

Greetings and Remarks
Björn Lyrvall
Swedish Ambassador to the United States

Thank you Reverend Nelson, thank you Bill. You have made me feel very welcome!

What a wonderful welcome to the Augustana Heritage Association Festival here at Midland University! And what a wonderful welcome to Nebraska! My special thanks to Senator Jerry Johnson for outstanding hospitality and for introducing your State over the past two days. Great talks at the Capitol and Governor's Mansion yesterday. And we have been following the Swedish path across the prairie, visiting the churches your ancestors built. And this morning's visit to the feedlot. Fascinating! Thanks also to David Baker and Hal Nilsson for inviting me to this amazing gathering.

I understand that the Augustana Lutheran Church has embodied and represented the essentials of the Swedish tradition of the Lutheran Church in the religious life of America.

And it is an honor to be here with all of you. From what I understand it's 143 years since a committee of Swedes from Illinois went to Nebraska to determine whether the Nebraska prairie was suitable for Swedish settlement and farming—and ushered in an entirely new influence in the growth of the state. This led to a variety of towns being settled, including Stromsburg, Oakland, Pender, Wakefield, and Wausa. Together with other significant Swedish populations in places like Mead, Malmo, and Swedeburg, the Swedes became a substantial community in Nebraska. Thank you for everything you do for Sweden! And that goes to those of you who come from other parts of the country. Many, if not all, of you have shown outstanding and longstanding commitment to preserve and promote some of the Swedish heritage as well as aspects of contemporary Sweden in American life.

Let me say—as a relative newcomer to the US—I have certainly experienced a lot of generosity and goodwill since arriving to this great country with my family some ten months ago. At one of the first large gala evenings I attended last year a lady leaned over to me and said, “So Mr. Ambassador, how does it feel to be the Ambassador of Sweden, country that everybody loves so much?”

Well, what could I say? Obviously I was honored and humbled, and recognizing that Swedish-American relations are actually in pretty good shape.

What a year we have had! The visit to Stockholm of President Obama. First ever visit to Sweden of an incumbent US President. For a new Ambassador you can, needless to say, be pleased to have the President visit your country on the first day of your new job, but what next? Was this the peak of relations or a platform to build on?

But also last year's celebrations of our Swedish-American heritage—375 years since the

first settlers arrived to the shores of the Delaware River to set up the short lived Swedish Colony, and 230 years since Sweden—as the first country after the Revolutionary war—recognized the independence of the USA, when our envoys, Benjamin Franklin and Gustaf Philip Creutz, signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce.

So we have a very solid basis for our relations—and a very good story to tell about our current work together, based on shared fundamental values and interests, including respect for civil rights and liberties, democratic principles, human dignity and economic freedom.

With the President we agreed to reinforce cooperation not least on trade, notably TTIP—Sweden and the US have strong trade links—Sweden being the 12th largest investor in the US, arguably the largest investor per capita, and Swedish companies creating 330,000 jobs in the US. But we also work closely together on climate and environmental issues, green technologies, innovation, international development cooperation, and regional and global security. All these issues give Sweden the opportunity to present itself as the creative, transparent, and modern society it is.

We have been working to promote Sweden in the Nation's Capitol at our House of Sweden by the Potomac, already a landmark building in Washington DC. Please come visit us there! It's presenting the best of modern Swedish Architecture and puts Sweden on the map.

But the Embassy also recognizes the need to reach out, beyond the Beltway of Washington DC. And we took inspiration from Carl Eric Wickman, a Swedish immigrant from my native Swedish Province of Dalarna who in 1914 took over a failing Minnesota car dealership and turned it into a successful bus route for miners. It grew rapidly and became one of the great icons of twentieth century America—the Greyhound Bus line.

One hundred years later, my Embassy colleagues and I decided to hit the roads on a grand tour named “Sweden on the Road” in a blue and yellow bus, care of Volvo Group, to connect with Americans outside of the Nation's Capitol.

We have been traveling over the past weeks to extend the conversation to the Governor of Minnesota, the Mayor of San Francisco, the business community in Milwaukee, start-ups in Silicon Valley, the game developers in Los Angeles, students at the Volta Elementary School in Chicago and many, many others. We went to Geneva, Illinois, the constituency of US Congressman Randy Hultgren, chair of the Swedish Caucus in Congress. On its route from Chicago to San Francisco the Bus passed through Nebraska a couple of weeks ago. And my visit today is in a way an extension of “Sweden on the Road,” an opportunity to meet you all and talk about how a great Swedish-American relationship can be further strengthened.

The theme of your Festival is “Prairie Roots. Global Impact.” How true that is in our day and time. The importance of your heritage in a globalized world. It chimes very well with the theme of my Embassy's public diplomacy program, this year called “Going Global.” We are

exploring how local solutions can interact with an international outlook. Very much what Sweden has been able to do.

And indeed, there are many reasons to feel proud of Sweden!

Swedes, shy as we are said to be, normally don't brag about our country. But I dare say that there are many reasons to feel proud of Sweden, what it has accomplished, what it stands and strives for. Surveys of global value patterns show that Sweden is not at all "the country of moderation" (landet lagom). Innovation and openness have characterized the history of Sweden in everything from being internationally successful in business and the Swedish model of society to a global commitment based on solidarity as well as technical state of the art innovations.

And as Secretary Kerry said in his statement on the occasion of Sweden's National Day just a few days ago: Sweden's June 6, 1809, constitution set forth principles of democracy and freedom to which all nations should aspire. Those shared values continue to form the bedrock of the close friendship between Sweden and the United States today.

You all cherish an image of Sweden that you share daily with your American friends and neighbors, and that is most likely the image of Sweden that they will remember. No Embassy event can ever match your impact on America's view of Sweden. You are true ambassadors of Sweden. You reach out much farther and deeper into the U.S. than the Embassy can. For that I salute you all!

And to answer the ladies question: "How does it feel to be an ambassador to Sweden, a country that everybody loves?" It feels pretty good—actually it feels amazing—thanks to friends like you!

Thank You!