

GROUPS

What is the American Hellenic Institute?

The American Hellenic Institute, Inc. (AHI) was founded in Washington, D.C. just weeks after Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in July of 1974. Gene Rossides, former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury under the Nixon Administration (1969-1973), played a central role in creating this important organization.

During that volatile time period, Rossides, along with General James A. Van Fleet, Sam Cachulas and George Livanos, realized that the Greek American community had no unified voice to effectively express their views on Capitol Hill. Together, they founded AHI and immediately began influencing members of Congress. On August 29, 1974, Congress sent a letter to then Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, emphasizing the rule of law in the Cyprus situation.

The rule of law was – and remains – a key argument in AHI's defense of the Greek Cypriot cause and a host of other issues that the organization has since addressed. As a result of AHI's active, coordinated and persistent efforts during its first months in existence, Congress passed an arms embargo against Turkey on December 17, 1974, because of its illegal invasion. Also in December 1974, Congress accepted AHI's proposal for \$25 million in humanitarian aid for Cyprus. As a result of this initiative, Cyprus to date has received over \$400 million, which has aided the island's remarkable recovery and helped to alleviate the plight of the 180,000 Greek Cypriot refugees.

Soon after, in 1975, the AHI Public Affairs Committee (AHIPAC) was created to concentrate on lobbying while AHI concentrated on research, position papers, conferences and seminars. AHIPAC was registered with Congress under the Lobbying Act, and still remains the only official Greek American lobbying organization.

AHI immediately made a strong impression as one of the first and most effective ethnically based lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill. In fact, a June 1975 *Time Magazine* article noted, "one of the most effective lobbies in Washington today is that of Greek Americans...most effective has been the American Hellenic Institute Public Affairs Committee."

In the years since 1974, AHI has championed the rule of law concept and American values with respect to U.S. foreign policy. AHI's policy positions and initiatives work to uphold what is in the best interests of the United States, particularly when it comes to south-eastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean regions.

Over 30 years later, Rossides remains an active player in the organization as its president and general counsel. He is an essential element in the formulation of the organization's policy agenda.

The Organization Today

Today, AHI is an independent public policy association with nationwide membership. Together with its affiliate organizations, it provides a program for strengthening U.S. relations with Greece and Cyprus, and the Greek American community. In addition to AHIPAC, AHI's affiliates include the American Hellenic Institute Foundation (AHIF) and the AHI Business Network. Together, they cover public policy, culture and education, and business areas.

Nick Larigakis has served as executive director of AHI for the past 14 years, and has worked for the organization for over 18 years. He maintains the daily business of the organization while working to enhance and expand key relationships both here and abroad. Staff members work on lobbying, media relations, publications, and general administrative management of the organization.

For its part, AHI organizes business and legislative conferences, speaker forums, and aims to attract and develop the talents of aspiring young adults who want to become the community's future business and political leaders. For example, AHI's Noon Forum lecture series regularly features experts who explore topics central to AHI's policy agenda. Speakers have included State Department Representatives, members of Congress, and Greek and Cypriot government officials, ambassadors and businesspersons, to name a few. The organization also hosts receptions, luncheons, dinners and briefings for visiting dignitaries from the U.S., Greece and Cyprus in order to promote dialogue and cooperation between these countries.



On September 23, 2004, AHI President and Founder Gene Rossides was presented with the Commander of the Order of the Phoenix medal by the President of the Republic of Greece, Konstantinos Stephanopoulos.



Executive Director of the AHI, Nick Larigakis, testifying before a congressional committee.



AHI is headquartered at Hellenic House on 16th Street in Washington, just a few blocks up the street from the White House.

by Chrysoula Economopoulos

AHIPAC has initiated legislation on the Aegean Sea boundaries, Cyprus, the rule of law, conditions on aid to Turkey, protection of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, reopening of the Halki Theological School, and issues related to FYROM's (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) internationally recognized name.

As an educational and research organization, AHIF is home to the first full-fledged think-tank devoted exclusively to the study of the critical issues confronting the Greek American community. For the past four years, AHIF has hosted "The Future of Hellenism in America" annual conference. The conference features prominent speakers from the fields of education, law, and the private sector to identify key challenges facing the Greek American community today. AHIF also sponsors an active publishing program that has produced 14 books and pamphlets on U.S. foreign policy and trade issues with Greece, Cyprus and Turkey.

On the business side, AHI's Business Network was initiated in 1989 to reach out to and harness the Greek American business experience. It does so in part through monthly networking events in Washington, D.C. and New York, and through the business network lunch series, which brings in accomplished speakers to discuss their fields of endeavor. Past speakers have included George Stephanopoulos, Nicholas Gage, "Today Show" Producer Dorie Klissas, and CBS anchor Alexis Christoforou.

Upcoming Events

Each year in Washington, AHI hosts its major fund raising event – the Hellenic Heritage Achievement and National Public Service Awards Dinner – to pay tribute to a group of individuals for their important career achievements and their contributions to the Greek American community. Past honorees include former CIA Director George Tenet, AOL's Ted Leonsis, Yanni, Senator Paul Sarbanes, and prominent businessman and philanthropist George Behrakis. This year, the event will be held on March 18 at the Capitol Hilton. Honorees are president and CEO of KT Communities, Kyriakos Tsakopoulos, Rev. Dr. John T. Tavlarides (St. Sophia Cathedral, Washington, D.C.), the National Philoptochos Society, and the Daughters of Penelope.

On an annual basis, AHI also hosts its "Congressional Salute to Greek Independence Day" on Capitol Hill to commemorate this important day in Greek history. The event also allows members of the community to hear from and interact with members of Congress and their staff.

Additional information on the American Hellenic Institute, including how to become a member, can be obtained on the organization's website at www.aheworld.org or by contacting the organization at (202) 785-8430.

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