

**Toespraak Burgemeester Krijnen diner America Europe Friendship Association (AEFA) - de Pastory, Cadier en Keer, 24 mei 2025**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you Mr. Chairman for organizing this fantastic dinner in our municipality. And thank you for inviting me to speech on this occasion, not only as a mayor but also as a proud AEFA ambassador.

Last November, we organized a very successful lecture at our town hall, about the security challenges the NATO alliance faces. Perhaps, we can turn this into a new tradition.

We certainly look forward to welcoming the new US ambassador, Mr. Joe Popolo, who's nomination has yet to be confirmed by the Senate.

But tonight, I have the honor to speech in the presence of Mr. Marcus Micheli, chargé d'affaires of the United States of America in The Hague. A distinguished career diplomat who serves his country with great dignity. Thank you for being here with us tonight!

Not surprisingly, I am a firm believer in bilateral relations between the United States and The Netherlands (and Europe, respectively). Our nations were founded on the same ideals and values, and both have a strong democratic tradition. I'm thinking for instance about the Dutch Republic's 'Act of Abjuration' (Plakkaat van Verlatinghe) from 1581, that later inspired the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

Subsequently, it was the Dutch Republic to be the first to officially recognize the independence, an act we remember as the “first salute”, which took place from our Caribbean island of Statia. In the following centuries, our bond only grew stronger.

Moreover, many important legal principles we have today, are derived from American constitutional law, such as the separation of powers and checks and balances. In the western world, they still form a safeguard against tyranny and are there to ensure equal justice under law, as is written in marble above the main entrance of the US Supreme Court building.

Here, in the heart of Europe, people have been living peacefully, without war on Dutch soil, for the past 80 years. The NATO alliance is at the very heart of that. And thanks to our American liberators and the gratitude and hospitality provided by our local community, our bond with the American people became strong and enduring.

My experience with our Liberation community has taught me to believe in the power of connection and friendship: those are the ties that bind us.

In a broader sense, the role of cultural, social and economic relations cannot be overstated.

- Our Transatlantic alliance has shaped our societies in countless ways: think of the Dutch origin of quintessential American concepts, like Wall Street, Yankees and cookies.
- Many Dutch people learned to speak English via American tv and movies, and more recently, internet and social media.

- There are countless academic exchanges between students, for instance via the NAF scholarships. In that same vein, we'll be welcoming students from the Omaha Central High School in a few weeks.
- Our countries share a liberal economic outlook with strong trade and investment links. Of course, we have to acknowledge that there are US states that outrank the Netherlands in both population and economy. A fact we might use to our mutual advantage, there is much to gain from strengthening our ties with individual states.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While today's world poses new challenges for all nations, it is crucial that we continue to work together, both bilaterally and multilaterally through NATO. In that respect, we are all looking forward to a successful NATO summit in The Hague next month.

In my office, the star-spangled banner lies neatly folded. This flag was flown over the American Cemetery in Margraten during the Memorial Day-visit of President George W. Bush and Queen Beatrix in 2005. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to add a second flag?

The U.S.-Netherlands relationship has the potential to grow even stronger than it is today. Not just because of centuries of shared values, trade, and cultural exchange. But because of the strongest connection there is: the connection between our people.

Nowhere in the Netherlands is this more evident than here. Where generations of families are connected with American families. People of all ages and all walks of life. Families of the fallen, families of the grave adopters. Veterans, volunteers, civil servants, school children, historians and artists.

This is why our municipality (and the broader Limburg region) provides a fitting and inviting setting for passing on the values of freedom to future generations, as well as an inspirational example of lasting friendship between the American and Dutch people.

Thank you.