

I would like to thank each of you for your membership and participation in the AmCham this year, and to thank the board for again entrusting me to lead the organization for another year. Tonight, I would like to talk to you, not just in this speech but at the reception afterwards, about what AmCham can do for you, and what you can do for AmCham.

The theme tonight is the Future of Prague. What is the future of Prague? To understand this, we must first understand what Prague, or any other city, is. And what it is is an accumulator, a magnet, for people. People in search of a better life for themselves and for their families. People who want to live in a place that makes them feel better about themselves. People who want to work in a place that gives them the best chance to accomplish their dreams: whether that is to create something unique, to make them wealthy or well-off, or to challenge them and make them learn new things about the world outside them, or about themselves. The future of Prague, therefore, will be determined by the kind of people it attracts, and how well those people can work together to make the sum of what we create much greater than our individual contributions.

Upstairs tonight, you will be able to see the visions and products of some people and companies who have an idea of how the city can be better. I hope you will take time to look at them and to support them. We are lucky to have such people who want to make tomorrow better not only for themselves but for the city we all live in.

Before you go up there, please give me just a few more minutes to talk about what AmCham can do, and how you can help. AmCham is a network of businesses. Each business, of course, wants to benefit from that network. Yet, the biggest benefit comes when each of us also tries to contribute to the organization in ways that benefit the entire network, and the country beyond.

In order to make your contributions have the greatest impact, we realized that the board needed to set a direction for all of us to follow. That is why we have set a strategic direction for our policy activities and re-organized our membership structures to represent both sectors and organizational functions. The first gives us a sense of purpose. The second creates effective feedback loops for achieving that purpose.

So what are our four strategic directions?

We believe we must move up the value chain in manufacturing. We must become a place that researches, develops and produces products for export at a level with the best in the world. Innovation and productivity must drive our manufacturing more than low price.

We believe that quality should drive health care more than cost. Each of our companies is the primary payer for the system, and, if it produces healthy employees, one of its primary benefactors. Today, the costs of the system are among the highest in Europe. To achieve better quality, we need more innovation. And, if we can innovate well, we can export those solutions.

We continue to believe in good government. This country is more reliant on public procurement than most EU countries for GDP growth. We need that investment to be spent in ways that generate long-term social and economic benefit, not just a one-term energy boost. Better and more accountable procurement will raise public trust. And that trust is the one certain cure for the negative mood our politicians and public intellectuals claim the citizens of this country suffer.

Finally, we believe we need to join our city development plans and our national economic strategy together. Cities create regional economies, and regional economies are what construct national economies. We need to urge that our strategies are built from the bottom up, not the top down. And, since our cities are the driving force of our economic success, we need to do more to make them creative and entrepreneurial centers of not only this country, but the continent. That is why we decided to make a promotional video that companies and officials can use to inform and attract people to come and do business in Prague. Do not worry, we will do the same thing for Brno in September.

Before we show the video, however, I would like to close by asking each of you to become more active in the AmCham over the next year. Bert is a good example of how we should all be. Please get involved with our councils and committees, or talk to the staff about how you can do more and benefit more.