



Ambassador's Remarks following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on American Space Valencia: "A conversation about U.S. diplomacy with the people of Valencia"

Cubo Azul, Universitat Politècnica de València, April 16 @ 1:00pm

Hace unos minutos, el presidente Juliá y yo hemos firmado un acuerdo para establecer un Espacio Americano de la Universitat Politècnica de València. Nos congratula que el American Space Valencia estará ubicado en el marco del Centro de Lenguas de la Universidad ya que reconocemos que la comunicación es el primer paso para que las relaciones internacionales sean eficaces, especialmente a través del estudio de las lenguas. Esperamos que el Espacio Americano animará a más estudiantes de Inglés a aprovechar este magnífico Centro. Durante nuestra estancia en España, mi esposa Susan y yo hemos trabajado muy duro para mejorar nuestros conocimientos de español, y apreciamos la dedicación que se necesita para aprender un nuevo idioma. Créanme! Si tuviéramos más tiempo, trataríamos de aprender más Valenciano.

Aprender otro idioma ayuda a ver el mundo de una manera diferente y hoy, quiero ofrecer una forma diferente de ver la diplomacia estadounidense y explicar por qué la Embajada de Estados Unidos ha creado un Espacio Americano en Valencia. Con su permiso, voy a ofrecer mis pensamientos en Inglés, y si usted lo desea, estos dispositivos de traducción.

I am not the first United States Ambassador to Spain who comes from the state of Massachusetts. That honor belongs to Alexander Hill Everett, who served from 1825-1829. During his tour in Spain, Ambassador Everett discovered historical records of the Spanish exploration of the Americas which were publically available. He invited a young American novelist named Washington Irving to come to Madrid to translate those documents. Irving completed many translations, but being a novelist, he used some of his research to write a book entitled "The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus." It became an international best seller. Through this and other of Irving's writings, including Tales of the Alhambra, Americans learned about Spain's contributions to the New World and about Spanish history and culture. I like to compare Washington Irving to contemporary exchange students, and the equivalent of a Fulbright Scholar today.

Some years later, Washington Irving himself was appointed United States Ambassador to Spain, but his second stay in Spain was not as enjoyable as his first. As a translator and writer, he had traveled the country, to Valencia, Sevilla and the Alhambra in Granada. As Ambassador, he was consumed by diplomatic responsibilities in Madrid and responding to taskings from Washington.

American diplomacy has changed a lot since Washington Irving's time. Susan and I have plenty to do in Madrid, but we believe it essential, to our work, that we visit as much of Spain as possible. We want to understand this country and its people. We want to see all of Spain, and we want all of Spain to be exposed to American diplomacy.

Therefore, we very much appreciate the opportunity to be back in Valencia, a city we have visited on several occasions. I want to especially thank President Juan Julia, Vice-Presidents Juan Miguel Martinez-Rubio and Francisco Jose Mora for hosting us today. I know that Cristina Perez Guillot, Director of the Center of Languages, and Miguel Angel Candel, who will be in charge of the new American Space, have worked hard to prepare for our visit. Many thanks to you and your teams. I know that Ambassador Irving would recognize the same friendship and warmth he encountered when he visited Valencia 150 years ago.

The world has changed a lot since that time, and naturally, diplomacy has changed with it. Some people argue the biggest difference between the diplomacy of Washington Irving's time and today is technology. Washington Irving wrote letters and sent manuscripts by courier. Today, we write emails and we use smart phones. While it is true that the tools of diplomacy have changed with the evolution of technology, more fundamental changes have occurred in who diplomats talk to, what we talk about and how we have these conversations.

It is not only that with a smart phone – and 63% of Spaniards have one – you can access a previously unheard of amount of information and participate in conversations with a national or even a global audience. These changes have also changed the way we conduct the business of government. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Tom Friedman recently wrote in the New York Times, "We live in an age of social networks in which every leader, outside of North Korea, today is forced to engage in a two-way conversation with their citizens."

This applies, not only to leaders in their own countries, but to diplomats serving in host countries as well. The American historian Will Durant once joked that half of the art of diplomacy is to say nothing in a speech. I hope no one says that about my speeches. On the contrary, as an Ambassador, I have found one of the most challenging aspects of diplomacy is not keeping secrets, but rather making sure that people in Spain have the most accurate information about the United States, whether we are talking about the requirements for a U.S. student visa or one of our foreign policy goals. For me, one of the most profound changes in diplomacy has been the rise of public diplomacy, or diplomatic outreach to the public. Public diplomacy is why I am here today, and why American diplomats are talking to students, journalists, business people, leaders of civil society and other members of the community all around Spain and worldwide.

This is profoundly important work for us. The United States counts on Spain to be a strong and reliable partner as we craft multilateral responses to global challenges. This is diplomatic work Washington Irving would recognize. But, we cannot expect the Government of Spain to partner with a global agenda that is not understood or supported by the Spanish people. Government to government diplomacy is no longer adequate. Through public diplomacy, we talk directly to Spanish audiences about how, for example, tough sanctions can alter Iran's thinking about its nuclear program or how to ensure that Afghanistan will never again be used

as a nesting place for terrorists who can plan and launch attacks against the United States or Spain or any of our allies.

When I say “we,” by the way, I don’t mean only the American diplomats, Foreign Service officers, civil servants and even Ambassadors, who rotate through Embassy Madrid. Most of the 400 people on staff at Embassy Madrid are permanent Spanish employees of our Mission. In the Public Diplomacy Offices in Madrid, and at the American Consulate in Barcelona, for example, two dozen Spanish professionals help organize exchange programs, maintain press relations, develop our website and social media platforms and facilitate institutional relationships.

Could Maria Jesus del Olmo please stand up? Maria Jesus is a highly trained librarian, and a former Fulbright Scholar, who has been part of the Embassy team since 1996. If you want to participate in a program at the American Space Valencia, you’ll be dealing with Maria Jesus. Count your lucky stars too, because you won’t find anyone more committed to strengthening U.S.-Spain relations than her. I am exceedingly proud to work along side Maria Jesus and her colleagues and to have them representing our Mission.

Public diplomacy today, however, is more than simply delivering messages about U.S. foreign policy. It is also about finding and supporting platforms to have those kinds of discussions. America’s Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, Tara Sonenshine, said: “Citizens are part of the global roundtable – it is more urgent than ever that we better understand them and effectively engage with them across a far wider spectrum of issues.” And public diplomacy is not a one way street. It is, as Tom Friedman said, a “two way conversation ... with citizens.”

Many of the conversations we initiate from the Embassy do take advantage of new technologies. We do webchats and video conferences. We have vibrant and interesting social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. We even have apps for your smartphone. Even a technological Neanderthal like me has come to understand and appreciate the tools you are so accustomed to using. We’ve brought some bookmarks with us with information about our social media sites. Please don’t leave here without one! ...or two or three!

Some of the best conversations, however, and the most helpful ones, are face-to-face, and we are also developing platforms to support this kind of conversation. We recently launched an Embassy Youth Council. Our Public Affairs Section selected 25 young people from across the country to join us, at the Embassy, to begin a conversation about the challenges and aspirations of today’s Spanish youth. One member of the Council is here today, Javier Gil. Among the priorities Javier and his colleagues identified for us is the need to open up more avenues for his generation to participate in politics, in community service and in entrepreneurship. Pointing to the value of this type of public diplomacy, Under Secretary Sonenshine also said: “When we help empower future generations of economic and political leaders who have had a positive American experience, they are more likely to become viable global partners.” In addition to young people, we have regular conversations with people from the business sector, from religious institutions, from different minority backgrounds and

from all sectors of Spanish society. But these conversations have limited value if we only have them sporadically.

Truth is no matter how often American diplomats come to Valencia, a visit isn't the same as a long-term conversation. That is why we have great hopes for the new American Space Valencia. I've used the term "American Space" a lot. Let me try to explain better what it is. An American Space is a modern updated version of an old concept ... the Embassy library. This is something we've had in countries around the world for many years. In 1943, on a day exactly 70 years ago this month, the United States Embassy opened up a library in downtown Madrid and stocked it with 200 books. We hosted cultural events at the Library like afternoon teas, movies, dances, art lectures and ... I confirmed this ... knitting circles. Over the years, the library model expanded to other cities in Spain. Between 1949 and 1957, we had a library here, called Casa Americana, in Valencia. I believe it evolved into a private English language institute. Especially in countries with authoritarian governments that limit freedom of expression, these libraries were vital resources to help people learn about the world. One of the Embassy's retired employees, Angelina Sebastian, who spent forty years at the U.S. Embassy, once told me she used to go to the Embassy library to read books that were forbidden by the Franco regime. She learned, that way, first hand, about American democracy and freedom.

Another person I know who went to the American Embassy's library in Jakarta, Indonesia, was a young boy named Barack Obama. His mother married an Indonesian, and she worked in that country for several years. Her son went to the American library to read TIME magazine, and other U.S. publications, to keep up with current events in the U.S.

Today, Spain has impressive universities and public libraries, access to the Internet and a constitution that guarantees free expression. Valencianos no longer need a U.S. Embassy library. But there is still a need for a place ... a platform ... a space ... for us to have conversations and work together, on a daily basis, here in Spain's third largest city. You need not have to wait for an American ambassador or senior diplomat to show up to learn about exchange programs, to ask questions about American politics or to propose a collaborative project. You'll receive terrific support from the American Space Valencia's Director, Miguel Angel Candel, and the rest of the American Space Valencia team. You will find a full slate of activities and programs that will create opportunities for us to have many ongoing conversations. Some may be digital, but many will be in person. Let me give you some examples of the kinds of programs that have already been set in motion.

American Space Valencia was selected to participate in a pilot online English language learning program called m-English. This is something we want to offer to people who want to learn English around the world, and we are very grateful to have the staff and students from the University's Center for Languages to help us test it out. We are already working with American universities with programs in Valencia to create an intercambio system with native English speakers. We will also be happy to organize as many English language lectures on interesting American topics as we can.

Second, we plan to open a pretty hi-tech workshop space in the Center of Languages. This workshop will house online and in-person presentations on a broad array of topics like American culture, science and technology, economic issues and foreign policy. Sometimes, we'll bring an expert speaker here from the Embassy in Madrid. This morning, my wife Susan and Public Affairs Counselor Kate Byrnes participated in a Women and Leadership roundtable discussion, here at the University, something we do almost every month at the Embassy in Madrid. Sometimes, we'll be able to sponsor movies, including critically acclaimed Academy Award winners or smart documentaries.

The idea of American Spaces came from the library model, but that doesn't mean that we have to be quiet. Last week, the Hubbard Street Ballet performed in Valencia. With a permanent American Space, we'll be able to offer additional cultural and arts programs, including art expositions, and maybe even a music concert or two. A few weeks ago, we brought to Madrid a music ensemble of students from the Valencia campus of the Berklee College of Music to perform at the Biblioteca Nacional de Espana. Their repertoire of jazz was off the charts. You may know that Berklee College, based in our home town of Boston, is one of the world's premier colleges of music. Last year, they opened a campus in Valencia, housed in La Ciudad de las Artes y Ciencias. We'd love to partner with Berklee and arrange live performances through the American Space Valencia.

We are also working with the official Embassy student advising network in Spain – Education U.S.A. – to offer help finding study opportunities in the United States, including through the prestigious Fulbright program. If you have any interest in the United States, I think we'll have plenty of opportunities to engage with you.

Third, American Space Valencia has access to a wide range of very useful research databases, usable for research and learning, as well as an expert research staff at the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Office. If you are a student or faculty member, at any school or university in Valencia, and you want some research assistance, I guarantee we'll be able to help. One example is eLibraryUSA, which is an online database of research materials that would cost universities a small fortune in the form of a subscription fee. For American Space Valencia users, it's all free. We are committed to putting smart students on the same playing field, no matter where they come from.

Fourth, American Space Valencia will expand our Embassy's reach by extending important programs from Madrid to Valencia. For example, in June, the Embassy is sponsoring a Day of Community Service. We will work with local partners, NGO's and other agencies, to recruit volunteers from the Embassy community and elsewhere to participate in service projects. American Space Valencia is participating by starting a program today to collect dry goods for donation to the Food Bank of Valencia. This project will be run by Javier Gil, a member of the Embassy Youth Council who studies here in Valencia.

American Space Valencia will be open to the public, and we are interested in collaborating with any and all partners. Later this afternoon, I will participate in a roundtable discussion with Valencia business leaders that has been organized by the Ayuntamiento. Our hope is to

figure out how the Valencia business community can support the American Space Valencia so it can reach its full potential.

In closing, I want to thank each of you for coming today to help us take the first step in building an American Space Valencia that will facilitate a conversation between the United States Embassy and the people of this beautiful city and region. Everyone has something to offer this project, and I encourage you to contact Miguel Ángel Candel or Maria Jesus del Olmo with all of your good ideas. And please, when you hear about an interesting event or program at the American Space, help spread the word. We decided to name this – American Space Valencia – in order to emphasize that it is a place to connect Valencianos with the U.S. Embassy and with the United States. I ask for your ongoing support to ensure that this Space is as much Valencia as it is America.