

Memorandum

Iowa State University

Department of Political Science

Date: October 15, 2007

To: Peter Reilly
Chair, Committee for Honorary Degrees
Faculty Senate
103 Laboratory of Mechanics

From: James M. McCormick
Professor and Chair
Department of Political Science
509 Ross Hall, 294-8682

Re: **Nomination of Dr. Kenneth Quinn
for an Honorary Degree from Iowa State University**

On behalf of the Department of Political Science, it is my distinct pleasure to nominate Ambassador Kenneth Quinn, President of The World Food Prize Foundation, for an honorary degree from Iowa State University. His significant and distinctive achievements over the past four decades as an American Foreign Service Officer, his humanitarian and refugee work for the federal government and the State of Iowa, and his recent accomplishments with The World Food Prize wholly demonstrate that he has had “a career of superlative intellectual and/or creative activity,” the principal criterion for this recognition. Indeed, he has been a distinguished public servant, an exceptional humanitarian, and an accomplished administrator. In all, he has been an extraordinary Iowan and American.

Kenneth M. Quinn graduated from Loras College in his native Dubuque, Iowa with a B.A. degree in Political Science. He went on to obtain a M.A. degree in Political Science at Marquette University, and, later, a Ph.D. in Government and Politics from the University of Maryland. He launched his career by joining the Foreign Service and his diplomatic service spanned almost 32 year with a wide array of appointments around the world. His distinguished service resulted in Ambassador Quinn being recognized as one of the two or three most decorated Foreign Service officers of his generation. In particular, Ambassador Quinn was presented the Secretary of State’s Award for Heroism and Valor for his work in Cambodia, and, on three different occasions, he was awarded the American Foreign Service Association Award for intellectual courage in challenging existing policy—the only Foreign Service officer so honored.

Ambassador Quinn is especially recognized for his exceptional governmental service in Southeast Asia, where he became the U.S. government’s premier expert on Indochina during his tenure. Fluent in Vietnamese, he served as an interpreter for President Ford and negotiated the first efforts by the United States government to be

allowed to search a Vietnamese prison for American POW/MIA's. Later, he was widely recognized for discovering and reporting on the genocide that was perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. While serving as America's ambassador to that country in 1989, Ambassador Quinn was influential in capturing a Khmer Rouge general who was accused of causing the deaths of up to two million Cambodians. In addition to these pivotal assignments in Southeast Asia, he also served with distinction on the National Security Council staff under Henry Kissinger, was a special assistant to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, and chaired an Inter-agency Task Force on POW/MIA's.

While his national governmental service is surely exemplary, his work on behalf of the State of Iowa is equally meritorious. Under a special exchange program with the federal government, Ambassador Quinn served as an administrative assistant to Governor Ray from 1978 through 1982. As former Iowa Governor Ray outlined in his supporting letter for this nomination, Ambassador Quinn was instrumental in developing the refugee resettlement efforts in Iowa during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In that role, too, he was responsible for devising a plan to respond to the "Boat People" crisis in the South China Sea, and his efforts eventually led to resettlement of these refugees in the U.S. and in the State of Iowa. Further, Ambassador Quinn was instrumental in developing the Iowa SHARES program that provided rapid assistance to starving Cambodian refugees and stimulated the humanitarian impulse that is so much a part of the Iowa political and social landscape. Governor Ray summed up the impact on these initiatives and Ambassador Quinn's role in this powerful and understated way: "As a result of Ken's efforts in working with me, thousand of lives were saved and thousands of other refugees are now living in the U.S."

With his retirement from the Foreign Service, he returned to Iowa, and since January 1, 2000, he has served as President of The World Food Prize Foundation. In that assignment, too, he has had extraordinary achievements. Under his decisive and creative leadership, the World Food Prize ceremony has become globally recognized the as "Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture" and had brought lasting honor and recognition to Iowa native and distinguished scientist, Dr. Norman E. Borlaug. As one of his supporters noted, "Under Ambassador Quinn's inspired tutelage and hands-on management, this ceremony has become a tour de force even of which Iowans can be extremely proud and which leaves foreign visitors very favorably impressed." In addition, though, Ambassador Quinn has expanded the activities of the Foundation to include a two-day international symposium on global food security, built a World Food Prize Youth Institute to accompany the annual forum, established youth internships to promote the goals of the World Food Prize, and has worked tirelessly to establish a permanent home for The World Food Prize Foundation and for the Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates as a lasting tribute to those prominent global citizens who have done so much to address global hunger and poverty. In short, the World Food Prize and the World Food Prize Foundation have become important Iowa institutions with a global prominence—and Ambassador Quinn deserves much of the credit.

Finally, and as his colleagues consistently note in their letters of support, Ambassador Quinn's interpersonal skills and personal integrity are widely admired qualities that facilitate his numerous successes. As one letter-writer noted, he has a

wonderful combination of “exceptional intellectual ability, creative vision and drive, consummate work ethic, personal integrity, and management skills.” Another associate points to his “outstanding skills in organizational management and creative policy formulation. And a third points to his exceptional skill in policymaking and policy execution for his numerous accomplishments. In all, his personal qualities and quiet determination only enhance and accentuate his policy and programmatic successes.

In all, Ambassador Kenneth Quinn has engaged in superlative creative activity over the past four decades, and he has made significant and positive contributions to the world, the United States, and the State of Iowa. By these accomplishments, he is exceptionally well qualified for an honorary degree from Iowa State University. Indeed, his life and his work exemplify the kind of public service and creative pursuits that are at the core of a land-grant institution. In this sense, I am pleased and proud to nominate Ambassador Kenneth Quinn for an honorary degree, and I believe that he is richly deserving of this recognition from Iowa State University.