

THE HONORABLE BARBARA HACKMAN FRANKLIN
PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD
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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Thanks very much, Charlie. Thanks, too, to Fred Bush and to Bob Patricelli for chairing this dinner. I'm thrilled, overwhelmed, and humbled. It is such a privilege to be honored here in Hartford among family and special friends and alongside my good friend and colleague, Dr. Jack Rowe.

I want to pay tribute to the work of the Woodrow Wilson Center. It is unique. It is bipartisan. It has global reach. And it makes an impact. I like the way it brings together scholars, policymakers, and citizens. And its director, former Congressman Lee Hamilton, is a remarkable public servant. So, I feel especially honored to be recognized by this institution.

Kudos to Jack Rowe. He came here five years ago on a wing and a prayer into an unsettled situation and has led Aetna through a spectacular turnaround. This once great company is great again. Jack brought Ron Williams to Aetna and I have no doubt that Ron will lead the company to even greater heights. I have been a director of Aetna for 25 years, have seen a lot of change, and this time in the company's history is the best. Congratulations to Jack and to everyone here who helped make this happen.

But, of course, my biggest gift from Aetna was Wally, since we met on that board. I can say absolutely that Wally Barnes is the best thing that ever happened to me. We are celebrating our 20 year wedding anniversary this year. And what a wonderful family I married. I love the Barnes and Betts families. They are close knit but individually independent. I admire their dedication to community service. I'm so pleased that a number of them are here tonight.

This evening has caused me to think back over some of the things I have done. Mine is a non-linear career, with various and seemingly unconnected chapters – I wasn't very good at career planning. But despite that, there are some unexpected connections. Strangely enough, China is one of them, and one worthy of comment, because that emerging superpower looms so large on the horizon today.

It starts with the Nixon White House. I joined that White House staff in 1971 to recruit women for high level jobs in the Federal government and to be the White House point person for the President's effort to advance women in government. This effort produced results but more importantly, it enabled the President to bring equality for women into the mainstream of American life. I believe in equality and am quite proud of having been a part of this.

During that year there occurred a random but important event: I met George H.W. Bush and Barbara Bush. He was serving as US ambassador to the United Nations.

In February, 1972, President Nixon traveled to Beijing and began the opening to China. It was a pivotal moment in world affairs. The Cold War was on and this opening to China was conceived as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. I had nothing to do with that trip – I was busy doing my job. But upon his return, the President gave me a square of Chinese silk. I had it framed, knowing that it was a special memento of a groundbreaking event. It is hanging today in our Washington apartment.

I had no idea then that both China and George Bush would one day figure so prominently in my life.

Fast forward twenty years. George H.W. Bush had been elected President and I was serving as Secretary of Commerce. Just after the election of 1992 – an election Bush had lost – he asked me to go to China. I was surprised, to say the least.

Since the US had recognized China in 1979, diplomatic relations had inched forward, but had been set back after the democracy movement was crushed at Tiananmen Square in June, 1989. The US had placed 8 sanctions on China, one of which banned ministerial or high-level government to government contact. Among other things, that meant the US-China Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade (the JCCT) had not met since 1989.

The JCCT had been initiated by President Reagan's Commerce secretary, Connecticut's own Malcolm Baldrige, with his Chinese counterpart in the middle 1980's. Its purpose was to promote business between the two countries and solve problems.

President Bush asked me to go to Beijing to reconvene the JCCT with my Chinese counterpart. That meant I would be the first US Cabinet secretary to go to China since 1989, an act that signaled the lifting of the ban on high-level contact. This was controversial – the politics surrounding China in this country were far more black and white than they are today. In some quarters, there was a strong negative reaction to the Chinese because after all, they were communists.

We put this mission together hastily, in a couple of weeks. In early December, as I prepared to head to Beijing, the New York Times broke a story which called the trip a boondoggle.

The next day I had a call from former President Nixon. "Ignore it", he said. "You are doing the right thing. This is important." I asked him whether he had any words of advice. He thought a minute and then he said (I wrote this down) "Don't slobber over them." A pithy Nixon comment. But I knew what he meant and made sure I wasn't smiling or making a toast in any of the official photographs.

This mission was nervous-making. We did not know how I would be received – cordially or otherwise. Fortunately, it went well. The sanction was removed and in addition, we brought back \$1 billion worth of signed contracts for American companies.

Back to reality: the boondoggle story was still alive when we returned. It had been planted and kept alive by some who were anti-China and did not want the US to be engaged there. But instead of being forthright about policy differences, the boondoggle attack was a much more convenient vehicle. I must admit that this was not comfortable at the time. But in hindsight, it was one of those experiences that builds character.

President Bush was correct in his rationale. He wanted that sanction removed before we left office in January, 1993. He understood that if the new Administration had a crisis with China, it would be much more difficult to resolve if the sanction remained.

I want to digress for a moment to say a few words about President Bush 41. I think he is a great man, a man of character and vision. He has been a special role model for me and one of the most admirable and decent people I have ever met. And now nearly 82, he continues his public service, raising money for Tsunami and Katrina victims and comforting earthquake victims in Pakistan, among many other worthwhile things.

The most important outcome of my mission was intangible. Removing that sanction gave a green light to US companies wanting to do business in China but holding back, concerned that the US government would not stand behind them. And after my mission, they went. The big upsurge in trade and investment began in 1993 and continues to this day.

Some would say the Chinese have gotten the better of the bargain. The US runs a large trade deficit with China. Their cheaper manufacturing capability and undervalued currency give them a competitive advantage. That may be true at this moment. But I believe over time, as the Chinese implement their World Trade Organization commitments, as the Chinese currency floats more freely and as China develops a more consumption oriented economy, two way trade will come into better balance.

The US-China relationship is far more complex today. There are many other strands – human rights; security, especially North Korea and Iran; the war on terror; China's growing military; Taiwan; the environment; avian flu; and on and on. But it is the economic and commercial ties that are the foundation of the relationship. The strength of that foundation makes engagement and cooperation on the other more difficult issues easier. And we must be engaged with China. There is no other option. The US-China relationship is arguably the most important bilateral relationship in the world. I feel good about being part of a crucial turning point in the relationship.

Wally and I were at the White House luncheon last month honoring President Hu of China and his wife. The two Presidents were cordial and comfortable with each other, not effusive, but comfortable. Summits are for building relationships and maintaining high-level dialogue, and this one accomplished that purpose.

Which brings us back to what the Woodrow Wilson Center is doing – building relationships by bringing together scholars, policy makers, and concerned citizens. This is so vital. It keeps dialogue going. And the complexities and uncertainties of the global world today demand it.

Wally tells me that a Connecticut governor of years past, John Lodge, was noted for finishing every stump speech with this line: “We have to turn off the heat and turn on the light.” Good advice then and now. That is exactly what the Woodrow Wilson Center is doing.

So, again my sincerest thanks to each of you for sharing this evening with me. I feel truly blessed. I’m deeply honored, and I thank you very much.