



State of Sweden 2012

Dear Swedes and Swedes at heart,

Celebrating the Swedish National Day both in Sweden and abroad as you do right now is an important celebration of our heritage, our unity and our determination to stay together wherever we are in the world and also over the generations.

I can tell you that Sweden is very happy and truly appreciates that you keep this tradition alive in America, especially as many of you or your folks left the “old country” many years and perhaps generations ago.

I am very sorry that I am not able to celebrate with you today in Seattle, but on the other hand, having been in Stockholm on June 6 was a treat.

I was able in person to watch the king and the queen, the Crown Princess and her husband Prince Daniel, Prince Carl-Philip and Princess Madeleine travel through the city in open horse carriages and with the Royal Horse Guard escorting them to the National Day celebration at Skansen.

Sweden has very good reasons to celebrate its history, its traditions, its achievements and, I believe, its future.

Sweden is a small country but it has had more impact on the world, I believe, than any other country of its size.

Many important scientific innovations have their roots in Sweden. Swedish industry has successfully been competing in the world market for the last 100 years and keeps doing so.

Sweden’s industrial export per capita is second to none, and so far Sweden has cruised through the global recession very well.

Unemployment is low.

Both trade and budget balances are positive and Sweden is one of the very few nations in Europe that has maintained its AAA (triple A) credit rating.

After the financial crises hit the US and Europe in 2008 Sweden has been hailed for its financial responsibility and stewardship and for its ability to stay financially healthy.

This is great, but of course as the European crises seem to deepen and as China seems to slow down, Sweden as a very export dependent nation can't totally escape the effects of a continued global recession.

But Sweden should be able to weather the storm better than most other countries in the "old world."

2012 will be a critical year when it comes to the faith of the European economy and the Euro. This weekend is actually especially important as the EU members are meeting to try to bail out the Spanish banking system, which, if it fails, will have very severe global ripple effects.

Looking in the rearview mirror, Sweden was wise to join the EU, but it Sweden was also wise to stay outside of the common currency, the Euro, for now.

Putting the financial issues aside, a lot of things have happened or will happen in Sweden this year.

Crown Princess Victoria, whom we had the pleasure to host here at the Club in May 2010 during Sweden Week, gave birth to a healthy girl a couple of months ago.

Therefore Sweden can look forward to having two consecutive women as heads of state in the future: Queen Victoria and Queen Estelle.

Baby princess Estelle was named after the American wife of Count Folke Bernadotte, the great second uncle of Crown Princess Victoria.

He was able to help thousands of people to safety during the Palestine conflict following the end of the Second World War with his “White Ambulance” program.

This brings me to the 100-year celebration of the birth of Raoul Wallenberg, which we celebrate in 2012.

Raoul Wallenberg and Winston Churchill are the only two foreigners that have been given honorary US citizenships.

As I am sure you all know, Raoul Wallenberg was a Swedish diplomat in Budapest during the end of the Second World War.

His heroic initiative to privately issue Swedish passports to Hungarian Jews on their way to death camps saved tens of thousands of lives at the end of World War II.

In 2012 Sweden is also celebrating that it is 100 years since August Strindberg passed away.

Strindberg is one of Sweden’s best-known authors, and he is still being read and played around the world.

Here in Seattle, Lotta Gavel Adams at the Scandinavian Department at UW holds the Strindberg professorship and I am sure she has a lot of Strindberg activities planned for Seattle during 2012.

Sweden has over the years produced a lot of great music.

We all know ABBA, but you might not know that Sweden today actually is the second largest exporter of music in the world, second only to the US.

A few weeks ago Sweden did win the Eurovision Song Contest with the singer Loreen singing “Euphoria.”

This song right now tops many European hit lists. Perhaps we can attract Loreen to Seattle for the second Sweden Week, planned for 2013 or 2014.

Here in Seattle we can rejoice with the Swedish telecom giant Ericsson and celebrate that T-Mobile just awarded Ericsson a multibillion-dollar contract to bring T-Mobile to the 4G forefront in the US.

This contract will to a significant part be handled by Ericsson in Seattle. The local Ericsson office is responsible for the T-Mobile account.

In this year’s America’s Cup contest there will for the first time in many years be a Swedish boat among the challengers.

It hasn’t happened since the mid-70s if I recall it right.

Sweden has over the last six years had a coalition government. The Alliance consists of the conservative party and the parties in the center.

The Social Democrat party, which was more or less used to rule the country year out and year in since the 1920s, got into a tailspin when it lost two elections in a row.

It has had three party leaders since the 2010 election. Mona Sahlin was replaced by Håkan Juholt about a year and a half ago. He brought down the party even further in the opinion polls, and a few months ago he was replaced by Stefan Löfven, a former union leader.

He seems to have turned the opinion polls around. The next two years leading up to the 2014 election will be very interesting, and

we will probably see a very close race between him and prime minister Reinfeldt and his coalition partners.

One observation I think I dare to make is that the difference between the leading parties is very small.

On the fringes you find the former communist party and the relatively new party “Sverige Demokraterna,” which is a nationalistic party that holds ideas that are close to the old Nazi ideas. Their big issue is to keep Sweden clean from immigrants.

Sweden’s immigrant population is now approaching 20 percent, to be compared to about 3 percent 40 years ago.

In times of uncertainty and unemployment there is always the risk that populists and extremists gain popularity.

The party is still small, with only about 5 percent support according to the recent polls, but it might be enough for it to hold a balancing position in the parliament depending on the outcome of the next election.

All of you that are here today can play a significant role in keeping Sweden in contact with the US and helping to show Sweden that diversity really is a strength for a nation.

Sweden is becoming a melting pot like the US was when millions of Scandinavians and other nationalities were new immigrants to this country. They all helped build the US to become the leading nation in the world.

Sweden has a lot to learn from American history and its way of accepting foreigners and rapidly integrating them into society.

Therefore an organization like the Swedish Cultural Center, “The Club,” is a wonderful institution where you combine pride and interest in your roots and heritage with being full-fledged and proud Americans.

Keep your good work going!

I am very glad that we have just relaunched the Seattle chapter of SACC (the Swedish American Chamber of Commerce).

It is off to a great start and its launch has given the Consulate a great opportunity to bring together all the local Swedish organizations to work closer together and to make 1 + 1 larger than 2.

To sum up, I think you can say that the State of Sweden is quite good, specially in relation to most other countries in Europe.

Therefore I can finish with the statement that not only is the State of Sweden good, so also is the State of Sweden in Seattle.

All the best to you from a summery Sweden.

Lars Jonsson

Honorary Swedish Consul to Washington State and Oregon.