

Remarks at Swearing-in Ceremony for U.S. Ambassador to Poland Steve Mull

Remarks

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
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SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, we have put this off about as long as we could. We've dragged our feet, we did some private diplomacy with the Senate saying, "You know, you really don't want to confirm him." (Laughter.) But unfortunately, here we are. And it could not be for a more deserving professional – someone who has in every way represented the United States so well for so many years. And I'm delighted that Steve's wife, Cheri, and his son Ryan, and his extended family can be here because we know that behind all that hard work, Steve, were a lot of people cheering you on and supporting you as you undertook your various assignments. And to Poland's new ambassador, we welcome you, and I can say I welcome you to the neighborhood. And we look forward to working with you.

I am a little concerned about one thing that has been making the rounds of the State Department. Ryan is by all accounts pretty tech-savvy – (laughter) – and when we saw a recently Photoshopped depiction of Steve's head on Captain America's body, we at first were hardly affected because that is how we think about Steve. The superhero Executive Secretary – and Captain America has nothing on you, Steve.

But think about it: Forty-nine trips. One hundred and one countries. Five thousand memos and documents last year alone, which he made me read. Spur-of-the-moment missions to far-flung places around the world. And yet Steve, at least in my experience with him, never broke a sweat. Okay, we need to leave tomorrow. We have to clear the following a hundred obstacles, we have to get then to a next place that is about 20,000 miles away. No worry. No worry. It just always got done. And it was just another day's work for Captain America. (Laughter.) And I know that because Steve was running a tremendous operation, it was easier for everyone in the building to do the jobs we were expected to do.

But that was just the day-to-day. Then crises would erupt. And they have occurred, unfortunately, all too frequently. Steve was always the first to spring into action, standing up task forces, managing rapid response personnel. Whether it was after the earthquake in Haiti, the terrible natural and nuclear crisis in Japan, or, most recently, the awful assault on our post in Benghazi and other diplomatic posts that were threatened, we never doubted we'd get the best response, the most professional response because of Steve's leadership and hard work.

Now he learned that, I'm told, from his parents, who themselves have worked hard all of your lives. And no one comes here on his or her own. You are here because you were someone who wanted to make a difference in the world and instilled with values that have stayed with you to this day. And I'm sure that when you were a young Foreign Service Officer stationed in Warsaw, and you were literally carrying messages from President Reagan to Lech Walesa, you were someone who remembered where you came from and where you hoped the Polish people would be going, the opportunities that they would have, ending oppression and tyranny, and making clear the United States would be their partner and friend.

Now, full disclosure: a long time ago when Steve was much younger and I had a different hairstyle – (laughter) – I visited Poland as First Lady. Steve Mull was my Control Officer – (laughter) – showing me around the country with a deep understanding of how far things had come, but also what challenges lay ahead. And during his prior service and in the years since, he has built a deep connection with Poland and with the Polish people. He has been a champion and advocate of their freedom and the future that they are so successfully charting for themselves.

And as sorry as we are – and you heard Cheryl really speak on behalf of all of us -- to see Steve go, we cannot think of a better person to represent the United States at this point in our relationship with Poland. We have a lot of work to do on everything from energy diversification to missile defense to democracy promotion to security in Afghanistan. So Steve was there seeing firsthand Poland emerge from Soviet domination and grow into a model of a young democracy, a vital free market economy, a leader on the global stage. And I'm thrilled that he'll be going back to continue building that essential relationship. So if you are ready, Steve, I am now ready to swear you in. (Laughter and applause.)

(Whereupon, Steve Mull was sworn in as Ambassador to Poland.)

Congratulations. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR MULL: Well, thank you all for coming. My voice is, unfortunately, broken, so my son Ryan has agreed to read my comments for you. So Ryan, over to you. (Laughter and applause.)

MR. MULL: Secretary Clinton, Ambassador Schnepf, and beloved family, friends, and colleagues. Today is a dream come true. And I am so happy to be able to celebrate it with the people who mean so much to me. I especially want to thank you, Secretary Clinton – laughter – for your support for this job, for the extraordinary honor of swearing me in today with such kind words, and for the amazing opportunity to serve on your team these last few years.

Your leadership of and loyalty to this institution and its people have enriched us beyond measure. And I know I speak for all of us with these three heartfelt words: Please don't go. (Laughter and applause.)

Poland has been such an important part of Cheri's and my life over the years. That's where we spent the first years of our marriage in the 1980s and that's where, in 1995,

we became parents of our son, Ryan – (laughter) – of whom we are so proud. (Applause.)

We have only the happiest memories of this amazing land and its people. A people who know and live every day the true values of freedom, loyalty, and friendship. When Cheri and I left Poland the first time in 1986, no one – least of all me – would have predicted that someday I would return as ambassador. Just before our departure, Poland's communist government accused me of running a NATO spy ring, probably as a means of embarrassing my contacts in Poland's democratic community.

It was a difficult time for my family. My hometown newspaper that day led with a banner headline reading: Local Man Accused of Spying. (Laughter.) When my mother was in line at the local supermarket, the shopper in front of her gestured angrily at the newspaper and said, "Look at that. That boy should be shot." (Laughter.) "Hey," my mother yelled out. "That boy's my son, and I'll shoot you if you don't watch out." (Laughter and applause.)

In the 23 years since it regained independence, Poland has proven itself as an unshakable ally of the United States standing shoulder to shoulder with us on the front lines from Iraq to Afghanistan, shining the light of democracy on those dark corners of the world that have not yet won their freedom, and volunteering to be among the first in helping the NATO alliance defend against the threat of ballistic missiles.

While our ties of blood and common values have endured for centuries, I am convinced the greatest rewards of America's friendship with Poland are yet to come. As Ambassador in Warsaw, I will work hard to build new friendships between Americans and Poles in academia, business, culture, and diplomacy. Together, we will tighten our cooperation to expand opportunities for energy independence, drawing on the vast reservoirs of talent and innovation that our people possess. We will expand and intensify our two-way trade and investment bringing economic benefits to us both. And we will work even harder to promote democratic values and respect for basic human rights in parts of the world that are still shaking off the bonds of oppression, even as we rededicate ourselves to the principles of justice and fair play in our own societies.

Madam Secretary, I pledge to pursue this agenda with all the tools that you've given us through the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. I've got a head start on engaging with the Polish people on a more personal level, by opening a Twitter account just a few weeks ago. (Laughter.) One of my first tweets asks about what bike paths are like in Warsaw these days. A few days later, I asked what beers are now the most popular. One of my newfound followers was skeptical. "Wait a minute," he said. "This ambassador is going to be riding around our country on a bicycle drinking beer?" (Laughter.) "He must be a fake."

Before we finish, I want to say a special thanks to those who made today possible, including the extraordinary Sharon Hardy and Heather Samuelson and our terrific colleagues in the Bureau for Legislative Affairs, Josh Blumenfeld and Rob Fallon, all of whom worked together to pilot through this nomination in almost record time. I

want to thank my outstanding team of colleagues in the Executive Secretariat, including Pam Quanrud, Julieta Noyes, Ted Allegra, Tuli Mushingi, Paco Palmieri, and Marcella Hembry, Darlene Namahoe, Diane McBride, Nancy Walker, Robin Hartle, and Ned Filipovic for being such rocks of support.

Thanks also to my new colleagues in the European Bureau, including Mike Morrow, Kate McGeary, Mara Vento, and Eleanor Chamberlin, all of whom have been enormously helpful in preparing for this assignment. A special thanks to John Dowd for his selfless and decisive friendship over the years. And to my Friday lunch crew, Ruth, Rich, Liz, and Dick, your laughs and support were enough to power me through every crisis. You don't know the half of how much I will miss you.

I also want to take a moment to recognize two very special colleagues who have had such an enormous impact on me over the past years: Deputy Secretary Bill Burns is already so well-known as the most gifted, professional American diplomat of our generation. And working with him closely over the past four years has benefited me in ways I realize every day on the job. And then there's Counselor Cheryl Mills, who inspired me every day with her razor sharp mind, unshakable commitment to justice, and amazing fighting spirit. If you're ever in a fight, you need to make sure Cheryl is on your side . (Laughter.) Cheryl, thank you for making today possible.

I also want to mention the people who mean so much who are not here with us – my high school teacher Mrs. Jess Cwiklinski, the daughter of Polish immigrants herself, whose health did not allow her to travel today; my friend Peter Gazda, who fled Poland with his wife Kasia in the 1980s when their friendship with Cheri and me brought the communist secret police to their door. Peter tragically passed away much too early three years ago, but I am so glad that his wife Kasia and son Michael can be here with us today from Toronto. Ambassador Nick Rey, who also was taken from us too early three years ago, was such an influential mentor and friend for me when we worked together in Poland in the '90s, and I am so glad his beloved wife Lisa can be here with us today. And finally, my stepfather Frank Spracklin, whom we lost just over a year ago. He would be so proud to be here today to hold your hand, mom, and to give us all hugs.

And finally, a word of thanks to the two people who bring all meaning to my life, Ryan – (laughter) – you grew up too fast – (laughter) – and I'll miss you so much – (laughter) – as you get ready to move away to college. But don't forget, it will be just as easy to harass you about finishing your homework from Poland – (laughter) – as it is in the dining room. And to my beautiful bride Cheri, who vowed to her parents after growing up in the Foreign Service that when she was an adult, she would never move again – (laughter) – forgive me for making you break that vow once again. I will be waiting for you in Poland with a heart full of love and open arms, so grateful that you said yes.

Thank you all for coming to share this day with us. As the Poles say, "May you all live 100 years." Thank you. (Applause.)