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ATLANTIK-BRÜCKE E.V.

Laudation at the XIII Vernon A. Walters Award Ceremony

Honoring Dr. Jürgen R. Großmann

By Gerhard Schröder, Former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany

The Metropolitan Club, New York, June 5, 2007

As Prepared For Delivery

Dear Jürgen,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Atlantik-Brücke, a great organization, presents the Vernon A. Walters Award in recognition of individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to transatlantic relations.

I believe that in nominating Jürgen Großmann, the jury has made a truly convincing choice.

Why do I say this? Because Jürgen Großmann belongs to the German post-war generation, a generation which, like no other, was inspired by the "American Spirit" – one of optimism, enterprise, and freedom.

The famous "can-do" attitude of many Americans – with the confidence and conviction that problems are there to be solved, the drive for progress, and the hunger for success – profoundly affected us.

And Jürgen Großmann personifies this American attitude. In short, his C.V. is the realization of what we in Germany call "the American Dream": To create something great, from nothing, through sheer determination and hard work.

For the price of two Deutschmarks – about a buck – he bought a completely run-down steel works. An enterprise that most people believed was destined to fail.

But with his unbounded optimism and his unwavering belief, Jürgen Großmann successfully transformed this run-down enterprise into a European steel giant.

Jürgen Großmann is one of the most successful business leaders in Germany. I am pleased that he will soon lead RWE, one of Europe's most important energy companies.

I am sure that this new venture will also be a big success.

However, Jürgen is not someone to concentrate on just one thing.

Those who know him will know that he collects classic cars, owns one of the best restaurants in Germany, and also has a vineyard in Australia.

But above all, he feels responsible, as one of Germany's business leaders, for the country's social development. For example, his views on vocational training or the training of engineers are exemplary.

He is also an advocate of the German model of codetermination, because he is convinced that only motivated employees can create sustainable business success.

He empowers his employees and, as a result, generates greater profits. He is, therefore, able and willing to pay higher wages.

And Jürgen is someone who passionately participates in public debates. He knows that in Germany we will only retain our high standard of living if we fundamentally reform our social welfare systems and further invest in education and training.

And he also knows that one can only maintain great traditions when one is ready to change – the transformation of his steel company is a great example of this. Jürgen Großmann is one of the great figures within the German business community.

So much for the formal part of the job: now, please permit me to make a few very personal comments.

Jürgen's surname "Großmann" translates into "Great man" ... and a great man he is, too.

His optimism is infectious. He works like a dog, but he can also party with the best of them. He is a generous person and a super host.

But despite featuring many traditional virtues, he is also a modern man. You all know the song, "Behind every great man, there has to be a great woman!"

In Jürgen's case, however, the 'great woman' – his wife, Dagmar – is right by his side: a strong, equal partner, who both shares and challenges.

In short, he is successful with almost everything he touches – with one big exception. There is one thing that Jürgen – to put it carefully – is no good at, and that is playing cards.

There is an extremely popular card game in Germany called "Skat." And we regularly get together in a small crowd of boys and indulge in our addiction to this game.

However, in contrast to his success in big business, Jürgen is a disaster when it comes to playing cards. He almost always loses when we play.

The great thing about Jürgen is that he does not seem to mind. He keeps coming back for more. Even worse, he seems to enjoy it!

How lucky you are, Jürgen, that things are this way around! But just imagine if you were great at playing cards and bad at business, then maybe I would be the owner of a billion dollar enterprise ... Who knows?

This man is a born leader as well as being a tremendous friend.

You could not have made a better choice!

Congratulations, Jürgen, I am really pleased to be here and to see you receiving the Vernon A. Walters Award.