



February 2009

Ambassador Graber Departs, Thompson-Jones Takes Over As Interim Chief of Mission

When Ambassador Richard W. Graber finished his service in Prague and returned to the U.S. on January 20, current Deputy Chief of Mission Mary Thompson-Jones became the Charge d’Affaires until a new ambassador arrives later this year.



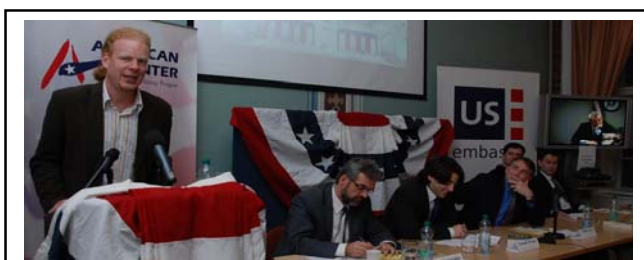
Mary Thompson-Jones says goodbye to Richard Graber at the U.S. Embassy on January 13. (Photo: Michal Stichauer)

Ambassador Graber attended numerous farewell receptions in his honor; hosted lunches with the editors-in-chief of the major Czech media, and mayors from the Brdy region; and paid goodbye visits to Czech political leaders. Defense Minister Vlasta Parkanova honored Graber with the Order of the Golden Linden. The former ambassador considers lifting the U.S. visa requirement for Czech citizens his greatest success and stressed that the Czech Republic and U.S. would remain close allies. He called participation in the missile-defense project a great opportunity for the Czech Republic to contribute to NATO. Reflecting on his tenure in Prague, Graber said, “This has been a remarkable journey for our family—one that has changed us a great deal...We are looking forward to coming back to this country.” Richard W. Graber served at U.S. Embassy-Prague from October 2006. Interim Chief of Mission Mary Thompson-Jones has been with the Embassy since August 2007. It is her second stint in the Czech Republic: she earlier served here as press attaché from 1993-1996. Her other overseas assignments include

assistant cultural affairs officer in Madrid; press attaché in Sarajevo; and public affairs officer in Montreal and Guatemala. Before beginning her diplomatic career, she worked for eight years as a journalist and editorial writer.

U.S. Foreign Policy Debated in A.C. as Obama Becomes New U.S. President

The American Center organized two events tied to the inauguration of new U.S. President Barack Obama. On January 15 journalists, diplomats and historians discussed presidential inaugural traditions: Cultural Attaché David Gainer touched upon the meaning and rituals and analyst Milan Hronicek explored the historical context. A day after Obama was sworn in as the 44th president on January 20, Embassy Charge d’Affaires Mary Thompson-Jones and Czech Ambassador to the U.S. Petr Kolar considered the direction of U.S. foreign policy. Experts, including Jiri Schneider and Tomas Sedlacek talked about other aspects of the inauguration.



Tomas Sedlacek talks in American Center on January 21. (Photo: Michal Stichauer)

Czechs and Visa Waiver: Lots of Interest

For more than two months, Czechs have been able to travel to the U.S. without visas for business or tourism for as long as 90 days by using the Electronic System of Travel Authorization (ESTA). According to Consul General Stuart Hatcher, more than 6000 Czechs have applied for ESTA



Navigating the ESTA website (Photo: Michal Stichauer)

authorization since November 17, 2008 when the Czech Republic joined the U.S. Visa Waiver program: “That is about twice as many people as applied for visas during the same period last year.” Hatcher considers the new system a big success, citing the fact that “almost all applications are approved”—the overwhelming majority of them almost immediately. Thus far, U.S. authorities have noticed no major problems. On the rare occasion issues do arise, it is typically because people travelling to the U.S. using ESTA forget to confirm they have biometric passports, which the Czech Republic has issued since September 2006. U.S. Immigration officers have denied

entry to several Czech visitors who inaccurately answered questions on the ESTA form about their previous stays in the U.S. (mainly concerning overstaying their admission periods, being deported, etc). Visa-free travelers to the U.S. must have individual ESTA authorizations and personal biometric passports. Also, ESTA authorization is given on the ESTA website, not via a separate e-mail. Learn more about ESTA at <http://prague.usembassy.gov>.

Daniel Fried Discusses Latest News in Prague

The Gaza Strip, energy security and missile defense were the main issues during U.S. Assistant Secretary of State



Daniel Fried interviewed in American Center (Photo: Jakub Hornek)

Daniel Fried's Prague visit. Fried met with Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar and Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra. Speaking about Gaza during interviews with the media, Fried said, "A

provisional solution leads nowhere; we are looking for a durable arrangement." On missile defense, he noted the U.S. is more than willing to cooperate with Russia. "U.S., NATO and Russian systems could be either integrated with a single command, or work on the basis of interconnection or instant communication. With respect to the European gas crisis a halt in Russian gas exports caused Fried noted: "Responsibility for European energy security is on Europe. We will do what we can to help.... No European country should depend on one energy source only."

U.S. and Czech Republic Enter into Social Security Agreement

The Social Security Administration announced that effective January 1, 2009, Americans working in the Czech Republic no longer must pay social security taxes to both countries. The agreement also removes the double taxation requirement on Czechs working in the U.S., and will improve social security protection for people who work in both countries. Until now, U.S. companies employing U.S. citizens in the CR had to pay Social Security taxes to both the U.S. and the CR on the same earnings. Under the new agreement, U.S. and Czech employers and their employees will now contribute to either the U.S. Social Security system or to the Czech social security system, but not both. Finally, effective January 1, retirement beneficiaries in the Czech Republic will be able to combine their years of employment in the

Czech Republic with those in the U.S. More details are available at <http://prague.usembassy.gov/>

U.S. Embassy on Facebook!

U.S. Embassy is on Facebook! Just enter "U.S. Embassy Prague" in the search window on www.facebook.com and you'll find information on our upcoming events plus great pictures and videos. There is a lot of interesting stuff available for the accounts of U.S. Embassy fans.

Czechoslovak Posters Promote U.S. Films

The American Center opened an exhibition of Czechoslovak posters of American movies spanning 30

years (1959-1989). During the Communist era, working on film posters was the only income source for many designers.

Though committees had to approve the posters, designers were

largely free to determine the posters' 'look'. An example of censorship can be found in the poster for *Bezstarostný jezdec* (Easy Rider), in which smoke obscures the American flag on Peter Fonda's back. The exhibition will be open until the end of March.



Czechoslovak movie posters in American Center (Photo: Jakub Hornek)

Teachers Discuss Intercultural Clashes

On Tuesday, January 27, the second workshop in the international "Deliberating on Democracy" series began in the American Center. The project is coordinated by Partners Czech/ NGO for secondary school teachers. The topic was "Intercultural Clashes." Eva Janská of Charles University's Faculty of Natural Sciences discussed her research on global migration and illegal labor activities in the Czech Republic and Europe. On April 2 the third session will continue the series by deliberating in "Crime and Punishment – Should a Capital punishment be the Part of Democratic Judicial System?"

Upcoming Events

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Feb. 10 | Abraham Lincoln 200 th Birth Anniversary with Dr. Joseph Fornieri , American Center, 5:00 p.m. |
| Feb. 19 | Abraham Lincoln: Preserving the Union (1996) – film screening. American Center, 6 p.m. |
| Feb. 26 | Discover Alaska with Rostislav Stach , American Center, 5 p.m. |