



## U.S.-Russia Business Council

**Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State**

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Thank you, Gene, for that introduction. Thank you, as well, for your abiding commitment to this country and your determination to improve ties between the United States and Russia. From my vantage point as Deputy Secretary of State, I can say that your success is our success: bilateral relations will only grow and strengthen if we have good business relations. And vice versa, I might add.

Of course, this is not a tribute to you, so I'll stop there. Besides, you're from that bastion of effete eastern ways, Oklahoma. As Secretary Evans made so clear, today is all about Texas. You know, Bob Strauss is from a small town in Texas that's famous for an annual festival called the Cowboy Reunion. It must be nice for you, Bob. You no longer have to travel all the way to Texas for that auspicious event. We have a cowboy reunion right here in Washington every day. This is certainly a case in point. Indeed, Secretary Evans, with his good humor, hard work, and gracious manner, is the perfect illustration of why one state is so well represented at the top of American society.

And I can tell you, I've been out to Crawford in mid-August, and it's not hard to figure out why Texas turns out such remarkable and resilient people. It's beautiful, big country. It stirs the soul. But it's also one of the hottest, roughest places I've ever seen. And trust me, I've seen some rough places.

In fact, I have to tell you that Russia in 1991, when Bob Strauss went out there to be our Ambassador, was a pretty rough place. I know it's hard to remember what it felt like back then, with all that has occurred since, but it really was a hard time. There were shortages of food and medicine and general confusion, as well as fear, about what would come next.

Our embassy in Moscow back then was a grim confection of dingy plaster and elaborate regulations. Bob once told Larry Eagleburger it was "a combination of a Texas warehouse and a pigsty." To which Secretary Eagleburger quite sensibly replied that he had never been in either one. One of the many stories that Foreign Service Officers still tell about Bob – one of the few I can tell in public – is about the phone system in the embassy. You couldn't call anyone without knowing a series of special codes. One night, when Bob couldn't sleep, he decided to call back to Washington. He couldn't figure out the code, though, and ended up calling the cafeteria. Apparently, the cook who answered the phone at 4:00 am turned out to be from Texas, so he ended up chatting with the Ambassador for a half hour. Bob was appointed by a President from Texas and reported to a Secretary of State from Texas, so I guess that was close enough. I can tell you that the staff in Moscow had never seen anyone like him before and they were delighted. Here was a guy who took care of all his people, from the cook in the cafeteria to the spouse of the most junior officer to the Deputy Chief of Mission. Now, that's true leadership. And at a time of historic upheaval and uncertainty, that mattered deeply to everyone there.

I believe his Soviet and then Russian counterparts had an equal measure of appreciation for Bob's charm and clarity of purpose, not to mention his legendary self-confidence. Indeed, as Secretary Evans noted, President Bush rushed Bob out to Moscow during a coup attempt. He didn't even have a chance to prepare for his new position. But before the jet lag wore off, he was wading into a demonstration of several hundred thousand people, taking the bullhorn right out of Gorbachev's hands to let the crowd know where America stood. Now that not only took leadership, it took some serious prairie oysters. Indeed, it is fair to say that he was just the right person, in the right place, and at the right time.

On the other hand, you can always say that about Bob Strauss. He is always the right person. Sometimes to an extreme degree. His schoolmates once selected him to be the President of the Baptist Young Peoples' Union, even though Bob was pretty much the only Jewish kid in West Texas. In the years since, he has built tremendous success as a lawyer, a businessman and a politician, leaving an indelible mark on everything from the Tokyo Round to Middle East peace to the Democratic Party.

Like everyone else in this room, I've sought Bob's guidance many times. Too many times, perhaps. When I was in the private sector, Bob was always quick to return a call, and straightforward with his counsel. But one day, he finally chuckled and commented; "Rich, if I'm gonna do your night work, I'm gonna have to do your day work, too." I hope to have an occasion to use that line, myself, someday. In any case, I've always appreciated his sage advice, especially when I haven't had to pay for it.

His sage advice has also continued to benefit Russia and America both, and helped to bring our nations closer together. Indeed, starting with Bob's tenure at Spaso House, it has been the consistent policy of the United States to seek a strategic partnership with Russia, based on our shared democratic values.

And so today, we can say that the economic outlook for Russia is promising, as are the trade and investment ties between our two nations. I think that is a testament to the right choices the government of Russia has made when it comes to economic policy, not to mention the hard work of this organization. As Secretary Evans suggested, however, recent events call into question Russia's ability to continue making right choices, which is critical to sustaining the kind of growth the country has seen in recent years.

For that matter, we all know that the health of any economy is not just about good indicators. For a steady rhythm of growth over time, the underlying political system also has to be sound and security has to be good. I'm sure all of you are concerned on this score. Certainly, President Bush has expressed concerns, and so has Secretary Powell.

Terrorism is hardly a new phenomenon. Even so, the siege at Beslan was a standout in savagery and depravity. There is no question that the Government of Russia has a moral duty to respond, immediately and definitively. But that response must account for long-term results. In safeguarding the security of the nation, we simply cannot afford to compromise the very democratic institutions that make our economies succeed and our nations strong. And when I say "we", yes, I mean the United States, but I also mean Russia and every other nation that enjoys the benefits of freedom.

In that regard, the United States is a fortunate country. At every turning point in our history, freedom-loving individuals of talent and vision have been willing to take a brave stand for our future. Bob Strauss is one of those rare people. Bob, this certainly isn't the first time you've retired and it isn't likely to be the last, but it is without question my honor to be here today in your honor and to celebrate your contributions to the US Russia Business Council, US-Russian relations, and, indeed, the life of this nation. Thank you very much.

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