

55th anniversary of the American Chamber of Commerce

Kurhaus, The Hague, 25 January 2017

Speech by the President of the Senate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Ankie Broekers-Knol

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me and it gives me great pleasure to celebrate with you the 55th anniversary of the American Chamber of Commerce in the Netherlands. Over the years "AmCham" has become a leading voice in promoting trade and investment between the United States of America and the Netherlands. Tonight we celebrate its many achievements in sharpening the competitive edge of businesses from both our countries.

Celebrations are a time for looking back, for connecting the past with the present. And although 55 years is quite some time - in the fast changing world of today some may consider it even a long time - I hope you'll allow me to take you back even further. To the year 1776.

In that year, 240 years ago, on November 16th, a small Dutch isle in the Caribbean, called St. Eustatius, fired eleven salute shots. The shots were fired from the cannons of Fort Orange to an incoming American vessel carrying the Declaration of Independence. With those eleven loud bangs, followed by white puffs of gun smoke over the turquoise sea, the Dutch Republic was the first foreign state to officially acknowledge the sovereignty of the United States of America.

In fact, that small Dutch isle was a vital supplier of ammunition in a time when the revolution was outgunned, outmanned, outnumbered and outplanned. In their efforts to stop the revolution, the British had imposed a trade embargo. But the Dutch - always eager to pursue a lucrative trade deal - chose to ignore that. By providing military supplies they enabled the fight for independence to continue. The British didn't take kindly, to say the least, the Dutch support of the American revolution. In December 1780 they even started a war against the Dutch Republic. A war that heavily damaged our economy in those days.

But all in all, I still think the gesture of the Dutch in 1776 was indeed a bold one but nevertheless the right one. And I don't just mean from a business perspective. There was a second reason the Dutch decided to support the rebel colonies. Having gained independence from Spain some 200 years before, we knew all too well what it was like to revolt against a global empire. Just like Americans, Dutch people have a strong sense of freedom and independence. Both our nations also strongly believe in the value of equality, honesty and hard work.

That brings me to the reason why we are gathered here today. In 1962 the "founding fathers" of AmCham - Coca Cola, Exxon Mobil, Aon, Dow Chemicals, DuPont, Deloitte, IBM, Honeywell and ABN Amro - made the decision to create an organisation that promotes the interests of its members in matters of trade and investment. They too recognized the similarities in our cultures and the need to open up commercial possibilities.

Since then, AmCham has provided a valuable platform for Dutch-American business contacts, as well as social contacts. It has grown into an influential forum for exchanging knowledge and experience. Through its Young Professional Programme it also gives future generations a chance to benefit from its network and expertise.

The work of the Chamber adds greatly to the historic ties that bind our two countries. I bring in mind the words with which John Adams - first envoy to the Netherlands and second President of the United States - described the Netherlands in a letter to his wife. He wrote: "The country where I am now is the greatest curiosity in the world. It is like no other."

Because of the important work of the Chamber we salute the Chamber tonight. Not with cannon shots. But with a toast. A toast to the American Chamber of Commerce in the Netherlands: I am sure that the urge to do business, to be involved in trade, innovation and reshaping the future is so vested in the DNA of both our nations, that our good cooperation is guaranteed for the years, for the decades to come. May you continue to do your important work for many years to come.