

CANDIDATE STATEMENT FOR BRIAN BELENSKY

I am a second-generation Slovak-American born and raised in Baltimore, MD. I have traveled numerous times to Slovakia to explore my family's heritage and experience Slovak culture. I have been an active member of the Slovak community in the Baltimore and Washington area and a member of the SASW since 2011.

Since 2012, I have served in a variety of capacities on the SASW board including vice president, president, and now currently as treasurer. I have been involved in board initiatives to promote the society, grow our internet presence, improve records retention, revamp our bylaws, and support Slovak Living Abroad certificate seekers.

I am seeking re-election to the board because I would like to help the SASW to continue to build on its recent success of growing its membership, raising its visibility in the greater Slovak world, and strengthening its presence in the local community. I would like to continue to share my expertise and the lessons learned in my past decade of service with the next generation of SASW leadership.

If re-elected, I would advocate for the SASW board to adopt a more organized budgeting process to make more informed decisions about generating revenues and proposed spending. I feel this is a critical step for the SASW to adopt better budgeting practices to help set up the society for the future.

CANDIDATE STATEMENT FOR KEVIN MCNAMARA

I am offering myself as a candidate for election to the Board as an at-large member. I have demonstrated a strong interest in the Slovak people and the Republic of Slovakia since at least 1993, when I discovered the origins of the story of the liberation of the Czechs and Slovaks, oddly enough, on a trip across Siberia.

First, however, let me say that I have been a dues-paying member of the SASW since 2016, when I first spoke for the organization at the Embassy of the Slovak Republic on the subject of my book, *Dreams of a Great Small Nation* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016). I spoke again for SASW on “Milan Stefanik as a Czecho-Slovakia Founder” in 2019 at the Arlington Public Library, Arlington, VA. During these events, I came to know SASW board members Helen Fedor, Brian Belensky, and Ken Bombara. I am tickled that a photo of my speaking for SASW still appears on the front door of the organization’s website ([www. https://dcslovaks.org/](http://www.dcslovaks.org/)).

While I have no Slovak or even Slavic background, I first learned of the epic story of the liberation of the Czechs and Slovaks from Austria-Hungary during the above-mentioned trip through Siberia, where, in 1918, the Czecho-Slovak Legion was born. My book, *Dreams of a Great Small Nation*, is a narrative history of that dramatic and consequential story. Bringing the history of the Slovaks to a wider American and even global audience, this book:

- Prompted the U.S. State Department to sponsor my book tour across five cities in the Czech and Slovak republics in May 2018;
- Inspired a new exhibit at the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, Cedar Rapids, IA, which ran from April 7, 2018, through December 31, 2018, and for which I served as a consultant;
- Was praised by reviewers in periodicals in four countries (Czechia, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, and United States);
- Was excerpted nine times in eight U.S., Czech, Russian, and Slovak periodicals;
- Has earned an Amazon ranking of 4.5 out of 5 stars, based on 44 global reviews and 98 global ratings (at last count); and
- Was published in Czech and Slovak translations in 2020 by Slovart Publishing Ltd., which has offices in Bratislava and Prague.

I have been researching and writing about Central and Eastern Europe more broadly since 1990 as an Associate Scholar of the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), which was founded by an émigré from Austria-Hungary, Robert Strausz-Hupé, a former U.S. ambassador to NATO and four countries. I served on the staff as FPRI Assistant Director from 1988 to 1993, also serving as a contributing editor of its journal, *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs*, which published 48 of my book reviews. In 1994, I was appointed FPRI Associate Scholar.

In addition to writing about the Czech and Slovak peoples and republics, being interviewed by Czech and Slovak media, and publishing articles in Czech and Slovak journals and newspapers, I have visited Slovakia twice and Czechia three times for both business and pleasure.

I am also a seasoned non-profit executive with 30 years of experience in higher education, museums, and research institutes. I am the current co-chair of the Board of Directors of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts & Sciences, Washington, DC. I am a former trustee of the American Helicopter Museum & Education Center and the Abington Free Library.

I would be honored to serve on the Board of Directors of the Slovak American Society of Washington, DC, and would try my very best to contribute to SASW's success.

PROFESSIONAL

2021-24 Managing Director, Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies, Media, PA

2008-21 Associate Vice President, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA

2004-08 Vice President, Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia, PA

1998-04 Associate Vice President, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA

1994-98 Director of Development, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, DE

1994- Associate Scholar, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia, PA

<https://www.fpri.org/contributor/kevin-mcnamara/>

1988-93 Assistant Director, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia, PA, and Contributing Editor, *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs* (1990-93).

1985-88 Press Secretary, U.S. Rep. R. Lawrence Coughlin (PA13), Washington, DC

1981-85 Journalist and Bureau Chief, Calkins Media, Inc., Doylestown, PA

EDUCATION

2007 Stanford University, Graduate School of Business, Certificate

2000 University of Virginia, Center for National Security Law, Certificate

1995 Temple University, Graduate School, MA, International Politics

1994 University of Pennsylvania, Fund Raising Management Program, Certificate

1989 Temple University, School of Communications & Theater, BA, Journalism

BOARDS / MEMBERSHIPS / CERTIFICATIONS

2022- Member, Pennsylvania Advisory Committee, U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, Washington, DC.

2021-22 Member, Board of Directors, Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI), St. Paul, MN.

2020- Co-Chair, Board of Directors, Czechoslovak Society of Arts & Sciences (SVU), Washington, DC.

2009-12 Member, Board of Trustees (Co-Chair, Development Committee), American Helicopter Museum & Education Center, West Chester, PA.

2002 Graduate, Drexel University Leadership Development Program.

1995-14 Certified Fund-Raising Executive (CFRE) by AFP (see below)

1993-14 Member, Association of Fund-Raising Professionals (AFP).

1992-93 Member, Board of Directors, Abington Free Library, Abington, PA.
(Member of the Library's Advisory Committee, 1989-92).

AUTHOR / EDITOR / SPEAKER

Translated into Czech, Russian, and Slovak, my work has been cited in 49 scholarly books, journals, papers, and USG reports, in 12 countries: Australia, Canada, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Serbia, South Korea, Turkey, United Kingdom & United States.

CANDIDATE STATEMENT FOR CHRIS SEDLOCK

I am proud to be 100% Slovak-American. My mother was born in Hazlin (okres Bardejov) and emigrated to the U.S. after WWII. My father's family lived in Olcnavá (okres Levoca) before coming to America. I was born in Cleveland, OH and was baptized at Nativity BVM Slovak Catholic church on the city's east side. My Christening presents included enrollment in the Jednota and Zenska Jednota fraternal societies, where I still maintain memberships.

My upbringing revolved around Slovak family activities. In my youth, I developed an understanding of Slovak as the language family adults used when they didn't want children to know what they were saying. After graduating college, I lived with my maternal grandmother for three years, which refreshed my Slovak tongue. My Baba shared stories of her Slovak upbringing in Austro-Hungary, the occupation of her village in WWII, and her recipes, which were never written down but I always closely observed.

Cleveland is home to many Slovak places and functions. On an annual basis, I took my children to plant, rake, and clean the Slovak grounds in the Cleveland Cultural Gardens. We helped to plant the lipa (linden) tree near the historic statue of Gen. Milan Stefanik in its Slovak Garden. The Cleveland Slovak Radio Hour was a fixture in our house every Sunday, complete with song dedications to family members on special occasions. Summer picnics at the American Slovak Sokol Camp and the annual Labor Day Cleveland Slovak Festival were must-attend events where we met Slovak friends and family.

I am thrilled my three teenagers have developed an appreciation for Slovak history, culture, music, and food. My daughters are gradually learning to help me prepare our family's Vilija (Christmas Eve) meal. And they have now enjoyed Svaty Mikulas parties in both Ohio and DC.

We moved from Ohio to the DC metro area in 2015, and I joined SASW. For five years prior to our relocation, I served as Vice President of Cleveland-Bratislava Sister Cities, Inc., a 501c3 nonprofit in Cleveland dedicated to advancing Slovak culture. I am currently Vice President at a STEM education nonprofit in McLean and have also served as a Trustee and officer of multiple nonprofit organizations.

I look back on my upbringing and adult experiences with beloved memories of my Slovak family and Slovakia. My life's most important accomplishment was escorting my mother, Baba, and my kresna (godmother) back to Slovakia and Hazlin after 47 years in America. The pastor at the Exultation of the Holy Cross church in the village

thanked me as the 'guardian angel' who brought them home. I have never been so honored.

Serving as a Board Member of SASW would allow me to continue my life of Slovak-centered activities and would also enable me to meet others with similar Slovak values in the DC metro area.

Thank you for your consideration.

CANDIDATE STATEMENT FOR GREGORY TEARS

Connection to Slovakia: My great grandparents came to the United States in the early 20th century. My great grandfather was from Porubka and my great grandmother was from Koromla, both small villages east of Sobrance near the Ukraine border. My great grandfather arrived in the United States in 1904, settling in eastern Pennsylvania. My great grandmother arrived in the United States in 1922 and they were married only three weeks after my great grandmother arrived in the U.S. They went on to have five children, one of which was my grandmother. Growing up as a Greek Catholic (I was baptized at Epiphany of Our Lord in Annandale), I was around Slovak food and culture on a regular basis. In fact, my parents met at a Greek Catholic church picnic in Jersey City, New Jersey. My grandmother spoke Slovak and she passed on Slovak recipes and traditions to my mother who honored those traditions until she passed away ten years ago. My great uncle (my grandmother's brother) also was a talented baker and made orechovnik and makovik from scratch which became one of my favorite desserts (I usually have at least one in my freezer).

Outside of attending SASW events and meetings, I serve as the Director – International Recruiting for the Slovenska Lakrosova Federacia (Slovak Lacrosse Federation), recruiting mostly American and Canadian lacrosse players with Slovak heritage to compete for Slovakia at international events such as the European Championships, World Championships and Olympics. I also serve as an assistant coach for the Slovakia Men's National Lacrosse Team and am registered with Slovakia's central registry of sport.

I have acquired my Slovak Living Abroad certificate and anticipate finalizing my Slovak citizenship on my next trip to Bratislava. I also have an A1 certificate in the Slovak language from Comenius University and am currently working on my A2 certificate. Becoming proficient in the Slovak language is a long-term goal of mine.

Educational and Professional Background: I have an A.B. in English and American Literature and Language from Harvard University and a J.D. from Rutgers Law School. I am admitted to the bars of New York, New Jersey, Illinois and Wisconsin and practiced law for over 16 years. Most recently I was a Partner in the Public and Project Finance Group at Cozen O'Connor, working out of the New York and Chicago offices. For the past few years, I took a pause from my legal career to pursue writing opportunities outside of the law and have been working on several projects with an Executive Producer of Suits.

Why do I want to join the SASW Board? Since I started attending SASW events almost a year ago, I have found the group to be welcoming, educational, friendly and the perfect place to get to know fellow Slovaks in the DC area (oh, and the food!). I

decided to become a Lifetime Member and have attended and/or volunteered at most SASW events and have attended nearly all of the SASW Board meetings since joining. I also have attended a few genealogical group discussions as well. I would like to join the Board to help SASW grow its membership, particularly among younger members, in order to keep a healthy pipeline of local Slovaks interested in SASW and Slovak culture. I would also like to suggest that we have more in-person events so that we can gather together as a collective more often (i.e., happy hours, dinners, movies, sporting events, cultural experiences, museum visits) and try to expand the number of members who participate in SASW events. In addition, we might consider joining forces with other Slovak cultural organizations (for example, +421 Foundation) for certain events in order to share expenses and get fresh perspectives.