

PRESS RELEASE
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**POLISH AMERICAN CONGRESS
PRESIDENT FRANK SPULA
POSITIVELY ASSESSES MAY 17-19 MEETING
OF PAC COUNCIL OF NATIONAL DIRECTORS**

"The spring 2012 meeting of the Polish American Congress' Council of National Directors once again confirmed the energy and strength of the organization in addressing leading issues of the day," said PAC President Frank Spula, after conclusion of the May 17-19 meeting in Chicago, Illinois.

Spula pointed out that the delegates, who represented the PAC's 29 state divisions and 18 national organizations, addressed a wide range of sensitive issues in American politics and U.S.-Poland relations that are important to Polish Americans. "At the end of the day," he said, "there was a broad consensus as to the organization's mission and programs."

That purpose and mission were eloquently articulated by Illinois Appellate Court Justice Aurelia Pucinski, who called for Polish Americans to "take charge of our destiny" and "set our goal to have the largest per capita turnout in the next election." She reminded us that it is the "American agenda" that makes a "Polish agenda" possible. "We cannot leverage for ANY good to be done for Poland without first committing to the cause of democracy right here. We cannot leverage for ANY good in our own community without first committing to be active in our own democracy," she told the Council's opening dinner.

A similar message about the need to be politically active and vote was delivered the next day at lunch by Cook County Commissioner and former candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives, John A. Fritchey, whose district has many ethnic groups, including Poles, competing for services and benefits. Anticipating the need for Polish Americans to be active in the 2012 election cycle, the Council of National Directors had at its October 2011 meeting passed an action program for increasing voting and candidacy for office by Polish Americans.

Building on the scholarly analysis of America's demographic and linguistic future by Vice President for American Affairs, Dean Anthony J. Bajdek, the Council reaffirmed the importance of ramping up efforts to gain passage of U.S. legislation (S.2233 and H.R. 5741, Jobs Originated through Launching

Travel or JOLT Act, and related S.2046 and H.R.3855, Visa Waiver Program Enhanced Security and Reform Act) which would facilitate Poland's entry into the Visa Waiver Program and visa-free tourist travel by Polish citizens to the United States. In the meantime, the PAC called on the U.S. State Department to change their policies in such a way that any visa refusal results in reduction or full refund of paid fees.

Looking further at the American scene, the Council deemed that the mandate imposed on the Catholic Church and other religious organizations is an attack on religious freedom in general and the Catholic Church in particular, and expressed full support for positions of the United States Conference of Bishops as expressed in their statement from February and March 2012. The Council also expressed strong dismay with passage by the House of Representatives of a bill which would discontinue the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, the sole source of official ethnic identity data, and called on the Senate, the Secretary of Commerce, and President Obama to ensure continued collection of this vital information.

The Council also addressed two Polish issues - investigation of the April 2010 Smolensk air crash and TV Trwam's application for digital broadcast rights - that have evoked widespread interest and debate among Polish Americans and Poles living in the United States. Recognizing that Poland is the sovereign, independent, democratic country for which the PAC had so long worked, the Council's resolutions look to the government of Poland to resolve these issues and encourage it to look to solutions that expand democracy and diffuse discord.

"For me," President Frank Spula told the gathered Directors, "the disaster at Smolensk Severny Airfield on April 10, 2012 which resulted in the death of former President of Poland Lech Kaczynski and 95 other high government and cultural officials, including nine Polish/NATO generals, was a very emotional and personal loss. Almost to the end, there were plans for me to be part of the delegation to Smolensk and Katyn. We were far advanced in plans for me and the PAC to host President Lech Kaczynski and his wife in Chicago two weeks later. Many of those officials who perished were close working associates and friends. It was a deeply felt loss."

The resolution passed by the Council of National Directors with respect to the investigation of the Smolensk disaster takes its lead from the United States government. It notes that the U.S. government has clearly stated that it will defer to the Polish government in the decision to call for an independent international commission to investigate the disaster and that the United States government will provide available evidence upon request by the Polish government. The Polish American Congress suggests that the government of the Republic of Poland take the initiative to convene an independent investigation.

A presentation by legal counsel about applicable Polish laws and administrative legal processes laid the groundwork for the Council's discussion of issues surrounding the application by TV Trwam, a broadcasting service which expresses Roman Catholic and conservative opinion, for terrestrial digital broadcasting frequency. The Council's resolution stressed the importance of freedom of the press as an indispensable component of a democratic republic.

Discussion of the PAC's Polish Agenda was opened by Vice President for Polish Affairs, Bozena Kaminski, who reporting on her three visits to Poland, visit to Lithuania, and other activities since October 2011. At Chairman Person's invitation, she testified before Poland's Senate Committee on Polonia and answered questions about the PAC and Polish organizations in the United States, and also met twice with the Chairman Lipinski of the Sejm (Parliament) Committee on Polonia. She met with the new President of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), Dr. Lukasz Kaminski, to express PAC's continued support and cooperation with IPN. At her invitation he subsequently visited Chicago and met with PAC President Spula. During her visits she also called on various Polish government officials of both major political parties to express PAC's concerns about Poland's policies affecting Polonia, including the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, the signed Social Security Agreement between Poland and the U.S., the Smolensk tragedy investigation and the TV Trwam dispute.

At Kaminski's invitation, Jaroslaw Narkiewicz, a member of Lithuania's Seimas (Parliament) and a regional Vice President of the Congress of Poles in Lithuania, was a guest at the meetings and briefed National Directors on the situation of the Polish community in Lithuania. The PAC reiterated its October, 2011 resolution in support of the rights of the autochthonous Polish population of Lithuania, and called on the governments of the United States and Poland, and the European Commission, to take necessary actions to protect basic human rights and fundamental freedom of the Polish minority in Lithuania, especially educational rights.

The Council of National Directors concluded its sessions on May 19 with an all-day workshop, "Enhancing US-Poland Collaboration in Small Business Initiatives." The workshop was co-organized by the Trade & Investment Section of the Polish Embassy in Washington, the Polish American Congress, the Polish National Alliance, and the Polish Chamber of Commerce. PAC Directors were joined by 3 Honorary Counsels of Poland, representatives of Polish-American trade chambers in Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, Atlanta, and Seattle, the US-Poland Business Council, the Illinois State Office in Warsaw, and senior officials of Polish economic agencies and regions. Chief of Staff to the Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, Adam Wilczewski, represented the Obama Administration and delivered the luncheon keynote. The day was marked by intense networking among the

100 representatives of participating organizations, and concluded with a dinner hosted by PAC/PNA President Spula at the Copernicus Center.

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Resolutions adopted by the Council of National Directors and keynote address by Justice Pucinski are available [here](#).

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