Brian Atwood and Ken Wollack
National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) -1983
Transcript

Brian Atwood: My name is Brian Atwood, and I was one of the original leaders of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), an institution that was created to promote democracy. It is affiliated loosely, although it's a nonpartisan organization, with the Democratic Party.

Ken Wollack: And I'm Ken Wollack. I joined the NDI as the vice president when Brian was the founding president of the organization. I was vice president in 1986 and served under Brian for seven years. Brian left to become the administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and I became president in early 1993, and stayed on with the Institute for 25 more years. I retired in 2018.

Brian Atwood: Let me say a few words about the origins of the National Democratic Institute. Obviously, it was created along with the other core grantees when the National Endowment for Democracy was created in about 1985. I was, at the time, the Executive Director of the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee and the very first project that NDI promoted was to have a group of party leaders from other countries come to the United States for the 1984 election. I actually spoke to that group as the Executive Director of the Senate Campaign Committee, so I like to say that I was involved with NDI from the very beginning!

The executive director at the time was Jack Lielo, and he had an interest in Africa. He had planned to do a major conference in Senegal on democracy in Africa. I then was asked by Madeleine Albright and Rochelle Horowitz, who were members of the board, if I would consider joining NDI to become its president.

I was a little reluctant because the Congress, in particular the Senate, had voted against giving the party institutes any money at all for the following fiscal year. The controversy was that it appeared that it was being run by the Democratic National Committee. In the view of the critics, it was an effort to try to basically practice American politics overseas. That wasn't my vision, but it was understandable that they would come to that conclusion, given the fact that many of the members of the board and the chair was also the chair of the Democratic National Committee.

There were also serious people on that board. I mean serious in the sense that they understood foreign policy. Cyrus Vance, the former Secretary of State with whom I worked in the Carter administration, and Madeleine Albright, with whom I also worked in the Carter years and who later became Secretary of State. When I was asked by Madeleine to consider joining, it was a pretty risky proposition because of the fact that the Senate had voted against any money for NDI. The Institute had very few staff, I think 4 people total, and no real plans to increase that number. The board was very nervous about what could be done. They basically thought that funding panels, discussion panels, was the safest programming. They wanted to bring people over to the United States, as they had for the election of 1984.

So the first thing I did was to fly to New York to meet with Cyrus Vance. He invited Tony Lake to join us. I think Tony was, at the time, living in New York. I explained my concerns and Cy basically urged me to put all of these concerns in writing. I did that. I wrote a letter to the Chair, Chuck Manatt, saying that I couldn't take the job because of these concerns. I presented certain conditions– including being made a member of the board, and presented a more ambitious program for NDI. I shared the draft with Cy Vance and he said that he would support my recommendations along with my candidacy.

The board, I suppose realizing that the Institute was in a weak position, agreed that I would not only be hired as the new president of NDI, but that I'd also be a board member. I had insisted on that because I wanted more authority to try to save the Institute after the Congress had voted against it.

It helped that I had been the head of the Senate Campaign Committee, because we then went to the Senate the next year and managed, in a very controversial vote, to win, by one vote. My former boss, Senator Eagleton, was crucial in this, because after that vote, one of the Republicans said that he'd voted the wrong way, so there was a motion to reconsider the original vote. Senator Eagleton threatened to filibuster, and he won the day because they basically conceded at that point.

So that was a fairly rocky start for NDI, but we managed to get about 300 hundred thousand dollars, and we were then on our way to doing things.. My concept was that we really needed to get out into the international community and introduce ourselves.

So the first program was this program in Africa that was originally conceived by Lielo and we worked with the Senegalese government. President Abdoul Diouf was a strong supporter and he had democratic inclinations, ideas that expressed eloquently in his opening speech. His Socialist party was the original party after colonialism. The main opposition party, led by Abdoulaye Wade, complained bitterly about their election process. After election defeats he would go to the streets to protest.. Wade was in that meeting and was able to express himself forcefully. The next day his speech was covered by the major press outlets. The headlines quoted Wade as complaining bitterly about the lack of democracy in Senegal.

That was very important,[but that was just the beginning]. We were accepted by all sides as trustworthy partners. We were invited back to Senegal a year or so later to evaluate their election system. Based on the recommendations of our multi-national team of experts, the election system was reformed dramatically to the satisfaction of Wade. He lost the next election as well, but he accepted the result and President Diouf graciously invited him to be a minister without portfolio.

But I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself. When I first started, there was some controversy about the labor union core grantee having taken sides in Panama’s election. I was concerned

about throwing our weight in any one direction, unless, of course, the direction was to try to defeat a dictator.

And I remember going up to the hill and briefing people, and John Rich, who worked for Joe Biden on the Foreign Relations Committee staff, said, if you're not involved in the Philippines, then you're not relevant. Marcos had just announced that he would hold a “snap” election. So, I said to myself, how are we going to get involved in the Philippines? I had a meeting with a lawyer who was an election expert, Larry Garber, who was then with the Human Rights Law Group. Larry convinced me that we could get involved by evaluating the Philippines election system, and then maybe even monitor the process.

In the snap election of February 1986 we had done a pre-election survey.We received a grant from United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and did a pre-election survey to determine whether the process was fair on its face and whether it would be possible to detect fraud. We convinced the Republican Institute to join us which made the effort more palatable all around. We then testified before the Foreign Relations Committee and said basically that we believed that we could evaluate the election, that we would be able to detect fraud if it happened.

So we joined with The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), the nonpartisan Filipino group that was monitoring the election. We learned a lot about how they operated, in particular by undertaking a parallel vote count. The person we'd chosen to lead our delegation was John Hume of Northern Ireland, who had the year before won the Nobel Peace Prize. The Republican selected the former president of Colombia, Misael Pastrana. It was a joint effort, it was bipartisan in American terms and multi-national in every other way. That delegation declared it to be a fraudulent election.

The people of the Philippines rose up in what is called the People Power Revolution. Marcos had to leave the country and Cory Aquino was declared the victor..

That was very significant in [establishing the importance of the party institutes]. We then went to Chile when they decided to hold a referendum on whether the dictator, Augusto Pinochet should stay in power. And that's when Ken got very much involved., I went down initially to meet with the Chilean government to tell them that we were going to offer an opportunity to evaluate their election process, and that it would be very important for them, because they would then have a legitimate result. Legitimacy was the key word here.

So, we then, of course, got involved. I won't go into Chile… that into any detail, because Ken was very much involved at the time. I knew Ken when I was on the Hill, and he was the legislative director for AIPAC, and we had a number of meetings over a particular issue, and we got to know one another, and I liked him very much, and it was a great partnership.

[I don’t believe that Ken was yet at NDI when we held a meeting in Venezuela with the divided opposition to Pinochet. We brought in key representatives of countries that had already

undergone transitions to democracy– countries like Spain and Uruguay.The Spanish former Interior Minister Manuel Fraga was an important participant in influencing the conservative Chileans, and the two Socialist Party representatives were equally important in influencing the Chilean Socialists, a party that had thus far refused to join the Christian Democrats and the others in forming a united front.]

I'll say one more thing about my thinking about NDI. I had done a report on the transition to democracy in Spain. It was a controversial time. No other country in Europe had recognized Spain because of Franco. Franco had been an ally of Germany, and was an authoritarian dictator. The question then becomes should the United States continue its bases agreement with Spain and in what for? Should it be a treaty, and, if so, what could the US Senate do to encourage a transition to democracy in Spain?

Representing Senator Eagleton I met with Secretary Kissinger's designated negotiator, Robert McCloskey., and suggested that the renewal agreement for the bases needed to be a treaty. It was an issue, a constitutional process issue. The treaty power had been mostly usurped by Nixon and Kissinger. I told him that I wanted to undertake a study to determine whether there was a move toward democracy. McCloskey couldn't commit to submitting the bases agreement as a treaty, but he encouraged me to go to Spain and study the transition.

[My report was a detailed description of a democratic transition. It received headline attention in Spain and resulted in the Nixon Administration submitting the agreement as a treaty. It was ratified with an express endorsement of the democratic transition.]

So I did this long report that got a lot of attention, and endorsed the transition as positive. I said, it was moving in the right direction. I had interviewed people from all of the major institutions, including the church, the military, the political parties, and the government as it was then constituted.

That experience gave me some ideas about what NDI could do later. We then began to work with political parties and perform the active role that the National Endowment for Democracy had envisioned. And after Chile, of course, the wall came down in Eastern Europe, and NDI was really on its way. We were involved with Viktor Orban in Hungary, a leader who claimed to be a European liberal, but was corrupted by power. We went to the Czech Republic,Poland,Romania and Bulgaria and other countries in that region.

We called on our contacts from Spain to help us in Chile. In addition to Fraga, we asked the first democratically elected President of Spain, Adolfo Suarez, to lead our observer delegation for the plebiscite. Ken was deeply involved in helping the opposition and he can add to this.

An interesting story: our NDI person in Hungary actually became a candidate in that very first election. And he ran against Posgoy, the person many called the Gorbachev of Hungary. He was a more liberal vice leader of the Communist Party. He endorsed the notion that Hungary

should be a multi-party democracy. Our NDI staffer beat him in the first election. [So, that was a surprise and a bit sad as Posgoy had been courageous.] I will stop there and let Ken take over.

Ken Wollack: Thanks, Brian. I thought maybe I'd touch on a few issues.

The first is, why NDI? Why should there be party institutes as part of this National Endowment for Democracy? And I think that there were a few reasons. When the endowment was established - - inspired by a speech President Reagan delivered before the British Parliament and mandated by legislation introduced by the then-chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Dante Fascell - - it was envisioned that the NED itself would be a grant-making organization, but affiliated with the endowment would be four institutes representing institutions of American democracy that would be operational arms of the endowment - - two institutes affiliated with the two major parties of the United States, another institute affiliated with the AFL-CIO, the Labor Federation, and a fourth associated with the Chamber of Commerce, which was the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE). And these were institutions with broad membership that were mission-oriented and could establish relationships with their democratic counterparts overseas.

Secondly, they were also inspired particularly by Dante Facel and some of the people around President Regan, by the German party foundation that was established after the war.

[Secondly, the two party institutes were loosely modeled after the German party foundations that were established after World War II]. It was, in part, the weakness of the party system in Germany which led to the rise of the National Socialists. Therefore, after the war, the German parliament, the Bundestag, invested significant resources in their own political parties and the work of those parties domestically and overseas. It was those foundations that played an important role in helping to steer Spain and Portugal during the 1970s into the democratic camp. So, ironically, it was the German foundations and the German system that inspired the notion that there should be party institutes in the United States working overseas with their democratic counterparts.

There was also a recognition that multi-partyism was integral to a democratic system itself. That if political parties fail to play their special role in society, the entire democratic system is placed in jeopardy. When NDI began there had been pre-existing relationships between democratic political parties. There were international groupings of Social Democratic parties, Christian Democratic parties and large-L Liberal parties. So there was already the existence of an international network of political parties, but the Americans never really participated in this effort, and NDI and its Republican counterpart became American chapters of this international club of small-D democratic parties.

At the very outset, Brian and the NDI board had a vision of principles that would guide the organization, and those principles still hold true today. The first is that the NDI, unlike the Germans, would not work on a fraternal basis with political parties overseas. That it would work with small-D democratic parties from across the democratic political spectrum, from social

democratic through conservative political parties. Therefore, the organization sought formal standing within the major international groupings of political parties. The international grouping of social democratic parties, Christian Democratic parties, and Liberal parties. And we were accepted as observers in all of those networks. Those memberships gave NDI a unique standing in the countries in which we were to work, because the political leadership in many of these countries had membership in one of the political internationals. We believed it was important to work with a broad cross section of democratic parties because, unlike the Germans, we were a two-party system, and we were operating mostly in parliamentary systems that had a multitude of political parties. That we work across the democratic spectrum and that approach was central to the mission of the organization.

The second important principle was based on the realization that we were an American organization, supported by public funds. As the world's oldest political party, we were proud of our Democratic Party roots, but we would be joining something larger than ourselves. That we were not there to impose an American political system overseas, but were joining a community of democrats to share a variety of experiences and expertise. And for practical reasons, countries that are going through a democratic transition require a range of experiences and expertise, and oftentimes, our experience was not as relevant as the experience of other countries. [So, for example, in the mid-1980s, we brought the Philippine experience of election monitoring to the Chileans during the lead up to the 1988 plebiscite in Chile that brought an end to Pinochet's rule]. As Brian noted, we later brought Chileans to places like Nicaragua, and Cuba, Serbia, and South Africa, and to other places, to share their experiences in coalition building among democratic forces, which was an important part of the successful transition in Chile.

While our approach had a practical value, it would also send an important political message overseas. That this mission was not about the imposition of democracy by one of the world's superpowers, or the notion that every country had to adopt American-style democracy, but rather, we understood that there were a variety of options and we were part of this larger community.

It had a practical value and a political value in the work that we did overseas. Both of these fundamental principles were important.This was not just a north to south mission, but rather the sharing of experiences from countries in the north to those in the south, from the south to the north, and from the south to the south. In short, the sharing of experiences across borders and regions. This approach enabled us to share the South African experience in negotiating a democratic transition with the Northern Irelanders, who were beginning to prepare for peace negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement. Exposing the Northern Irelanders to the negotiating success South Africa leaders had a huge impact on the negotiations that led to that historic agreement. Those were the two fundamental principles, I think, that guided NDI's mission, and is still true today.

Brian Atwood: Could I add something to this? I agree, this is a very good presentation by Ken.

In the early days, one thing I forgot to say earlier was that we basically wanted to create a network of friends who trusted us around the world. To get that ball rolling, we did something called “Democracies in Regions of Crisis.” We went to Botswana, where they had been under pressure from the apartheid regime of South Africa. We invited South African press to observe the discussions, and Botswana was, at the time, a legitimate democracy, even though one party had succeeded in the mayor's race in Gaborone which was won by the opposition party dominated by the central government, the opposition succeeded in the mayor's race in the capital city. It was a legitimate democracy.

We then went to Costa Rica where, of course, because of the Nicaragua Civil War, there was a lot of tension there on their democracy. We wrote long reports [on how these countries dealt with the pressure]. And then we went to Israel. Ken was instrumental there, having worked at American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Vice President Mondale led our delegation. Every Israeli leader, including the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, generals and other members of the Knesset participated over three days. We had some really interesting discussions. The hand wringing over how to handle the occupied territories was right on the surface. The then-ambassador of the US, Sam Lewis, said that he had learned more in those three days than he had learned in the last six years of [his tenure] about Israeli concerns, occupied territories, and what to do about them.

[We invited our new friends from the earlier conferences in Botswana and Costa Rica and we produced a booklet on the three conferences.] We made friends, deep friends. I mean, they could see that we were legitimate, that we weren't trying to impose ourselves, as Ken suggested.[Our network was built on trust and that was our strength.]

The other aspect of this is that I felt it was important in the early days to do everything in a bipartisan way with the Republicans. That's why we went with IRI to the Philippines. The very first trip that I ever took as the president of NDI was with Frank Fahrenkopf and Keith Schuette, the Republicans, to Venezuela, where we then talked to both political parties. These parties shared our belief that they should work with other parties to encourage democracy in Latin America. That was a very useful visit, and it's kind of sad to think about what's happened in the meantime to Venezuela. Those early days were very significant.

Ken Wollack: One of the weaknesses sometimes of donor aid agencies is that they view democracy support efforts in rather mechanistic formulaic ways - based on rigid objectives, intermediate results, log frames, etc. In contrast, the Endowment, and the institutes saw their mission, as Brian noted, grounded in relationships. That has been a hallmark of NDI's work from the very beginning. We believed that the organization can better achieve results by forging and developing relationships based on trust. And if those relationships were successful, you could accomplish a great deal. If the relationships were not successful, no pre-set goals, objectives or results could be achieved.

And so, NDI put a premium on establishing and forging those relationships with political leaders at the highest levels of government, but also political activists at the grassroots. NDI's success is grounded in relationships and standing behind our democratic partners, not in front of them. Finding those democratic partners, developing those relationships, [using our convening power]to share those experiences have served the mission and the work of the organization and [expanded democratic networks globally]. And some of those networks still exist even without NDI support today. You know, we began by helping to export the Philippine model of election monitoring. Brian referred to the group (NAMFREL), the National Citizens Movement for Free Elections. That movement exposed the fraud in the snap elections in 1986 and inspired hundreds of similar election monitoring groups around the world, and NDI's role was to convene many of these groups that learned from the NAMFREL experience. Today, there is an international network of more than 200 monitoring groups representing more than four million volunteer election monitors as a result of that initial work with NAMFREL in the Philippines.

And so NDI's role in this case was to help establish and develop these organizations, introduce them to each other, and help them learn from each other. This effort has had a huge impact in supporting democratic elections - - exposing fraud when it existed, or enhancing confidence in the election results, even when citizens may have been skeptical about the process and the results. So, it has had an impact as NDI was standing behind many of these individuals and groups, as it did with democratic political parties during many of the major transitions that took place from Africa and Latin America to Eastern Europe and Asia.

Brian Atwood: I think that the other aspect of this, I mentioned before, is that we tried to do work with the Republican Institute. They took a slightly different approach to this. They even created an international [institution] separate from the more legit, the more historic internationals. They created a conservative international, and they invited a number of parties that were Christian Democratic and otherwise, to join.

One interesting test that caused a great deal of tension was that when they had a meeting in Japan, we asked if our chairman, Vice President Mondale, could actually attend that meeting. In the end, they made a decision that, no, they wouldn't invite the National Democratic Institute to that meeting. I think there were some real tensions created inside that new international about that. Many of these more conservative parties knew that they had to work with both American parties so they were very nervous about rejecting a request that the former Vice President of the United States attend. IRI also worked in Costa Rica, a well established democracy, and there were questions raised about that on Capitol Hill.

But you know, for the most part, we had excellent relations with the International Republican Institute, and did a lot of things together. That has been maintained over the years, so, that's why Frank Fahrenkopf continues to be a good friend of NDI, and others as well, for example, Vin Weber and others that served on the NED or IRI boards.

It's a controversial time now, because there's very little support for democracy promotion. The Secretary of State has put out a message saying that the embassies should not comment on

elections, one way or the other, other than to compliment the people that win. I just don't know where it's all headed. Thank goodness the National Endowment for Democracy has survived all of the cuts, and we're kind of back to where we were in the beginning at NDI. Less money, but with a more focused approach, and a very large network of democratic friends around the world.

I had introduced democracy work in a very big way at USAID, and they were spending a lot of money on it with all of the bureaucratic impositions that AID is forced to do, but they're no longer in existence, so….

Ken Wollack: I think that's an important point. When NDI began, its budget was based almost solely on NED support, and its annual budget was about $1.5 million. There were certain add-ons, particularly the first huge add-on: a special $1 million Congressional appropriation for Chile in the months leading up to the [1988] plebiscite. Those funds, which went through USAID, were earmarked for the Endowment with about half of that going NDI for support to the democratic forces in the country.

After the fall of the [Berlin] Wall, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) got actively engaged in democracy support programs, dedicating substantial resources for this effort, and that was expanded under Brian's leadership. And also, the Human Rights Bureau, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) at the State Department, also had Congressional funds for this purpose. NDI and its Republican counterpart became the natural beneficiaries of those funds from both USAID and DRL. As a result, the percentage of our budget from the Endowment declined significantly - - to about 70 to 30 percent. Also, other governments saw the international nature of our approach and, interestingly, wanted to invest in the work of this American organization. Oftentimes, our overseas offices in these countries were led by non-Americans - - Canadians, Britons, Dutch , Kosovars and who were heading our offices around the world. And so, we began receiving program funding from governments and donor aid agencies from Canada, the UK, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Irish, and other governments that began providing funds. And to this day, those countries continue to support NDI programs around the world. In many cases the decisions to fund democracy programs came from their respective embassies around the world and saw the work of NDI and wanted to support that work.

[Now, with the dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), it is a little bit like *Back to the Future*; that the institutes' primary source of funding, like it was in those early days, is coming from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).]

Brian Atwood: Just another piece of history on Chile. There was a question as to whether or not all of the opposition parties would come together. The more conservative parties were very nervous, in particular the Christian Democrats, a major party in Chile, nervous about joining with the Socialists. So we had that meeting in Venezuela, which was a very good place to have this

meeting, because the president at the time of Venezuela had lived in exile in Chile, and so he knew all of the Chileans. We brought the Spanish leaders as well as I mentioned earlier.

It's kind of an interesting aspect of this. We made a decision that the plebiscite represented a choice between democracy or a continuation of autocracy. So we basically urged the opposition to come together. They did come together, and as you know, the plebiscite was won. We did a parallel vote count as had the (NAMFREL) National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections group in the Philippines. The Chileans, several of whom we had brought over to the Philippines when they had local elections, trusted the methods used and the results they reflected. The leader of our delegation, Adolfo Suarez, was a hero to many Chileans.

So it all turned out. We surprised them in the sense that we got a lot of people registered to vote using this Hispanic group from the Southwest U.S. They all spoke Spanish. We sent them down there, and they managed to get a lot of people registered to vote that would not have otherwise done so.

We also had people that were experts on media and polling and the rest, and they worked with their counterparts in Chile. It was a great effort, and it turned out in the right way, and reinforced the wave of democracy in the world. Then we had the [Berlin] Wall come down, and we got very active, in Eastern and Central Europe, and then, eventually, the former Soviet Union.

Ken Wollack: Brian spoke about Chile and the Philippines. I think both of those transitions, moving away from dictatorship - - the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines and the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, - - had a huge impact early on during the debate over democracy support programs overseas. There were skeptics on both the left and the right in our country. There were those on the right who were concerned about promoting democracy in places where the governments may not have been democratic but were friendly to the United States, particularly in our fight against Soviet communism around the world. The concern was challenging those friends would undermine this larger global campaign against Soviet communism. And on the left, there was concern about cultural imperialism; that the United States would try to impose American democracy. They were also suspicious of a Ronald Reagan initiative, and,therefore, were skeptical or critical of the mission of the Endowment and the institutes in those early days.

And what changed was what happened in the Philippines and Chile. For the right, they saw that there was a democratic alternative to the communist insurgency in the Philippines and Marco's dictatorship, and in Chile, there was, likewise, an alternative to Pinochet and the communist insurgency there. That given an opportunity and a voice, the broad democratic center, from moderate socialists to conservatives, supported a middle course between communism and dictatorship.

In fact, the two extremes enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. They drew strength from each other, and marginalized the democratic center in both countries. So, for the right, they saw there was a democratic alternative to the dictatorship in these countries, and on the left, they saw that the Endowment and the institutes supported genuine democratic change, even in places where the

regimes were friendly to the United States. So I think those two events changed the debate in Washington, brought the left and the right, Republicans and Democrats, together to support a robust democracy promotion effort, led by the Endowment and the institutes.

Brian Atwood: You could tell that things were catching on when we went to the Czech Republic, to Prague, and had a meeting in this famous theater that Havel had used to try to express himself in the communist era. Many from the cast of Saturday Night Live and MASH came over. The originator of Saturday Night Live was in that delegation. And we also had people like Paul Simon, who sang at an event that evening, as did Joan Baez. These were people and songs that had inspired the small-d democrats of these countries.
Havel himself made that point as he introduced Simon and Baez. I then flew to Bulgaria, where the other side of the Simon and Garfunkel duo sang Bridge Over Trouble Waters to a crowd of 100,000 people. So it was quite obvious to me at that point that we had arrived.

So we went from Poland to Hungary to the Czech Republic to Bulgaria. In Bulgaria we faced a very controversial issue. We did a parallel vote count there, and the opposition, the Socialist Party which was the former communist party, won. And we had to confirm that, and there were people that did not want that to happen. They were ready to start a Civil War. We went on television with our Bulgarian partners, an election monitoring group called BAFE (Bulgarian Association for Free Elections), and said that we've got a parallel vote count here, and it shows that the Socialist Party has won. We averted a major crisis in Bulgaria. There have been several elections since and several parties have risen to the top only to be replaced in the next election. In one coalition a former NDI staffer became the foreign minister.

Ken Wollack: One of the changes that has taken place over the last four decades, as I said very early on, was the German party foundations who were the primary source of democracy support efforts around the world, particularly in places like Spain and Portugal. But there wasn't much else, and so when the Endowment began in late 1983, it really was one of the few organizations around the world that were engaged in this type of work. And today, that has changed.

Now, over the years, every U.S. ambassador has democracy and human rights as part of his or her portfolio. It may not be the number one issue on the bilateral agenda of the countries where they are stationed, but it is now part of their portfolio. There are now international networks of not only political parties, but civic organizations, parliaments, governments, and politicians, that are engaged in this work. There are regional organizations, like the Organization of American States (OAS) and the African Union, that have adopted democratic charters, and donor aid agencies that contribute resources to this cause.

And so today, you have a democracy ecosystem, an international democratic architecture that didn't exist 40 years ago. And it gives me great hope that these networks can continue to support each other, provide solidarity to others engaged in this struggle, so [democrats] are not operating in isolation. We have found that citizens everywhere are in a demanding mood. They

want the same things. They want to put food on the table, and they want to have a political voice. And they're not willing to forfeit the latter for the former.

And so this network is still alive. It is operating with fewer funds and is facing new challenges, including a network of autocrats around the world who for the first time are working together to weaken democracy where it exists and to prevent its emergence where it doesn't. This autocratic solidarity network is trying to undermine groups like ours, but the demands of ordinary people and the work of this network can eventually overcome these challenges.

Brian Atwood: It's a difficult time, and in our period at NDI we were riding a wave. And, it seems to me, this group of autocrats has now learned a lesson. I remember being shepherded in to meet Marcos when we first got there, and he told me his staff had told him not to meet with us. But we had a discussion, and I said, if you want to basically get beyond the challenges to your leadership, then you should go to your people and gain legitimacy in that way. And that's what, of course, he tried to do by using all of the tricks in the book, but he failed, and the same with Pinochet. I mean, I'm not sure that we could surprise anyone today with what we did back in those days.

And it's a shame, because there's more communication among these autocrats, they have used democratic techniques, like elections or whatever, distorting them and basically using methods to undercut the people's wishes. It's sad to see.

And Ken mentioned that ambassadors, it's true, have always considered human rights and democracy to be part of their portfolio. Nowadays, they're under instructions not to do so. It's a transactional kind of approach to it. There is interest in another country because they think we can gain something, in terms of money and resources. So, it is not the same as it was in those days. It's a much more difficult task to promote democracy in today's world when the American Administration has no interest in it.

So, I don't know what the future holds. I do think NDI has done a wonderful job of accommodating itself. They've lost a lot of money, because AID is no longer in existence, but they're back to what they had to do back in the early days. We had mainly National Endowment for Democracy money. I do remember that AID did give us a grant to do the Philippines and Chile..

Ken Wollack: After I retired, I became a board member of the National Endowment for Democracy. During the Biden administration, I was chairman of the Endowment for four years. Now, under a Republican administration, I serve as vice chair, because, by tradition, the chairman of the NED comes from the party that controls the White House. But I will say that, despite all the challenges that exist, the relationship between the Endowment itself and the four institutes, the core institutes of the Endowment, have never been better. The coordination, the cooperation, the sharing of information, is carried on daily. And despite the financial challenges, the work continues, and the demand for our assistance around the world has only increased. This includes many of the most autocratic countries, as well as in those places that are

struggling to sustain their democratic systems. This mission and work reflect not only the values of our country, but serve our interests. And there aren't too many issues that represent the convergence of values and interests. That is why it continues to garner strong bipartisan support on Capitol Hill. And so the National Endowment for Democracy Act (NED) and the work of the Endowment and the institutes are alive and well despite these challenges.

Brian Atwood: I think it's important to recognize that NDI has really been benefited by the chairs of our board. Walter Mondale ran for president. When you run for president, you're known around the world. He then threw himself into the job, and we traveled all over the place. He was a great chairman and gave a lot of standing to NDI. And then later, Madeleine Albright, after having served as Secretary of State, became Chair, and she, again, had a great network of her own, the former foreign ministers and the like, so she did a wonderful job, along with Ken, obviously, when she was chair. Now we have former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle. So we have succeeded in having well known Democrats chair our board.

Ken Wollack: Madeleine contributed measurably to the standing and reputation of NDI . And the longtime chairman of the Republican Institute, Senator John McCain, served in a similar way for the Republican Institute in terms of their standing and reputation. Madeleine and McCain had a strong relationship, which enabled us to carry on many bipartisan efforts around the world. And both had similar visions of the American role as a force for good in the world. That the institutes were joining a community of democracies. So there was a compatible vision by both institutes which I think strengthened our collective work.

BrianAtwood: I don't have any final comments other than to say that NDI has done a wonderful job of accommodating to the budget reductions, and we now have mainly regional offices overseas [with some important exceptions] . [We receive resources from other donor countries and private philanthropy as well]. I always envisioned that we would have our own foreign service. It didn't happen until Ken got there, but it's gone from… I think it's important to mention, we only had 5 people when I started the NDI. And then eventually, I think when I left, we had about 40. Then it had about 1,200 around the world, including, as Ken mentioned, a lot of people from other countries that were running our programs overseas.

Ken Wollack: More than 100 nationalities were represented on the NDI staff.

Brian Atwood: A true international organization, no question about it. And it's down to maybe 500 now, but it's still able, I think, because a lot of people want to volunteer to do this kind of work, and it's been very helpful.

So, thanks to Jeff Fisher and Alyssa for paying attention to all of this and recording it, because it's an important part of the history of our country.

Note: Narrative in the transcript added after the recordings is shown in brackets.