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You are in: [Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice](#) > [What the Secretary Has Been Saying](#) > [2006 Secretary Rice's Remarks](#) > [January 2006: Secretary Rice's Remarks](#)

Remarks at the Summit of U.S. University Presidents on International Education

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Dean Acheson Auditorium
Washington, DC
January 5, 2006

(3:45 p.m. EST)

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. Thank you. Welcome to the Department of State. I would like very much first to welcome a number of members of Congress who are here. I especially want to welcome Senators Roberts and Lugar. I know that there are others who are here as well. I'd like to also welcome my colleagues who are partners in the Language Initiative that we are going to be announcing: Secretary Rumsfeld of Defense, Secretary Spellings of Education, and Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte. Thank you for being here and thank you for the hard work that you've put in, in making this initiative possible.

The person I'd really like to welcome is the President of the United States. We are so honored, Mr. President, by your presence. The President is helping us to open here our Summit for University Presidents, which Margaret Spellings and I are co-hosting.

Mr. President, you might be interested in knowing that this is a very accomplished group of university presidents. They come from a wide variety of community colleges and state schools and private universities. But 25 percent of them had schools in Bowl games this year. (Laughter.) Half of those won. (Laughter.)

I was going to mention that the presidents of USC and Texas are not here, but before you say it, Mr. President -- I will say that the President of Stanford will be here. He was not otherwise engaged on the Bowl season.

The President is, of course, a fierce fighter and fierce believer in the spread of liberty and freedom as an antidote to ideologies of hatred. The United States of America and our friends around the world face an enormous challenge now, in facing down an ideology of hatred so great that it led people to fly airplanes into buildings on a fine September day. But the only answer to that ideology of hatred is a belief that freedom and liberty are indeed liberating for human beings and

that contact and exposure of human beings to freedom and liberty are the key to a better world and a more peaceful world.

We've done this kind of work before. In the Cold War, we faced down an ideology of Communism that also believed that human beings could not govern and believed in inexorable historical forces that would triumph. Indeed, freedom and liberty triumphed. But this country made a huge intellectual investment in winning the Cold War.

In universities across the country, people studied the cultures and the languages of Eastern Europe and of Asia and of places that we had not known before World War II and had not been. This country made a huge investment in bringing young people from the recovering parts of Europe like Great Britain but also from a new German democracy through programs like the Marshall Fellowships and the Fulbright Fellowships. And we made a huge investment -- intellectual investment -- in getting young people to learn about those cultures and those languages.

I was one of those young people who fell in love with the study of the Soviet Union and of Russia. But I was also told that it was a patriotic and good thing to do for my country. We have not as a country made the kind of intellectual investment that we need to make in the exchange of peoples, in the exchange of ideas, in languages and in cultures and our knowledge of them that we made in the Cold War.

But the President is committed to doing precisely that. The language initiative that is being announced today, the Critical Languages Initiative, will give earlier instruction in language to our children, K through 12. It will encourage students in university and in graduate school to take on the hard and critical languages. And it will press forward to bring people into the Foreign Service and into the Defense Department and into our intelligence agencies, who are competent in those languages.

But this is a broader challenge and it is a challenge that the United States Government cannot meet alone. And the reason that we wanted you, the university presidents, to be here today is that we need partners in this intellectual exercise. We need universities to open their doors to people from around the world. We need universities to send their students around the world. So through that exchange and contact, we can learn more about each other because the truth of the matter is if we're engaged only in a monologue, we will not get very far. If we get to know each other better, it will be a dialogue.

Thank you very much for your presence here.

And now I'd like to ask the President to address you. And to say to you, Mr. President, thank you for your leadership in this area.

(Applause.)

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2005/13

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