

It is truly an honor to welcome one of the world's great heroes to Minnesota. President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic is a man after my own heart. He embodies many of my own aspirations as a leader, and he is promoting many of the same values:

Personal responsibility
Commitment to community
And rock n'roll

Vaclav Havel helped to shake down the iron curtain from its rusty hinges a mere 10 years ago. He shook the world by getting elected as president of Czechoslovakia while sitting in jail as a political prisoner.

As a man dedicated to the Truth, he fought the Big Lie of Communism with his pen and with his voice. Unfortunately, they didn't have the First Amendment over there. No freedom of the press, no freedom of expression in those days. Especially if the target of your attacks was the government. So the iron boot kept kicking him behind bars - three times for a total of five years.

Let me tell you President Havel that the freedom of press is alive and well here in Minnesota. They might be a pain in the butt sometimes but they sure as hell are alive and well. I can tell you that much.

Why were the Communist dictators so afraid of the Truth? Why were they so afraid of words? Words on the radio? Words on stage? Poetry?

Because words have the power to change how people think. The key to good government is to change the attitude of the people. Stir them up, get them involved. The powers that be get very worried when the people start waking up and getting involved in the way the government operates. I know about that, too.

Yes sir, Vaclav Havel was a rebel, a "Truly Dangerous man," an enemy of the state. An enemy of big government.

Do you want to know what happens when you think government can solve every problem? When government takes over the role of the parent? When government tries to tell you what to think and how to behave?

President Havel saw what happens. He also saw tanks rolling through the streets of his hometown, rolling over his neighbors and his friends.

Of course you don't want the other extreme either. You don't want "no government" either. That's anarchy. President Havel, do you have to deal with anarchists in the Czech Republic? Do they call themselves Libertarians?

The challenge is to find the right balance. Government has a role. But the people have to be in charge. Government is a tool of the people, not the other way around.

But if people don't assert their power, guess what? Somebody else moves in. Nature abhors a vacuum. It doesn't last even a minute. And those who take power may not be looking to serve the public good. They might be looking to serve themselves. They might be looking to serve special interests.

The challenge of a healthy democracy is to activate people. How do you do that? How do you motivate people to take charge of their own lives and be responsible? You don't do it through guns and tanks. You don't do it through rules and regulations. And you sure as hell don't do it by passing as many laws as possible.

You do it by appealing to their minds, to get them to think. You do it by appealing to their hearts, to get them to feel more human. That's when responsibility has a chance to kick in, when people start thinking and feeling for themselves.

That's when you have a civil society. When people respect each other and do the right thing. That respect needs to encompass the family, the schools, the community and beyond.

President Havel, I submit my respect to you. I admire an intellectual who knows how to be practical. Imagine that, an intellectual who wants results! Not just another study or another committee.

I welcome you here as a Minnesotan, and as an American with Eastern-European roots. I hope we can extend the partnership between Minnesota and the Czech Republic. I know that some Minnesota businesses are among the biggest investors in your country. I thank you for investing some of your time in our state. If I'm not mistaken, your biggest dictator these days is your schedule.

And finally I want to express my appreciation to you for the concern you have shown beyond your borders, in doing what you can to help the more troubled parts of Eastern Europe - Bosnia, Albania and now Kosovo. I just sent some Minnesota National Guard troops to Kosovo to help with humanitarian aid. I pray I won't have to send any more.

What we need is more people like you, President Havel, men of peace who fight only with words.

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