

TRANSCRIPT BY TASHIA WRUM

TRANSCRIPT OF KEN'S SPEECH AT ICIU ANNUAL DINNER

...to be here tonight, when she, ah, said, you know, I would and then she called back and uh, said she had to check in with the board and uh, with Dell and others uh, to make sure that it was O.K. She called me back and she said, "Ken, I have some good news and some bad news. Uh, the good news is that the board uh, has all agreed that you should be our speaker tonight, the bad news is that you're going to have to follow Simon Estes". Oh, talk talk, talk about a challenge.

Uh, I've uh, I'm so glad that there are a number of friends of the World Food Prize uh, here tonight: Senator Betker, Nancy Betker, Elaine Semoniac back there uh, Pat Delary. Where's Pat uh, —over here. Uh, he's uh, he grew up along the Mississippi, uh, Simon uh, but uh, down in Davenport, he was associated with St. Ambrose—which was our arch rival when I grew up in in Dubuque and uh. Kent Sovereign is over here from the partnership. They're all great friends of the World Food Prize. I want you to notice one thing, they're all kind of sitting over near the doors and or places where they can escape—this is because they've heard me speak before. So, this is very pivotal uh, planning by them.

When I was growing up in Dubuque, and I was intrigued by the thought of foreign affairs, but when you grow up in Dubuque, you know, you're a little uh, isolated and I used to think foreign affairs was going over to Rockford where Nolen Gentry uh, grew up—and uh, this was a long, a long trip those days. But uh, actually, I found that uh, following Simon Estes has a uh, couple of advantages. Uh, and uh, among those are the fact that you have that wonderful tribute to the Mississippi River, and the suffering that was experienced on it. And that water has, around the world, the ability to bring great suffering, great heartbreak, but also to be the possibility of breaking away from that and finding freedom and happiness.

And I want to start discussing, what I said was, reaching around the world to finding Iowa's humanitarian character. By asking you to imagine with me that you're getting on a boat in Havana, and you're going across that water heading towards Florida to Miami—and what you think is going to be freedom, happiness, a new life. And then somehow, just as it's about there, and it's about in your grasp, suddenly, boats come from the coast, the coast guard is there, and you're turned back and you're turned away. Maybe that's a scene that you've seen somewhere on CNN lately, but the experience I'm talking about didn't happen in 2003 or 2002, but it happened in the late 1930's. When a ship carrying 937 Jews from Europe sailed, to the Americas in the hope that they could land in Cuba, and somehow escape the coming Holocaust. But the ship was turned away in Havana, and they're last home of refuge was the United States. And the ship's name was the ship St. Louis. As it came cost to our shores, the coast guard was there once again, and for those of you who know the story, know that it was tragically turned away—and returned to Europe, where more than half of the people on board died in the Holocaust.

And I tell you that story because, it was at that same time, that the founders of ICIU were coming together in Des Moines, concerned about what they saw was, this coming human

catastrophe. And they said, “What can we do?”. And they lit a small candle of hope here, and they said, “Here is a beacon for you to follow”, and they sent a message to our government in Washington—to the Roosevelt administration, and said, “Let them come.” Even though, these are people, who are in many ways quite different from us and from countries in Europe, and they may speak a different language, we have families who are willing to accept them. We have homes, we have churches, we have synagogues, we have groups that will sponsor them. And that effort and many others like it, had an impact. And the policy was changed. And people in the future were welcomed. And many were saved.

In the actions by the Iowa Council for International Understanding’s founders, sixty-five years ago, occupy a special place, in our state’s humanitarian legacy. And therefore, it’s right that we come together and put in perspective what they did. And see how it fits with the actions by many others—by many other Iowans—who, in our history have, also reached out around the world. To feed starving people, through agricultural innovation, to assist refugees, through humanitarian outreach, and to alleviate human suffering by coming together above political differences, religious differences, ethnic differences to work together as Iowans.

And I wonder if the ICIU founders understood that as the philosophy they were following was the same philosophy that motivated Dr. and Mrs. John Millholand of Winterset. Who opened their home to a refugee was fleeing not from Europe, but from Kansas and Missouri, who wasn’t allowed to go to school there because of the color of his skin. And who was thirsting for education and for a chance. And they took in George Washington Carver and gave him that opportunity and guided him to Simpson College and to Iowa State, and beyond that to a life of contributing enormously to the betterment of human kind. And it was the same philosophy that a century later, motivated Governor Robert Ray to provide global leadership from our state in the Indo China refugee program. And if you read Senator Grassley’s article in the register a few weeks ago, you know that the first wave of refugees included a group, Thai Dom, from Laos—a distinct people with their own culture, their own language. But, who because of the policies that were going to be followed in our refugee program, would be scattered all over America. And they wrote letters to every state and said, “Please keep our culture together to preserve it so that we can live together”, and one state stepped forward and said, “We’ll welcome you. We have homes, we have sponsors, we have people who will assist you”. And today one of the great success stories in Iowa is how the Thai Dom people have been here and have built a community and preserved their cultural legacy.

And the refugee program was over in 1975, but in 1978 again, Vietnamese now, on boats trying to seek freedom over water, were going out into the South China Sea. And an African American journalist, Ed Bradley—many of you see on Sixty Minutes—went out in the remote beaches, on islands and filmed boats being pushed back out to sea by people who said, “we can’t take refugees here because there will never be any place for them to go”. And there was this moment in the show—1978—where you see the boats breaking up, and people drowning, and some struggling to the shore, trying to push their children cling to life. And that night, Governor Ray and I sat in his office in the state

capitol and we watched the video tape of this, and in the middle of the show there was a happier picture. And it was an earlier group of Thai Dom refugees coming to Des Moines. And the camera, for whatever reason, zoomed in on a baggage check that said "Des Moines". The Governor said, "It's a sign. We have to do something. Because we can't turn our back." And so, that night, he wrote a letter to the President. The next morning, he called a special press conference and said, "Iowa will double its refugee intake, but please Mr. President, you have to do something—our country has to accept these people." And he went to the Governor's Association meeting and he called upon Governors of every state to do something. And two governors stood up, one a Democrat from New Jersey, Brendan Burg, and the other a Republican from Michigan, Bill Millican, and said, "We'll work with you." And the three of them and urged the change in our refugee policy. And the call came from Vice President Mondale's office and said, "Governor Ray, we want you to go to Geneva, they're having a United Nations Conference on the boat people." And we were there, in this hall, as the country after country's representative lamented the plight of the boat people, but nobody offered to do anything. And then, in one of the most astounding moments I've ever witnessed in my career, Walter Mondale came to the podium and he told the story of the ship St. Louis, and how it was turned away from America's shores and he said, "Never again we turn our back on refugees." And he announced that the United States would take 178,000 refugees a year, to address this incredible humanitarian problem. And once again, that beacon that had started in Iowa had found it's way to Washington and helped bring about a change of policy and had reached out around the world. To people drowning in the South China Sea, and pulled them to safety.

In 1979, a year later, we again confronted incredible humanitarian and human catastrophe. Following Pope John Paul's visit here, where he addressed 300,000 people at Living History Farms, he told, "You're the stewards of the Earth with an obligation to feed all man-kind." Governor Ray and I, and several other Governors were at the Cambodian border—Thailand. And we stood amidst 30,000 people who just escaped from the Khmer Rouge, and who were dieing at the rate of a hundred a day. And the governor brought back the most extraordinary pictures, of human beings at the seventh level of hell. And he was visited then, by leaders of the Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic churches who said, "Governor, we must do something." And the Des Moines Register and Michael Gardner, one of the great humanitarians of our state, and a great personal friend of mine, said, "The newspaper will be behind whatever we can do." And we formed Iowa SHARES—Iowa Sends Help, Aids Refugees and Ends Starvation. And over the next six weeks, all across the state, every religious denomination in schools, civic groups, 4H, FFA, individually raised money and sent it to us and we sent food and medicine, and Iowa doctors and nurses, to the Cambodian border and saved thousands and thousands of people.

And it was in the great tradition of Herbert Hoover, who Governor Vilsack referred to in his letter, is known as the failed President, but has saved probably a billion people during WWI by taking food from America and bringing it to starving people in Europe. One of the great icons in the history of our state and another person who reached around the

world, to alleviate human suffering—working as a conservative republican, working for a democratic President, Woodrow Wilson.

And our Iowa SHARES program also connected to the, our legacy of agricultural innovation, the Governor referred to. We denominated our gifts in bushels of corn, so that people would be thinking of George Washington Carver, and all he did. Jessie Field Shambaugh, the woman from Clorenda, who started the 4H movement, which now the 100th year of extension, that's so right that we celebrate that. Henry Wallace, and people from Pioneer, who are here should be so proud of all the contributions and all the lives that have been enhanced and saved by the great scientific breakthroughs that have been made there. And of course, Norman Borlaug, Simon Estes... you know Norman Borlaug shares one thing with you. He went and applied to go to the University of Minnesota, as I say, his only real mistake in life in not going here, and was turned away from the College of Agriculture! Told he wasn't good and that he had to earn his way in! I think there is some solace I'm taking in the rejection letters to colleges some of my kids have gotten. Maybe this, maybe this is a sign of uh, of greatness coming.

But, Borlaug, reaches around the world and brings to India and Pakistan, as famine is about to sweep through their lands, a way to take rice and quadruple the production. And he saves hundreds of millions of people as well as in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran—all the countries that are in the news. Who's the person who has saved more lives in the Muslim world, more lives in the Hindu world, more lives in the Buddhist world, than any other person who has ever lived? It's Norman Borlaug, from Crestco.

And though there's this great legacy of heroes, but, you know there's another legacy, it's the legacy of ideas. Mentioned there international visitors program, one of the great stars of uh, ICIU is how it brings foreign visitors to live in people's homes, to meet with Americans. We were talking about this with, uh, from Principal here at the table that I am pleased and honored to sit with, about the impact that individuals can have.

I want to tell you a story when I was in Cambodia, the night the shooting is starting. And the democracy activists are under attack and under threat, and my neighbor across the street was the Minister of Interior. A member of the Communist party of Cambodia. Who, when we had had UN supervised elections, we gave them a trip to come to the United States. And he traveled around, and went to International visitors programs and he was taken in peoples' homes. And that night as the town is covered in shooting, and I came out to my gate and I waited until I could run across the street and get over with him, and we're trying to stop this and save, what we thought were, the leading opposition politicians from being shot. And he and I worked together, making phone calls, and giving orders, and they were saved. And he was there at the forefront of doing this. And somebody wrote a letter to me, later and said, "You know Ambassador, America saved democracy in Cambodia tonight." I don't know if that's right, and it's nice to get a letter like that. But I think there's something to the story about, that we saved something, there. And I know, that someplace in America, there's some person or persons, who were in an international visitors program who took that man in their home and converted him, and changed him, and had an impact on him. So that that night, he, of his own

volition did, what was necessary to save democracy and preserve human rights. As all of you, as you do this, just understand, that you could be having a dramatic impact, far beyond what you may think possible.

Well, when my career was over, I returned from the killing fields to the field of dreams, and went to work with the World Food Prize and tried to make that into the Nobel Prize for food and agriculture. But, I also have in my heart that we need to preserve this legacy. We have a wonderful legacy, and our state has a great humanitarian history. We have our problems, we have our warts, we have things we wish never happened, but there this great tradition, great legacy, of which ICIU is a part. And in this hall, there is a unique opportunity to do that. We start with the 65th anniversary of ICIU, in September, it's Bob Ray's 75th Birthday—although he doesn't like people to say that—but, what a wonderful time to recall what he has done for refugees.

We are trying to organize a Hoover Wallace dinner to bring politicians together. Pat, I need your help with this, and uh, just think, for a night, democrats and republicans, and the spirit of it is, that democrats need to speak well of republicans, and republicans speak well of democrats. And one of the first people I want to try to invite is George McGovern. Because, if you want to find somebody who will tell you what a great person Herbert Hoover was, it's George McGovern, who has devoted his life to feeding people. And I hope that October 16th, is World Food Day, we'll be having World Food Prize events, but I hope, that we can find a way that we can reach out in every community of our state. And through religious, civic groups, turn everybody's attention to hunger. And maybe once again have something like an Iowa SHARES—Iowa Stops Hunger, and Aids Refugees, and Ends Suffering.

Now the other project I'm doing is trying to turn the Des Moines public library into the pantheon of Iowa heroes. At a place where this great legacy can be preserved. Because a great legacy deserves a great building. And my dream that this building there can be right across from the Simon Estes Amphitheatre and uh, will be a wonderful backdrop when you perform there. And also to have, just imagine to have the statues, of our heroes on the bridge and, as you approach the capital. And imagine you're taking some of the wonderful visitors we have here tonight in a car, as you're showing them our town. And as you go across the bridge, and look out one side, and here's George Washington Carver, here's Jessie Fields Shambaugh, here's Henry Wallace, Herbert Hoover, Norman Borlaug—what a great statement about our state. That our heroes are people who have devoted their lives to saving other human beings and alleviate suffering. Now, we hope to have the library finished by 2007. And you'll be having your 70th anniversary in 2008, and I can think of no more wonderful venue for this next gathering than for all of you to be there, surrounded by our great humanitarian legacy, and our humanitarian heroes.

Thank you very much for having me here.