



## A Skilled Hand with the U.S.-Swiss Mix

by Richard W. Rahn

This past week, with the passing of Faith Ryan Whittlesey, America lost the best example of what an ambassador should be. By happenstance, Ambassador Whittlesey also served twice in, perhaps, the best example of what a country ought to be — Switzerland.

Faith Whittlesey was first named ambassador to Switzerland by President Reagan in 1981. In the almost four decades since her first appointment, she made it her passion to foster and improve the relations and understanding between the U.S. and Switzerland and in this she succeeded. After her second tour as ambassador, she became president and chairman of the American Swiss Foundation, and later chairman emeritus.

Few Americans understand the history of Switzerland and its influence on the American Founding Fathers, and why its political governance and economic system is so successful. And likewise, too few Swiss understand how America outside of Washington and New York really functions. Faith Whittlesey set out to reduce that mutual ignorance. Despite battling the cancer, for a number of years, that eventually claimed her, she was still hard at work, including a trip to Switzerland at the end of March, and developing new projects to improve mutual understanding.

Switzerland has managed to stay at peace, build the most prosperous economy in Europe, and preserve democracy and

human rights longer than any other country. The American Founders looked at the Swiss model of decentralized government — which managed to succeed despite major religious and language differences — in designing the U.S. Constitution. When the Swiss decided to rewrite their constitution in 1848, they, in return, took the U.S. Constitution as their model. The two old, free-market democracies have always had good relations, but as Faith Whittlesey understood, they could still learn from each other and serve as role models for the rest of the world.

While serving as ambassador, Faith brought many U.S. experts to speak before influential Swiss groups and meet with Swiss opinion leaders and journalists. (My particular assignment, as chief economist of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce at that time, was to explain the Reagan economic program to Swiss business leaders and others.) At the same time, she helped Swiss groups and opinion leaders go to the U.S. and speak before appropriate forums.

As chairman of the American Swiss Foundation, she began the Young Leaders Conference in 1990 to bring outstanding young Americans and Swiss together for a week-long privately sponsored conference in Switzerland each year. The purpose was to better understand each other's cultures and history, and to develop personal relationships. The program now has more than 1,200 alumni, and many of them have gone on to prominence in their respective countries, including members of Congress and heads of major companies. The program has been so successful that other countries are now trying to emulate it.

Faith Whittlesey had a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania, and served two terms in the Pennsylvania Legislature. In addition to serving as ambassador, she also spent two years as a senior member of President Reagan's White House staff. She had three children and 10 grandchildren. She also had considerable musical talent and would often invite Swiss groups to the ambassador's residence in Bern to participate in sing-alongs, where she played the piano with great skill and gusto.

Faith encouraged Americans to learn from Swiss successes. The Swiss have developed a very effective constitutional mechanism to restrain the ever-growing pressures (that all countries face) to increase the size of government that others should adopt. The Swiss have also been far more successful than the U.S. (and virtually every other country) in keeping most government decision-making at the local level, which greatly reduces political tensions and allows more cost-effective government management. In recent months, she had been encouraging her Swiss friends, particularly in the business community, to be more aggressive in developing programs to explain the Swiss success story to Americans outside of the New York-Washington and California media centers.

The Swiss rank near the top at every major index and measure of economic success, economic liberty, human development and civil liberties. With the encouragement and assistance of Faith Whittlesey, I produced a documentary film explaining the Swiss success, which has been broadcast on major ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox stations. The film can be found on the [Improbable Success Facebook page](#).

The fact that many Americans now understand that our governmental and economic system gained much from the Swiss model, and that Switzerland is justifiably famous not only for its watches, financial institutions and chocolates, and also is now known as a high-tech industrial country producing everything from advanced passenger rail trains to cutting edge pharmaceuticals, is in part due to one unique, brilliant and energetic American woman — Faith Ryan Whittlesey.

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