

Atlantik-Brücke's Tenth Eric M. Warburg Award 2009

The Library of Congress, Washington, DC, June 25, 2009

Laudation by The Honorable Chuck Hagel

In accepting the prestigious Eric M. Warburg Award, the first to be presented here in the United States, Chancellor Angela Merkel follows a most distinguished group of leaders who have influenced not only German-American relations but world affairs. This remarkable leader whose career began as a young East German has had an historic influence on her own country and the transatlantic alliance.

Dr. Angela Merkel has traversed steep intellectual mountains in physics, chemistry, and academia, and has been an effective and respected leader in the worlds of environmental affairs, youth, women's rights, government and politics.

Always a leader, breaking new ground, grasping the vision of the bigger picture as well as the minutia of detail, but never coming untethered from her core of purposeful effort focused on building a better world for all mankind.

I recall the first time I met Angela Merkel. She was General Secretary of the Christian Democratic Union. We had lunch in Berlin and talked about German-American relations, NATO, the transatlantic alliance and her concerns about a world that she saw as drifting in a very dangerous way. That included a German-American drift, a tension building in our relations affecting our interests.

After our first meeting, which left me with a deep impression of this leader, I had many occasions to meet Dr. Merkel in both my Senate office in Washington and in Germany. Each time I met with her I was more impressed with her insights and ability to move quickly to the center of an issue. I also was struck by her decency and humanity. This should not be surprising considering that she was raised and shaped under the yoke of communism as she grew up in East Germany. She has lived through and witnessed the devaluation and degradation of the individual, the wanton disregard for human dignity and the breaking of the human spirit.

Angela Merkel's life has been about inspiration and leading her people to a better place, where all are free to live in a democratic society based on respect for the individual and hope for a better world and the ability to work toward that new world.

Chancellor Merkel's steady stewardship of Germany since 2005 reflects her informed and wise leadership. She has helped to re-establish a 21st Century foundation for German-U.S. relations, which is vital to the capacity and strength of the broader transatlantic relationship. Differences between nations are inevitable. The challenge therefore is for nations to define relationships based on common interests, not differences. Chancellor Merkel has always understood this.

The German-U.S. relationship touches on nearly all of the most critical global challenges the world faces today: from national security and geo-political crises to climate change and the global economy. A robust bilateral relationship between Germany and the U.S. is essential to progress on all of these fronts, and Chancellor Merkel has helped bring a common purpose not just to Germany, America and Europe, but to the world.

The challenges of the 21st century span the globe, and require international cooperation and leadership unparalleled in our history. From Afghanistan to Iran, North Korea to terrorism, pandemic health concerns to debilitating poverty, the global financial crisis to destabilizing migration, we cannot address these issues alone.

Transatlantic cooperation, defined in part by the German-U.S. alliance, must be broad, deep, and strong if we are to move forward in the 21st century. The transatlantic partnership is an anchor for global stability. The transatlantic alliance is the only global alliance with the capacity to engage these great challenges, and Germany and the U.S. are two of the most critical pillars upon which this alliance is built. Chancellor Merkel appreciates this reality and the responsibilities that go with it. The fact that Chancellor Merkel and President Obama have already met twice, in London and Dresden, and will see each other again tomorrow is a testament to the importance of this relationship.

Germany is a friend, close ally and a critical partner to the United States. The strength of this relationship is essential not only for our two countries but for the world. These two great free nations represent two of the four largest economies in the world.

We live at a time of not just great challenge, but also of great promise, great opportunity, great responsibilities and great hope. It is a time for wise and inspired leadership and much courage. Tonight, we are honoring such a leader, Chancellor Angela Merkel.