



December 2008

## Obama Elected New U.S. President

Barack Obama, the Democratic Senator from Illinois, was elected the 44<sup>th</sup> U.S. President on November 5. The previous night, more than 250 people gathered at the U.S. Ambassador's residence in Prague 6 to discuss the historic U.S. presidential election and follow the early returns on three big-screen televisions. Guests enjoyed a panel discussion among four US citizens from both the Democratic and Republican parties and Czech television stations and others journalists circulated through the crowd interviewing guests about the elections and their potential impact on U.S.-Czech bilateral relations. Out of approximately 5,500 American citizens living in the Czech Republic, about 300 used the opportunity to send ballots through the U.S. Embassy in Prague. Many others sent their votes directly to the states of their registration.



## U.S. Energy Envoy Gray Talks in Prague about Gas Supplies from Caspian Region

U.S. Special Envoy for Eurasian Energy Boyden Gray visited Prague on November 10 to discuss with the Industry and



Trade Ministry representatives, academics and media U.S. and European energy security. "The U.S. wants to help European countries diversify their energy sources to decrease the chance of Russia's using its energy supplies as a diplomatic weapon against them," said Gray. He noted countries like Azerbaijan

and Turkmenistan, on their side, want to diversify their customers and thus will scramble to broaden business outside Russian sphere of influence. Gray also opined the financial crisis was the decisive element in the U.S. elections that tipped the scale toward Barack Obama.

## First Visa-Free Flights to the U.S.

Already an important day in Czech history, November 17<sup>th</sup> again became significant as the first Czech citizen, Lenka Cilova, travelled to the United States without visas. Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra and Interior Minister Ivan Langer were also among the first travelers to register with the on-line ESTA system. The first visa-free flights to the U.S. were Czech Airlines Prague to New York and Delta Air Lines Prague to Atlanta. The Visa Waiver program enables Czechs to travel for business or tourism purposes to the United States for up to 90 days.



## Ambassador Talks about Elections, Visits Pilsen

U.S. Ambassador Richard Graber lectured on U.S. election system and the situation after the presidential election at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Prague's Jinonice on November 6. "Senator Obama was a very good candidate. He has raised the bar in many aspects," said the ambassador. Talking about President Bush's legacy, Graber noted that we should not forget it was Bush who pushed relentlessly to add several nations including the Czech Republic into the Visa Waiver Program. In Pilsen on November 13, the Ambassador explained to journalists and travel agencies representatives how to travel to the U.S. without visas.



## Non-profit Organizations Expert Doris Heiser Shares Experience with Czech NGOs

Doris Heiser participated in a two-day program in Prague and Ústí nad Labem. She met with the representatives of Opona (an NGO commemorating the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain) and the Business Leaders Forum, visited several local NGOs in the Usti region as well as held a roundtable with Community Foundation Euroregion Labe representatives about the role of board in CF. The following day she gave an interview to

Neziskovky.cz (the biggest Czech NGO portal) and held a roundtable for NGO representatives on the topic of legacy giving, which is a new concept in the Czech environment.

### Ex-Health Secretary Thompson Muses with Czechs on Health Care Reform

Former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services and ex-Governor of Wisconsin Tommy Thompson was in Prague on November 19-20 to discuss with Czech Health Minister Tomas Julinek and various experts aspects of Czech health care reform and to talk about the health care reform in Wisconsin and the U.S., difficulties encountered during reform process and about methods used to publicize changes. Thompson also talked about challenges awaiting the U.S. health care in upcoming years. "About 47 million Americans have no medical insurance – it needs to be fixed," he said.



### U.S. Officials Discuss Missile Defense in Prague

U.S. Representative John Murtha visited Prague on November 25-26. He met with Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar and at the Defense Ministry Murtha talked with his Czech colleagues about Czech and American deployments in Afghanistan and global security issues. Acting U.S. Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John Rood was in Prague on December 4. Having served as one of chief architects of U.S.-Czech Missile Defense Agreements, Rood came to the CR to consult with his counterparts the future of the missile defense project, Czech ratification, reactions of Russia and the NATO involvement. Rood said the U.S. is pleased that NATO supports U.S. agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic. "We see it as an endorsement of the initiative we have taken with these two countries," Rood said.



### Embassy Supports Mezipatra Festival

U.S. Embassy participated for the first time in the annual "Mezipatra" [Mezzanine] Gay and Lesbian Festival held in Prague and Brno in early November. The embassy contributed money for screening of five American films, including *A Four Letter Word*, *Red Without Blue* and *Further Off The Straight & Narrow*. "The main thematic focus is 'life after...' – after sex change, diagnosis, loss of partner. The theme is not dark, the characters of this year's

films are heroes and heroines in the inconspicuous meaning of the word; they are characterized by a skill so vital in the histories of minorities: ability to survive," said festival's director Ales Rumpel at its introduction.

### New U.S.-Czech Clinical Research Project Presented to Media

On November 25, the U.S.-based Abbott Company presented to experts and the media in the Ambassador's residence in Prague 6 the CEVA project aimed at the cooperation between a commercial sphere, science and the clinical application for laboratory diagnostics. The goal of CEVA is the spread of the science knowledge in the field of laboratory diagnostics and a better education for its users. The project was launched by a joint effort of the Abbott Company, the West Bohemian University in Pilsen and Klatovy Hospital. More information can be found on [www.ceva-edu.cz](http://www.ceva-edu.cz).



### Ambassador Graber Christens New Czech Book on New York

Ambassador Richard Graber was present on December 3 in Ponrepo Cinema in Prague at the christening of *New York*, a book written by Zdenek Mahler in 1964 which was not published because the illustrator, Vladimir Fuka, emigrated to the U.S. during the Communism era in Czechoslovakia.



Photo Courtesy: Albatros Publishing House

### Upcoming Events

- Dec. 10 Photo exhibition opening "America Through Your Eyes", Am. Center 5:30 p.m.
- Dec. 10 Alice Masaryk Human Rights Award Reception, Amb's Residence, Prague 6.
- Dec. 15 Christmas in Washington – Friends of American Center, American Center, 5 pm.

<http://prague.usembassy.gov>



Happy Holiday Season 2008!