rousing speech – I felt sure that we were going to pull a Truman and shock everyone.

Unfortunately, there are some aspects of democracy that we have to accept no matter how unjust they might seem – and one is that people who disagree with us are still entitled to vote.

But the results of that election did nothing to dampen Geraldine Ferraro's desire to serve.

Under President Clinton, she was our country's ambassador to the UN Commission on Human Rights – a natural position for her.

In the face of exploitation, Gerry was incapable of silence; she was the voice for those who could not otherwise be heard.

She also served on the board of NDI – where she created a landmark initiative to train and empower women leaders.

For Gerry, the context – whether local or global – did not matter.

To her, suffering and injustice were always unacceptable and so was complacency.

Just last fall, she contacted me about a project she had conceived to fight discrimination against women in religions across the globe.

Even in her final days, she was thinking and striving to create a better future.

That message is her legacy – and it explains why we are so pleased to honor her this evening.

John Zaccaro, please come forward to accept, on behalf of your wife, the Averell Harriman democracy award.

When Gerry Ferraro was nominated for vice-president, the incumbent national chairman of the Democratic National Committee was Charles Manatt – or to everyone who knew him – Chuck.

In 1984, he became the founding chair of a brand new pro-democracy organization called NDI.

Under his guidance, the blueprints were drawn up that would transform a tiny group of doers working in a handful of countries into an action team with programs and friends in virtually every corner of the globe.

No one was more skilled than Chuck at preaching the good news about democracy – but he was even more a practitioner of it.

To him, the rough and tumble of electoral politics was more exciting than any sport—but he also belonged to a tradition that defined that activity differently than many do today.

Chuck and Frank Fahrenkopf, his counterpart at the RNC, considered democratic competition to be an honorable profession and an essential part of public service, not an invitation to sling mud.

Rumor has it that Chuck and Frank even liked each other – but to find out for sure, you can ask Mr. Fahrenkopf directly, for we are delighted to have him with us tonight.

The collaboration between these two fine men had much to do with the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy, NDI, IRI, and its other affiliated institutions.

This was at a time when Ronald Reagan was in the White House and the Democrats controlled the House of Representatives; there is a word for what they accomplished – bipartisanship.

And there is a term, as well, for Chuck Manatt – the best.

Whether as party chair, or head of NDI, or director of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, or as our nation's ambassador to Santo Domingo, Chuck Manatt could be counted on to carry out his leadership role with brilliance, honor, and an abiding commitment to freedom.

He has been called one of the architects of the global democracy movement, which puts him in pretty good company, for the same could be said of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

Kathleen Manatt, in recognition of your husband's lifetime of service, please accept with our gratitude, the 2011 W. Averell Harriman award.

I mentioned earlier those articles about five myths that we sometimes see in newspapers.

There would be no point in writing such a piece about Richard Holbrooke – because all the myths are true.

I have often heard him described as a force of Nature, but that can be misleading because, in addition to the occasional storm, Nature is responsible for the stillness before dawn and the first gentle breezes of spring.

Richard Holbrooke was never still and his gentleness was of a very distinctive sort.

There are many stories about him; a few of which he could be forced, under duress, to tell himself.

But tonight, given the limitations of time, I will say simply that he was as true a democrat as ever lived.

During the Balkan Wars, we used to say that we were joined at the hip.

He probably talked to as many dictators and demagogues as any public figure of his generation – and he could reason and do business with them shrewdly – but he never accepted an excuse for repression and never lost sight of our country's purpose.

He had all the skills of a consummate pragmatist, but he never confused the merely convenient with what was right.

Like the magnificent diplomat he was, he put every ounce of his talents in service to his ideals – which were laser sharp and based on a deeply felt commitment to the dignity of every human being.

He may be remembered best for the Dayton Peace Accords– but that is just the barest surface of what he achieved.

The fact is that, in any discussion of America’s role, he came down on the side of leading, instead of standing aside; of pursuing justice even in the presence of grave risk; and of using our influence to help those trapped by conflict, poverty, and disease.

These traits were in evidence at every stage of his career – from his early days in the Foreign Service and Peace Corps, to his time in the Carter Administration, to his contributions in the Clinton years as Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and ambassador to the UN, and finally, as President Obama’s special adviser on Pakistan and Afghanistan.

He also served as a member of the board of the National Endowment for Democracy.

In every position, and at all times; he could be trusted with the hardest jobs and relied on to fight on the side of the angels.

According to myth, Richard Holbrooke was one of a kind. If that were true, he would be irreplaceable – and irreplaceable is exactly what he is.

All of us here at NDI join in paying tribute to Richard Holbrooke – and in welcoming the award-winning author and journalist Kati Marton, who will offer a few words of her own about her husband’s remarkable career.

Good evening once again.

Introducing our keynote speaker tonight is a little like asking the sky to greet the Sun.

After all, it's not like we're exactly unaware of Hillary Clinton's existence.

She is a best-selling author, a Grammy-award winner, a former First Lady, a former Senator from the great state of New York, and currently serving as America's 67th Secretary of State.

If that were not enough, she is also a prior recipient of the Averell Harriman award.

We all know her and we are all aware that she has been doing an absolutely outstanding job in a world that refuses even for a minute to stand still.

In less than three years, she has helped President Obama restore our nation's reputation and leadership, lent fresh energy to partnerships across the globe, and created a new foundation for progress on issues that range from terrorism and arms control to human development and the empowerment of women.

In the process, she has assembled a stellar State Department team, made creative use of every available foreign policy tool, earned the abiding respect of our armed forces, and generated enthusiasm wherever she has traveled.

Those of us who have seen her abroad know that she is an incomparable representative of our country; she doesn't just make appearances – she makes connections by explaining the goals that guide our actions and the interests that we share with law abiding people on every continent.

What you may not know is that our secretary of state has also been a stalwart defender of NDI in a number of countries where our work has been challenged and our status placed in jeopardy.

Given her position, it would have been easy for her to point to the press of other business and priorities, but instead she has made clear that defending the truth about what we do IS a priority – and that – on her watch – supporting democratic institutions and values is at the very heart of American foreign policy.

The Arab democracy movement is only one area among many where our secretary of state has acted in a timely and effective way to keep our alliances together, maintain our nation's commitments, defend our security, and uphold our ideals.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce one friend to many others – please welcome Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.