Thank you very much for the kind introduction. I am grateful to Strobe Talbott for his very kind remarks. Thank you, too, for this extremely generous and most unexpected award. I want to extend my warmest congratulations to Diana Walker, my co-recipient tonight, for her great contribution to portraying the presidency. I look forward to doing more television shows together.

I am even more grateful for this award, given my distinguished predecessors in receiving it, one of whom, General Brent Scowcroft, is here tonight, and the high respect I have for the members of the selection committee.

Let me also thank Mr. Peck for his unstinting generosity to the Portrait Gallery, the presidency, and to the pursuit of educational opportunities for disadvantaged Americans, including African Americans and Hispanics and many others. Your willingness to support so generously such worthy and deserving causes is more than admirable. Were I not a recipient of the award tonight, I would say with equal vigor "thank you for doing this for your country and its future." I want, too, to thank all the cooperating foundations and organizations that made the award and the evening possible.

I would be remiss in my own understanding of reality were I not to say immediately that it has been my family, who have been my strongest supporters throughout my career in government. I'm happy to have with me tonight my son Timothy and members of his family, my daughter Margaret and members of her family and most especially my wife Alice. To all of them, but most especially to Alice, my firmest friend and toughest critic through many fascinating assignments, I owe the most, and they too should be receiving the award with me in every sense of the word—they surely deserve it.

I have had the honor of serving every President since Harry Truman, when I worked as a clerk in the U.S. Post Office and for the U.S. Weather Bureau as a
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summer intern in the Arctic. Since leaving the Foreign Service at the end of 2000, I have also served on a number of official advisory committees to U.S. departments and agencies.

My Foreign Service career was highly rewarding and in some respects very unusual. I've had the pleasure of serving on all continents except Australia. But then, too, I went to university there under the Fulbright program. I also spent three-and-one-half years in the U.S. Navy and more than forth-one-and-one-half in the Foreign Service.

I wallowed in diversity, both ethnic and religious. I had the pleasure of being ambassador to the world's only Jewish state (Israel); to a Muslim country (Jordan); to the world's largest Hindu state where Buddhism was born and where 150 million are Muslims, which makes it the world's second-largest Muslim state (India); to the largest Orthodox Christian country in the world (Russia); to a predominantly Roman Catholic republic (El Salvador); and to two countries, while still both Christian and Muslim, contain very large populations which practice traditional African religions (Nigeria and Tanzania). It's been a wonderful career, even though my mother often wondered why I kept moving around and couldn't keep a steady job.

Paul Peck is truly right. Public service—and we all serve the President in that regard—is essential for our country's survival and prosperity.

Last year, Mr. Peck encouraged us all to think about change and improvements—about ways to make our service to the presidency and through the presidency to all of the people more effective and more valuable.

Tonight, I want to talk about two aspects of that service and provide you some thoughts on improvement.

I do so in the certain knowledge that the Civil Service the military service and the Foreign Service of the United States have made numerous sacrifices and provided enormous opportunities for us all as citizens. We are lucky that for the size of our population, we have one of the smallest public services in numbers, both at the federal and state level, when we compare it with other countries around the world.

Also, I see it as one which is generally dedicated, intelligent, and hard-working. Indeed, our public found out how essential was our public service, when just a few years ago in a budget battle, there were selective shutdowns of activities of the federal service and the public uproar was immediate, vigorous, and sustained.

However, I must tell you I am troubled by the fact that in our presidential elections there has been an increasing tendency for presidential candidates to run against our public service. It's not just the talk of "clean up the mess in Washington," but that plays a role in it. There have been implications that the public service hasn't been faithful or it has been lazy and self-indulgent, or that it has not met the needs of the people. And the candidate of course will not only throw out the rascals from the opposing party, but go down to Washington and clean up "that mess" for once and for all.
This has hurt the reputation of our career public servants, and I am concerned that in another oncoming electoral season we will see much of the same rhetoric repeated. I hope I am wrong. I will keep my fingers crossed. But on the very off-chance that any candidates are listening tonight, I ask them to consider this issue carefully.

Secondly, I am concerned by the increasing what I can only call politicization of our Civil and Foreign Service.

We all know that over the years, congressional legislation has sought to draw a clear, bright line between public service and the elected political leadership. Indeed, that is as it should be.

As a public servant, I have understood the necessity for loyalty to the President and his policies. That, too, is as it should be. Our system has always provided a remedy if there was conflict or confusion—resignation.

But let me mention that during recent administrations, in the department that I know best, the Department of State, there has been a general replacement in jobs, some well down in the bureaucracy, of career appointments with political appointments.

Let me also note that the plumb book which lists these jobs has grown several-fold over the last two decades, yet again another indication of the pressure of politics on the public service.

And then, let me mention something that I perhaps know even more about—ambassadors.

As an ambassador who served coming from the career service, I appreciate what my colleagues from outside the career service have often brought to the job. There have been, and continue to be, outstanding appointments to those jobs. Stu Eizenstat and Howard Baker—and might I add Nancy Kassebaum Baker in Japan and Felix Rohatyn in France—are but a few fine examples, and there are many others—Max Kampelman and Sol Linowitz, among others.

What disturbs me is the large number of such appointments for whom one cannot say they bring special knowledge, background, experience, or wisdom to the job. We must be frank that they are there because they are being rewarded in the main for their financial contributions to the winning political party. At a time of war on terrorism that should not be the standard for such service!

The spoils system went out in the 1880s, but this remnant is not one that speaks well of our presidency or indeed of our needs at a time when we are the undoubted leader of the world community in such a war.

One wag has remarked that the first job that was truly professionalized by popular acclaim was brain surgery. And after disastrous experiences in the Civil and Spanish-American war, we professionalized our military officer corps.

Right now, by tradition more than anything else, about 70 percent of our Ambassadors are from the career service and 30 percent from the outside. Not too long ago, a distinguished American senator, who has gone on to serve at a
high post in the Executive Branch, led the fight for reducing that number to 10 percent. He was unsuccessful, but I don't believe the project should be abandoned.

Where knowledge, experience and good training can make a difference, America deserves the best. The career service is organized to do that, and I would hope that this important improvement, in what I believe is the spirit of Paul Peck's Award, can be picked up and implemented in the future, despite my full understanding of all the difficulties in doing so. And I say that in full knowledge of the fact that the career service needs to send its best men and women to this assignment.

For me and for all of my colleagues in the Foreign Service and with all of those with whom I worked in the civil and military service, it was and is always a privilege to serve this country.

Every day was a day of new challenges and new opportunities. I used to tell my staff that the day in which you did not learn something new and important in the service of our country was a day wasted.

You all, as Americans, gave us that opportunity. If I was able to give something back to you in return, then it was for me both a great pleasure and the highest honor.

Thank you most sincerely for your recognition tonight. Because you recognize public service as well as individuals at this occasion, I am pleased as well to tell you that my acceptance of this honor must be on behalf of all of those who have so loyally and faithfully served our country down through the generations.

Thank you very much.

**Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering**
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**Image:**
National Portrait Gallery Director Marc Pachter and Paul Peck present the Paul Peck Presidential Award to Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering.