

U.S. Global Leadership Coalition Tribute Dinner July 17, 2012

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT)

MS. CAROLINE MILES: So we'd like to start our tribute, and it's my very distinct honor to begin this tribute to Senator Patrick Leahy. We want to recognize Patrick Leahy as one of the most thoughtful and effective leaders in our country, a tireless and passionate voice for America's engagement in the world, the senior senator from Vermont, Patrick Leahy. (Applause.)

The pictures – the pictures that you see on the screen are actually pictures that Senator Leahy has taken on his trips around the world. So he not only talks about these issues, but he goes out and he visits. And he witnesses what is happening in terms of foreign assistance around the world.

You know, lately Senator Leahy is getting some notoriety for something else, which is his cameo appearances in “Batman.” And I understand that this newest film, “Dark Knight,” he has actually a speaking role, so I'll be seeing that film, I think, tomorrow. I'll be looking for you.

But tonight we pay tribute not for “Batman,” but for his unrelenting role in support of America's development and diplomacy programs. For nearly a quarter of a century, Senator Leahy has served as a leader of the subcommittee that oversees America's foreign assistance programs. Senator Leahy's commitment to civil liberties, to the needs of the poor and victims of conflict, both home and abroad, has really known no bounds. He does vitally understand the importance of the development tools and the – and what diplomacy does for our world, and has championed this idea of smart power long before the term was even coined. As chairman of the State, Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, he has worked to protect and strengthen our international affairs programs. He has used his respected voice to defend and underscore the essential role these programs contribute to our own security, prosperity and our values as a nation. His efforts have literally saved lives and provided hope and opportunity to millions across this planet.

Senator Leahy, on behalf of the millions of Americans that our broad coalition here represents, it is the highest of honors to thank you for protecting and strengthening America's civilian agencies, and to honor you for your extraordinary leadership in making our world a better place. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in saluting Senator Patrick Leahy. (Applause, music playing.)

MR. CLYDE TUGGLE: If I may – if I may read the inscription, because it is important, and it reads, “The U.S. Global Leadership Coalition salutes Senator Patrick J. Leahy for his vision, leadership and unwavering commitment to elevating development and diplomacy and

strengthening the U.S. international affairs budget. Presented to the Honorable Patrick J. Leahy, U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, July 17, 2012, Washington, D.C.”

Congratulations, Senator.

SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY: Thank you so much. (Applause.) Thank you.

You know, nice choice of music. (Laughter.) Thank you all very much. As Carolyn knows, I've long admired the work of Save the Children, but all of you – and I apologize for the voice – but Liz and Clyde and members of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (sic) board and so many of our friends, Secretary Albright, Secretary Powell. You know, Secretary Albright and Marcelle and I traveled to China back in the '70s when I was too young to know what I was doing, but fortunately she did and kept me out of trouble. And of course, my good friend Secretary Powell, who mentored me and worked with me over the years. And I wanted to wish you and Mrs. Powell, on August 25th of this year, a happy 50th wedding anniversary. (Applause.) How's that for knowing what's going on this – (laughter).

And my dear friend, Lindsey Graham, it is so good to be here with you. Lindsey and I come from opposite political backgrounds, but we have worked together; we've been partners on the Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, as was Senator Mitch McConnell and Senator Judd Gregg. As Marcelle knows, we have worked so hard to make sure that we keep foreign aid out of partisan politics.

We've had a long tradition of bipartisanship on our subcommittee. It's served us well. It's rarely mentioned. With all the stories about how Washington is broken, this is one area that works very well. The mission of this coalition – coalition we recognize today – is to protect national security, to build economic prosperity, to strengthen humanitarian values. Lindsey, I think I can say safely for both of us that's one we share. (Applause.)

And in the United States Senate, both parties have worked together to project American diplomatic and development leadership at a time of severe budget pressures. Tim Recerf (ph) from my office, who heads the committee to – (inaudible) – they know how hard we work, because we understand we can't divorce ourselves from a world that's increasingly competitive. I'll also say it's a world that is increasingly dangerous – not just because of religious and ethnic intolerance and (terrorists ?), proliferation of nuclear weapons, but other threats, like climate change, unsustainable population growth, poverty, conflict – (inaudible) – parts of the Middle East and Africa when we know that we're probably going to fight more wars over water than oil in the coming generation.

I worry that, try as hard as we might, the United States is not responding as effectively as we should. In the next three to five decades, the world's population will grow by another 2 billion people. And as I mentioned before, wars will be fought not only around oil, but food and water.

I think we ought to all be working to prevent that, instead of wasting time arguing about whether to even fund family planning in the United Nations. Let's get real. (Applause.)

And I know this may come as a shock. I'm going to tell you a secret. This is highly classified. (Laughter.) But sometimes the House of Representatives doesn't always agree with

what Senator Graham and I are doing. (Laughter.) Fortunately, there are some key Republicans and Democrats in the House. I see one, my partner from Vermont, Peter Welch here, who do work with us.

At the same time we're fighting for the necessary funds for diplomacy and development, we have to also recognize – and let's be honest about this – the money we get does not always achieve the results we want. There are many reasons for this. Often, we don't hold foreign governments accountable when they fail to perform. We've got to start saying: You want our help, you want our money? You've got to be accountable. Let's work together. (Applause.)

And let's stop worrying about a bureaucracy that says we have to worry about how we report on what we're doing. Let's just do it. That might make a lot more sense.

And not just to big organizations and contractors – look at the fact we have some wonderful men and women in the field – and you know many of them: Give them a free rein to do what they can do best. So the work by this coalition to highlight the importance of diplomacy and development as pillars of U.S. national security has not gone unnoticed. We're in this together, both from the defense side, State Department side, USAID. When top Pentagon officials praise the work of USAID's programs in Africa, as you know they do, you have all had a lot to do with that. When CEOs, Republicans and Democrats alike, come to Congress or write letters in support of our budget allocation, we see your hand in it. And trust me, Lindsey and I use those letters to line up votes.

Now, none of this is easy. How do you tell a farmer in Vermont why it matters to the United States what happens in Yemen or South Sudan? How do you convince an autoworker in South Carolina that investing in education and infrastructure in Egypt or Haiti is good for the United States? We know it is, but we have to get that word out. And how do you explain to voters why we should use their tax dollars so Lebanese and Pakistani students can study in American universities, even though everybody in this room knows it's in our best interests?

We're here tonight because we want the United States to be strong and respected around the world. We have troops fighting in Afghanistan, but they alone are not going to defeat terrorism. Our economy increasingly depends on foreign markets. But people in developing nations have to be able to buy what we want to sell. We're defending freedom of speech and religion, due process and women's rights – something we take for granted in this country. But they're under assault in ways none of us could have thought possible in the 21st century. Watch the horrific video of the Taliban shooting to death a woman. Watch these things and know that we have more to do. And we are facing challenges to our influence not seen since the Cold War.

Now, Marcelle and I are delighted to be at the same table as Secretary Albright and Secretary Powell. They've been outstanding defenders of the foreign service, but they've also been outstanding defenders of funding for foreign assistance. They've brought credibility to this. That's critically important. I want to thank the both of you for all the help you gave me during the years you were secretaries.

So that's – (applause) – but let me also thank the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition. You don't get thanks enough. Trust me. We use you every way we can on the Hill for our common goals. So this award means an awful lot. Thank you very, very much. (Applause.)