



Thursday, July 18, 2002

Presidents Bush and Kwasniewski visit OU

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Representative of its growing global perspective and increasing collaborations and partnerships throughout the world, Oakland University played host to President George W. Bush and Poland President Aleksander Kwasniewski on Thursday, July 18.

About 3,500 students, faculty, staff, local citizens and representatives from the Polish community, as well as a host of dignitaries from around the state, gathered in OU's Athletics Center to hear the two world leaders speak on the alliance between the United States and Poland and the mutual vision for world peace.

"There has been a lot of talk of war lately, and rightfully so," Bush said. "But we speak of war because we want peace for our children and peace for the children of Poland as well. Poland is standing strong with us in the war on terrorism, and America will track the terrorists down one by one."

Kwasniewski's appearance is part of an official state visit, the second such visit during Bush's term. The Polish leader is striving to position his nation as a strong American ally as it seeks European Union membership. Both nations are pursuing the creation of a joint military initiative, and both men spoke Thursday of bilateral cooperation in ending terrorism and securing world peace.

"Poland is steadfastly aligned with America in every case where peace and human rights are violated," Kwasniewski said. "We shall not let madmen threaten our values. All of Europe's new democracies should share the same values."

Throughout his speech, Bush made reference to America's historic ties to Poland and how that union has been extended to the present.

"Poles fought for American independence, and we have had the privilege and honor of helping Poland fight for its independence," Bush said. "America is proud to call Poland a friend and partner. We share strong bonds in culture and commerce. The sons and daughters of Poland have been enriching America throughout its history. We're proud of that contribution."

Bush also referred to NATO's recent inclusion of Poland and how strong an ally it has been in the fight against terrorism. "Poland is an example to all of Europe. It is a force for stability within Europe and it is now poised to play an influential role in the world. In this era, America needs allies who share the same views about the world's opportunities. In the aftermath of September 11, NATO and Poland declared that an attack on America was an attack on all of us.

"We've entered a new type of war. These international criminals send the young to their deaths. We're going to keep them on the run until we take them to justice. We owe it to history – to our children and grandchildren."

In Kwasniewski's speech, he noted Poland's contributions to the founding of the United States and how the bond between the two nations helped Poland gain freedom.

"Polish-American relations is a never-ending story," Kwasniewski said. "Polish-Americans have been part of the development of this country that today is a symbol of freedom and democracy. We want to thank the United States for helping to bring our country back to a place it deserves in the family of free states."

The events leading up to Bush and Kwasniewski's appearance in the Recreation and Athletics Center also had a strong Polish-American flavor. Hundreds of people obtained tickets to the event from the American Polish Cultural Center in Troy. Olivia Lalewicz, an 11-year-old member of the center, sang the national anthems of both nations while her brother Peter, age 19, accompanied her on keyboards. Many attendees dressed in authentic Polish attire and hundreds more waved small Polish and American flags to greet the two world leaders.

In his introductory remarks, OU President Gary Russi spoke of the attention OU is gaining internationally and its efforts to broaden itself globally while offering a distinctive educational experience.

"This is an historic event for Oakland University," Russi said. "It is the first time a sitting president from any country has visited

our campus in an official capacity. All our faculty members share the importance of having an international perspective with Oakland University's undergraduate and graduate students through innovative classroom interactions and a dedication to research. We're proud of our focus on giving undergraduate students a distinctive and unique education that they can't get anywhere else – and we're even more excited that students from other countries seek out opportunities at Oakland University."

Russi then welcomed Ania Matuszewska, a Polish citizen who came to attend OU in 1997 and graduated last May with a B.A. in journalism.

"When I arrived at Oakland University in the fall of 1997, I was warmly welcomed by the International Students Office, where I found my first friends from all over the world," Matuszewska said in her speech. "Together we revived the International Students Organization. With help from university officials, advisers and professors, we've been promoting diversity and cultural understanding, breaking down stereotypes, as well as learning how to be leaders in today's world. Looking back at my education at Oakland University, I see that it provided me with everything I needed to become a successful person."

OU Associate Professor of Anthropology Richard Stamps, who acted as a volunteer usher at the event, said the presence of Bush and Kwasniewski reinforced OU's goal of educating its students to be effective citizens and workers in an increasing global environment.

"The fact that we were able to host this event on our campus shows that we're not just talking about preparing students for the global marketplace – we're doing it," Stamps said. "I think it was a great opportunity for students to see the presidents and have the opportunity to listen to them discuss international topics. I think it's also good to note the widespread interest shown here today by both men and women and a variety of age groups."

Halina Rzeszotko, 70, is a former Polish citizen now living in Waterford. She was fortunate enough to shake hands with both presidents following their speeches.

"I spoke with President Kwasniewski in Polish and welcomed him to America," Rzeszotko said. "I told him where I was from in Poland and how happy I was to see him. And then he turned around and made a translation to President Bush! I think both men made very good speeches. I think most Americans don't really appreciate the freedom they have. I have two daughters and I'm always reminding them that this is the best country to live in."

OU senior Heather Dunn, a secondary education major, said it was important to note that both presidents emphasized the alliance between the nations in the fight against terrorism.

"I think the speeches were very inspiring for the students who were here," Dunn said. "It's really great to know that we have the support of other countries in the world against terrorism and that we're not out on our own. Right now is the best time for us to form alliances with other nations."

Bush and Kwasniewski left Oakland University shortly afterward for a luncheon for 450 guests at the American Polish Cultural Center in Troy.

For more information on the official state visit, see the [Presidents' Visit](#) Web page.

SUMMARY

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Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Thursday, July 18, 2002
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Thursday, July 18, 2002
Article Start Date: Thursday, October 2, 2003