**Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic Kyriakos Mitsotakis**

**American Ambassador to Greece George Tsunis**

**Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to the U.S. Alexandra Papadopoulou**

**Esteemed members of the U.S. Congress**

**His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America**

**Distinguished Fellow Honorees**

**Prime Minister Mitsotakis, first and foremost, congratulations on what by all accounts has been a successful historic visit to Washington, DC. We swelled and beamed with pride today.**

**Secondly, we humbly request to please convey the sincere appreciation and deepest gratitude from AHEPA members worldwide to President of the Hellenic Republic Katerina Sakellaropoulou, and the people of Greece, for this incredible honor bestowed to our Order.**

**It is with an immense sense of awe, weight, and responsibility that I accept the Order of the Phoenix on behalf of the Order of AHEPA because this significant recognition is earned on the blood, sweat, and tears of generations of Hellenes, many of whom immigrated to the United States in search of a better life.**

**In many cases, what they encountered was not pleasant.**

**A time existed in America when Greek immigrants who would peer outside their windows and witness the marches of men in white robes and hoods—arms extended—carrying torches of hate that eerily lit the nighttime Southern sky.**

**The Ku Klux Klan ran rampant and was on the rise in the early 20th century.**

**They boycotted and vandalized Greek-owned small businesses and threatened other citizens not to patronize those businesses.**

**They took young Greek men working in restaurants to what the KKK called lynching “parties” in the woods, along with Black men.**

**The Greek men were roughed up, intimidated, and told to leave town.**

**The Black men were not so fortunate.**

**Also during this time, Greeks were the victims of race riots, most notably, in South Omaha, Nebraska in 1909; and in Toronto in 1918.**

**Greek immigrants in grueling work conditions died in the Dawson, New Mexico, mining disasters of 1913 and 1923; and became victims of the Ludlow Massacre in Colorado in 1914, as they fought for workers’ rights.**

**This was the environment Greek immigrants faced in America in the early 20th century.**

**This was the environment that led to the birth of the greatest Hellenic heritage organization in the world 100 years ago in Atlanta, Georgia—the Order of AHEPA.**

* **Tonight’s honor is just as much theirs as it is AHEPA’s.**

**AHEPA helped countless Greek Americans pursue and fulfill the American Dream. “AHEPA was there for them” as prominent Greek American and Ahepan Michael Psaros remarked at our last Congressional Banquet, referring to his grandparents.**

**AHEPA empowered a community by embodying the very best of ancient Greek ideals and thereby making us better citizens. Those ideals included education, philanthropy, civic responsibility—combined with a reverence for democratic principles and human rights.**

**AHEPA taught us how to organize.**

**Just two years after our founding, Ahepans were meeting with President Calvin Coolidge at the White House. Amazing when you consider it.**

**AHEPA taught us to respect the inalienable rights of mankind and to speak out against tyranny, wherever it may exist, as tyranny is a menace to life and prosperity. Of note:**

**In August 1938, Ahepans who understood the gravity of world events, spoke out to condemn “the inhuman and cruel persecution” of Jewish people, three months prior to Kristallnacht.**

**During World War II, many Greek Americans, including Ahepans and Sons of Pericles members, were recruited into the Office of Strategic Services—which was the precursor to the CIA—and they parachuted behind enemy lines in Nazi-occupied Greece to help liberate it.**

**AHEPA championed education.**

**It led to a time when Greek Americans were the second highest educated demographic in the United States, per capita.**

**And today AHEPA easily awards millions in scholarships annually.**

**AHEPA is proud its members have represented a cross-section of society: from small business owners to titans of industry – from clergymen, veterans and U.S. presidents – to world-class athletes and entertainers –Hellene and Philhellene, alike.**

**Ahepans have walked the halls of Congress and walked the ministries in foreign capitals, including Ankara, to build bridges; Ahepans have crossed the Green Line in Cyprus to deliver messages of hope and goodwill; and Ahepans have served on the battlefield to defend democratic ideals.**

**Since our founding, AHEPA has chartered more than 600 chapters worldwide of which more than 400 currently are active and over one million men have been inducted into the Order. AHEPA’s collective donations to charitable and civic causes has reached $1 billion. Of note:**

* **AHEPA raised more than $253 million for United States War Bonds during World War II, for which AHEPA was named an official Issuing Agent for United States War Bonds by the United States Treasury Department, an honor that no other civic organization could achieve at the time.**
* **AHEPA spearheaded raising more than $612,000 collectively toward the restoration of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, New York; the largest donation given on behalf of any ethnic community, earning special recognition from the U.S. Department of Interior.**
* **$1 million to rebuild Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine at World Trade Center.**
* **AHEPA’s Humanitarian Campaign to aid Greece during its unprecedented economic and migratory crises raised more than $500,000 to feed the less fortunate, and AHEPA worked in cooperation with the IOCC to secured shipments of medical supplies to hospitals throughout Greece valued at more than $12 million.**
* **In commemoration of the Centennial Olympic Games held in Atlanta, Georgia, Ahepans raised $775,000 for the Tribute to Olympism Sculpture that was erected in Centennial Olympic Park. The sculpture’s fan-like design is credited with saving lives during the bombing at Centennial Olympic Park.**
* **AHEPA provides vulnerable older adults and individuals with disabilities with safe and dignified affordable housing and services at 91 federally-assisted senior living communities in 19 states.**

**These contributions to strengthen society are a fine testament to the “can-do” attitude Ahepans bring to each task asked of them.**

* **This honor is accepted on behalf of all who volunteered and sacrificed to achieve these remarkable, worthy service endeavors.**

**Mr. Prime Minister –**

**We are immensely proud U.S.-Greece relations are at an apex. We have demonstrated the AHEPA family of organizations—comprised of the Daughters of Penelope, Sons of Pericles, Maids of Athena—including nearly 100 chapters in Greece—is a vibrant, strong, and dependable bridge between North America and Greece. We are an organization that contributes positively to this relationship with philanthropic, cultural, and educational programs as well as people-to-people, quasi-diplomatic efforts that serve to strengthen the transatlantic bridge. One of the things AHEPA does so well is bring people together, which is why our work to secure Greece’s entry into the U.S. Visa Waiver program in 2010 is as source of pride. The George C. Marshall Statue that stands on the grounds of the U.S. Embassy in Athens – donated by AHEPA as gift of love to this relationship – is another.**

**Looking forward, we are excited about what the future holds for U.S.-Greece relations and celebrating new milestones. As always, AHEPA stands ready to assist.**

**Prime Minister Mitostakis—**

**Ahepans comprise a unique band of men focused on a mission borne of Hellenic ideals and a noble founding unlike any other. We are proud of our rightfully earned place in society—not just as a leading Hellenic heritage organization—but for being a proponent of civil and human rights in America and abroad; for being a leading nationwide provider of affordable housing for the elderly; for the century’s worth of patriotism we fostered; and for being acknowledged by Presidents of the United States, the US Congress, and leading diplomats as an integral piece of the American mosaic.**

**Throughout our history, AHEPA has served as a vital vehicle for the progressive development and emergence of American citizens of Greek heritage into every facet of society—business, government, education, and the arts.**

**Look around. Tonight’s audience is proof positive. Greek America has arrived like gangbusters—in dynamic fashion—thanks in large part to AHEPA.**

**If you are an Ahepan, or member of the AHEPA family, please take a bow and be recognized.**

* **Thank you for your membership. This honor is yours.**

**This fulfillment shows the promise of the American Dream is real. And so was the hard work ethic of our immigrant forebears who labored to achieve that dream with the principles of Hellenism rooted deep in their hearts and minds.**

**The Order of Phoenix is a most gratifying affirmation of this momentous accomplishment.**

**However, our works continues to ensure the beacons of the American Dream and Hellenism burn brightly for future generations.**

**Thank you.**