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FROM THE AMBASSADOR

Dear Friends,

It has now been six months since I arrived in Moscow to take up my duties as U.S. Ambassador – an extraordinarily challenging period in U.S.-Russia relations. In line with my belief that our relations can only benefit from increased dialogue and communication, I have decided to reach out to a select group of you with an electronic newsletter – think of it as something between an e-mail and a blog – to keep you informed about events that I and our Embassy staff have taken part in as we work to improve our bilateral relationship and reach out to various segments of Russian society. I'll plan to send one out about every two months. Please feel free to respond to this with any ideas or comments of your own.

A New President and New Approaches to Russia

On January 20th, Barack Obama will become the 44th President of the United States. The President-elect has already spoken to President Medvedev by phone: they agreed they will try to meet as early in 2009 as they can, and we are already busy preparing briefing papers for the transition team. Every new administration brings new ideas and approaches, of course, but the sense of expectation attending this election – both in the US and around the world – is phenomenal. I have been in Moscow during many U.S. elections over the years, but have never seen a higher level of interest – even excitement. The 500+ guests who crowded into Spaso House for our traditional Election Day reception (we called it a “celebration of democracy”) found, I think, something truly historic to celebrate.

Managing the Economic Crisis Together

Despite the global financial crisis, there was some good economic news this season. A new GM automotive assembly plant opened in St. Petersburg in November, creating new jobs and opportunities for Russians there. President Medvedev joined Governor Matvienko and me to celebrate the opening, a sign of how important this factory is for the Russian economy. The plant is a \$300 million investment, which will employ 1700 workers and produce 70,000 Chevrolet Captivas and Opel Antaras annually for the Russian market. GM is already the number one foreign car maker in Russia, with an 11 percent market share. Another major U.S. company, Caterpillar, recently celebrated thirty-five years in Russia. Their plant in Tosno employs 700 skilled Russian employees, producing tractors that make Russian agriculture more productive. These are just two examples of American companies who continue to find Russia a promising place to invest and grow. (See more inside the newsletter.)

More Russians Travel to America

Another success story is the growing number of Russians who are now traveling to the United States. Last year we received over 200,000 visa applications, the largest number ever, and issued visas to 95% of the applicants, a record low refusal rate. Last summer 32,000 Russian students went to the United States on the Summer work-travel program, another record, where they discovered America, improved their English, augmented their bank accounts, and were excellent informal diplomats for Russia. We hope that even more Russians will go this summer.

Reaching Out to Russian Regions

In the last few months I've also been traveling around Russia – I've visited our Consulates in St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and Vladivostok, where I've met government leaders, business people and students. In Russia's regions, I've seen new partnerships and projects between American and Russian businesses, and I've met growing numbers of Russians who have visited the United States to study, work, or travel as tourists. The highlights for me were almost always my question-and-

answer sessions with university students, which challenged me to keep myself current with the broad range of subjects that the students and I exchange views on.

Putting Our Differences in Perspective

These are just a few examples of what I've seen as some of the high points in the U.S. –Russian relationship. As I've said many times, I'm convinced that we have many more points of agreement and cooperation than we sometimes give ourselves credit for. And that is not to minimize the disagreements we have – over issues like the war in Georgia, or plans for a missile defense system in Central Europe – which are serious and require serious discussion and negotiation to narrow our differences. It's simply my effort to provide a sense of perspective on the totality of a complex, multi-faceted relationship that has global significance and which both countries must work hard to manage in a responsible manner. I'd like to hear your comments and suggestions, and your ideas about ways that we can improve the Russian-American relationship.

Best regards,

JOHN BEYRLE

U. S. Elections 2008 - A Celebration of American Democracy

More than six hundred journalists, students, teachers and exchange alumni attended the "Celebration of Democracy" at Spaso House on November 4 and had their pictures taken with cutouts of John McCain and Barack Obama. "Ekho Moskvyy" Radio and TV Center were



there with live coverage. As the evening progressed, the guests were treated to an entertaining mixture of campaign commercials, music, and informative exhibits about the voting process, including real ballots from California and Illinois. Visitors to Spaso

House also had the option to "declare" their campaign preferences with free McCain/Palin or Obama/Biden buttons.

Visa Refusal Rate Down to 5 Percent

Last year more than 200,000 Russians applied for a U.S. visa - a record number - a 95% of those who applied got it. Russian tourism to the United States was up 28% last year. New finger scanning procedures make the process faster and easier.



Ambassador Beyrle announced the opening of the 2009 Summer Work and Travel Program 2009, under which young Russians can discover the United States, make new friends and have new experiences, and earn some money at the same time. In 2008, over 31,000 Russian

students came to America under this program, working at summer camps, resorts, hotels, restaurants, and other businesses all across the United States. The program has another benefit - Americans learn more about Russia from the young people who go on the program. The Embassy is now taking applications for Summer 2009. This year the application and interview process is made as easy as possible. (Summer Work and Travel students by the Gallatin River in Montana. Photo by Ekaterina Kosaya)

Ambassador Beyrle Honors Russian and American Veterans

Russian veterans of World War II who fought with courage and devotion in the common battle that America and Russia waged against Hitler and fascism were honored at an American Veterans' Day reception at Spaso House on November 12. Ambassador Beyrle met one Russian veteran who had served as a tank unit commander on the same front where the Ambassador's father had fought with a Red Army Unit, after he escaped from a German prisoner-of-war camp.

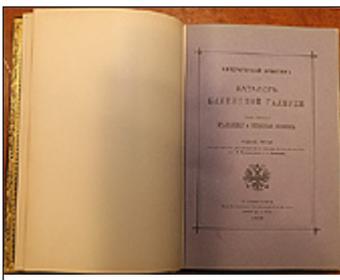


A New GM Plant Opens in St. Petersburg

President Dimitri Medvedev and St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matvenko opened a new General Motors plant near St. Petersburg on November 7, the latest symbol of U.S. investment in Russia. With trade between Russia and the U.S. exceeding \$26 billion and investment edging over \$20 billion, U.S.-Russian business cooperation continues to hold steady.



Historic Book Returned to Gatchina Palace



A book stolen from the library of Czar Alexander III at Gatchina Palace during World War II was returned to Russia, thanks to the alertness of Rosokhrankultura, the Russian agency for protecting cultural property, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The book somehow ended up in the United States, and was put on sale on the Internet. It was spotted by Russian experts, who notified the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, and U.S. Department of Homeland Security agents recovered the book. The search continues for other books, documents and art treasures stolen from Russia during World War II.

American Cows in Kaluga Pastures



A second herd of registered Angus cattle was delivered to Svetlitsy village in Kaluga Province, as part of a new Russian-American venture to introduce the popular breed of beef cattle to the Russian market. The Angus breed, originally developed in Scotland, is the most popular breed of cattle in the United States, noted for its taste and quality. The herd in Kaluga oblast now has 260 heads, including 250 heifers and 10 sires. They are part of the first trial of Angus breeding in Russia, which will be managed by the Angus Genetic Center. The Russian company will bring American special-

ists for five years to coordinate all aspects of the pedigree breeding.

Russia - U.S. Cooperation in Space



The Soyuz TMA-13 spacecraft made contact with the International Space Station, carrying NASA astronaut Michael Fincke, Expedition 18 commander; Russian Federal Space Agency cosmonaut Yury Lonchakov, Soyuz commander and flight engineer; and American spaceflight participant Richard Garriott. Fincke and Lonchakov will spend six months on the station, while Garriott returned to Earth on Oct. 23 with two of the Expedition 17 crewmembers currently on the complex. Northeastern Bulgaria, south of the Danube River (along the top) and north of the Balkan Mountains (along

bottom), and the western Black Sea (lower right) form the backdrop for the scene.

Astronauts Greg Chamitoff (left), Michael Fincke, Expedition 18 flight engineer and commander, respectively; and American spaceflight participant Richard Garriott pose for a photo in the Harmony node of the International Space Station. Synchronized Position Hold, Engage, Reorient, Experimental Satellites (SPHERES) float freely in the foreground.



Culinary Diplomacy in St. Petersburg

St. Petersburg PAO Eric Johnson demonstrates Tex-Mex cooking for an article on American regional cuisine in the newspaper “Sankt-Peterburgskiy Vedomosti.” Tex-Mex is a blend of the cuisine of Mexico with the cooking style of Texas and the American Southwest.

The cuisine that would come to be called Tex-Mex actually originated with Tejanos (Texans of Hispanic descent) as a hybrid of Spanish and native Mexican foods when Texas was part of New Spain and later Mexico.

In addition to his diplomatic duties, Eric Johnson has also given cooking demonstrations and lectures about American food, and has written articles for “Gastronom,” a popular Russian cooking magazine. (photo by Sergey Gritkov, “Sankt-Peterburgskiy Vedomosti”)

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USEFUL LINKS

United States Embassy Moscow
U.S. Visa Information
Summer Work & Travel Program
Foreign Commercial Service in Russia
Foreign Agricultural Service in Russia

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

We welcome your comments, suggestions and ideas on this newsletter and about what the Embassy is doing. Please send them to askambrussia@state.gov