

Remarks by Margery Kraus, President and CEO of APCO Worldwide, after accepting the Institute for Public Relations Alexander Hamilton Award on November 11, 2010, at the IPR Distinguished Lecture and Awards Dinner at the Yale Club in New York City:

Thanks Bob, and thanks to all of you who have come tonight to support the IRP and to share this honor.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Institute for Public Relations for this award. As those before me, I am honored to be in such company and am especially thankful for this "vote" of my peers. There is nothing more humbling than that!

I think this award is especially meaningful to me as a political scientist and civics teacher, whose academic background focused on political socialization and the impact that our environment can have on our political beliefs and political actions. No one understood that more than Alexander Hamilton, and nowhere is it more important than in today's world where we are bombarded by a million voices through blogs, tweets and screeching cable channels.

What would Hamilton do or say about finding those words that can unite us and help us see a bigger picture through all the clutter? What advice would he have for us to make sure we exert the leadership and take the risks of advocating our principles when it is so easy to be shouted down?

Even in the earliest years of our nation's history, Hamilton was able to envision the significance of mobilizing public support in America. Whether it was the passing of the Constitution or the negotiation of American foreign policy, he was the pioneer of recognizing the importance of communication as the tool to mobilize public opinion and affect political outcomes. He took a huge risk by writing Federalists letters with James Madison and John Jay, which are now viewed by historians as the most significant public relations campaign in history and continue to influence us.

Alexander Hamilton shaped the way America runs today. When you cash a paycheck or vote for president, follow the war against terrorism or criticize the government, read a newspaper or sit next to someone of a different race on the subway, you are doing something that he foresaw and helped to make happen.

He also demonstrated the value of leadership and sticking to one's beliefs and values at a very critical time in our history.

While we are again living in a time of great challenge, it is important to remember how the rest of the world looks to us for a spirit of global optimism and American entrepreneurship. Our franchise is at risk and it is our responsibility to think how we, through our clients or our firms, continue to build on these values and remind our policymakers and our constituencies that we have been given the gift of opportunity and we need to nurture and protect it to keep our country strong and create opportunity for our next generation.

It is our responsibility as communicators to think about how we rebuild the trust in institutions and look for that common lens that unites rather than divides us.

Perhaps it is this strong sense of the American promise that binds me to Hamilton and makes this honor especially meaningful for me. Like Hamilton, I too, am a child of immigrants who came to the United States to find a better life and create their version of the American dream. My parents did not come with material means, but a trust in the institutions and the society they were adopting. My mother, who fled

Poland and then Cuba, had a philosophy: that where there is a will, there is a way. She taught me to have passion for life and for family. My father also taught me the value of client service and hard work in our country store where we all worked from the time we could see over the counter.

And, it is this very sense of optimism and “can-do ism” that has enabled me—a school teacher from a small mining town and the child of parents who were seeking a better future for their children—to have the opportunities I have had and the privilege of developing and leading a wonderful company like APCO.

I have tried to take these basic values of passion, hard work and client service and embed them in my firm and use them as the pillars for growth and leadership.

For the past year, I have had the special privilege to serve my term as the Chair of the Council of PR Firms. Working with leaders of other firms, I was reminded of the great people who have chosen to make communications their chosen profession. While we may be competitors on the playing field, we all share the struggle, along with our clients, to create value in a changed world. Above all else, we should take the lesson of Hamilton, to remind us that we have a job to do.

As I said, the Hamilton Federalist papers have been called the best PR campaign of all time. It helped to unite America around certain principles and ideals at a time when the country was very divided. Once again we are at a pivotal point in our history where people are not only divided, but they have lost their sense of trust in institutions. We can and should play a vital role in rebuilding that sense of shared purpose in an ever changing world... by leveraging our role as a central player in an integrated, often global, matrix of culture and reputation. And by remaining innovative, nimble and ahead of the curve, our industry can be at the forefront of building a new class of educated consumers of both products and ideas who are empowered to make good choices that affect behavior and ultimately change society. This should be our call to action.

I'd like to conclude by thanking the entire APCO team, some of whom are here tonight, whose belief in me and my vision allowed me to pursue my dreams and whose devotion, courage, and entrepreneurial strength continue to motivate and inspire me every day.

And, I'd like to thank my family, my husband Steve (who is not here tonight because he is looking after my 91 year old father who now lives with us), my three children (two of whom are here tonight), their spouses and my 10 grandchildren, for their love and support over the years. I would also like to acknowledge my friends and extended family who have joined us for the evening.

Constructing a business and being able to balance a family life requires a lot of compromise and an enormous support system and I am very lucky to have that.

Again, I thank you all for this tremendous honor.