

WE CAN, WE MUST, AND WE WILL!

Ladies and gentlemen, let me extend my warm welcome and congratulations to all Honorees, and all distinguished guests of this festive gala of the 40<sup>th</sup> Polish Heritage Month Banquet. Let me also welcome you to this special celebration commemorating the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Polish American Congress. I hope, that we will meet your expectations, and that you will be impressed by the credentials of organizations and individuals receiving the Awards. For brevity, please forgive me that I do not mention all organizations or individuals receiving the Awards today. Let me congratulate few which I believe deserve special mention, they are: the Heritage Award for the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences received by Dr. Thaddeus Gromada, a President's Award to be received by a long time member of the Polish American Congress, Ms. Eva Betka, and the Special Award which will be awarded post-mortem to the first President of the Polish American Congress, Karol Rozmarek. The Award will be received by the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation family member, Charles Komosa.

The Polish American Congress charter was established in Buffalo, New York in 1944, but to this day, the history made by this charter has made profound impact on the events in Poland, Eastern Europe, but above all, in the United States. We were all galvanized by the mission of the Polish American Congress to fight the communist oppressors for free and independent Poland, and ultimately, the Nation's obsessive fervor resulted in a crowning peace time achievement - joining NATO ten years ago and European Union five years ago. That is precisely why, today, the October Heritage Month has such a significance, because it reminds us that, we have many a reason to be proud as Polish Americans. It vividly demonstrates that as Peoples, we cannot be challenged by any adversities or adversaries and we are all bound together for the cause of our Nation, and for our political ambitions in the United States of America.

Just as in the most critical times, when we were a political force to contend with, I believe that also today we are capable to exercise our political stamina. Our time has come again!

Our political landscape is becoming more and more promising. We finally get more people who get interested in politics. This year we have several Polish candidates for various offices which promise political future. Some are even members of the Polish American Congress of the Illinois Division. There are examples today, which show that we have already achieved political successes in mayoral elections in local suburbs. Last year Mr. Wasowicz became a mayor of Justice and Ms. Jezierny a mayor of Hardwood Heights.

Let's be clear, it will remain an ongoing mission of the Congress to support Polish candidates for political offices.

We also have the responsibility to our Polish Youth to encourage them and to create for them a suitable environment. Toward this end, we invited to the banquet today eight students from Polish Saturday Schools along with the School Board President, Mr. Zbigniew Piwoni, at the table # 26.

A few comments are in order to share with you, our plans and projects of the near future. Let me address several key initiatives in which Polonia has vested interest and which the Illinois Division needs to consider in the near future:

- As many suggest, the Congress should consider acquiring a building and a recreational facility. I am happy to admit that there are principals interested in such projects.
- Congress must expand its membership and fundraising campaigns, and we have blue prints for such initiatives.
- We will make very serious efforts to involve Polonia in the political processes and we will try new attempts to educate and activate the Polish electorate.
- Congress needs to create conditions for a frank dialog, debates or invite for input from Polish public, press or Polish media. Just as even the questionnaire available at this banquet.
- Recently, a good example of vibrant and active involvement of the Polish American Congress, is also a symposium known as "Polonia w XXI wieku", to be held on October 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> which will be organized at the Northeastern University. The symposium will address the most challenging issues facing the Polish American Congress. Various panelists in many sessions will in depth examine many concerns of the Polonia today.

There are many formulas for success, but many a times, what makes us follow a success is seemingly an impossible dream. The very mission of the Polish American Congress following the WWII, I am convinced was considered by many to be the impossible dream. Yet, after 45 years of the Congress fighting the communists, the Congress has prevailed, and the free and independent nation was reborn just as the legendary Phoenix from the ashes.

To achieve the ultimate success, each of us can follow such a dream, and I am convinced even today, that may be one of the eight students, who sits at table #26 has vowed to follow such an impossible dream.

As Peoples, we all at times need need to aim for such an impossible dream. Let's even today, set in motion our generation for such an ambitious goal, that within the next 20 years we will have a Polish-American President in the White House.

"Czy to nie będzie tej imprezy piękna puenta, gdy za 20 lat będziemy mieli w Białym Domu Polsko-Amerykańskiego Prezydenta."

I know and I believe that ultimately we will, because our Polish Youth will follow this dream. I am convinced that one of these kids today will become obsessed and consumed with this dream to become the first Polish-American President of the United States. I know because,

"WE CAN, WE MUST, AND WE WILL!",  
 "MOŻEMY, MUSIMY I ZROBIMY!"

Kazimierz Casey Chlebek,



October 4, 2009.

Marriott O'Hare Hotel of Chicago