



# The American Hungarian Federation

*Serving the Community since 1906 - Fidelissimus ad Mortem*

## **Commemoration of Kossuth Lajos and the Hungarian Revolution of 1848**

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*On the occasion of the American Hungarian Federation's Congressional Reception commemorating Hungarian National Day, Lajos Kossuth and the 1848 Hungarian War of Independence, and honoring members of Congress.*

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We are here today to commemorate the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 and the role of Kossuth Lajos as its inspirational and unforgettable leader.

It was a romantic, liberal time in Europe when the Hungarians' longing for independence from the Hapsburg Empire reached its crescendo and exploded on the European landscape, drawing the admiration of a generation of American leaders and statesmen. Although the revolution was ultimately overwhelmed by invading Austrian and Russian forces, it paved the way for equal status for Hungary in a dual Austrian-Hungarian nation.

Kossuth himself was to go on a highly acclaimed tour of the United States, including several cities in Ohio. It was in fact in Ohio's State Legislature where he laid out a truly democratic vision of governance: "All for the people and all by the people; nothing about the people without the people...That is democracy." He proclaimed this vision 11 years before President Abraham Lincoln would do the same in his famous Gettysburg address."

Kossuth's vision captivated American audiences near and far creating national 'Kossuth fever' with parades undertaken in his name and numerous counties and villages also named after him, even newborn children. Few know that in recognition of his stature, he was given the ultimate honor of being invited to speak here before a joint session of Congress.

Fewer still know that a bust of Kossuth was presented by our Federation to the American people for placement in the United States Capitol where it can be found in Freedom Foyer.

Some one hundred years later, the ideals which the life of Kossuth exemplified found their full expression again in the Hungarian revolution of 1956 against Soviet occupation. If the revolution of 1848 demonstrated Hungarian valor in the face of oppression, this uprising left no doubt as to its depths as Hungarians from all walks took to the streets and manned barricades against the tyranny of an unaccountable occupying power.

Once again their revolution was met with crushing force. But even so, as Albert Camus wrote of the 1956 revolution, “Hungary conquered and in chains has done more for freedom and justice than any people for twenty years.”

This is a proud legacy, a rare legacy in the annals of history, one which we here today commemorate. Regrettably, it is a legacy easily lost in the ongoing public debates about the pace of evolving Hungarian democracy.

For the critics of Hungary’s current center-right government, democratic advancements are not taking place rapidly enough and are not sufficiently in line with Anglo-American forms.

For its defenders, the country’s series of internationally recognized free elections and economic growth at 4% and unemployment below that number, already represent significant achievements in the last 28 years, which followed some 40 years of communist dictatorship.

One thing is indisputable. While Hungary’s fledgling democracy may not be flawless, anyone familiar with the media landscape there can see examples of criticism in the Hungarian media of government policies, including criticism of the prime minister himself. In fact, the respected Reporters without Borders organization ranks Hungary’s press freedoms above that of Japan and Israel, both allies of the United States.

And just as noteworthy, it was an opposition candidate who last month won a resounding victory in a local parliamentary election. But whatever our political views, inclinations and perspectives of the current political situation in Hungary are, and however critical or supportive we might be, we should rest assured that the ideals of freedom and justice Hungary’s countrymen and countrywomen fought and died for remain embedded within the Hungarian spirit and will find new and creative forms of expression. Hungarians know, and know it well, that their future is theirs and theirs only to determine.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson acknowledged as much recently when he said that we “recognize that our [European] allies are independent and democratic nations with their own history, perspective, and right to determine their future.”

Kossuth would have applauded Hungary’s current inclusion into the NATO alliance as a strong and committed partner of the United States. For while he passionately believed in national independence, he also believed in the importance of cooperation, even interdependence, among nations,

But just as importantly, and perhaps most importantly, he believed that even only one person, even only one individual could change the world in which he or she lived for the better. It is an ideal that crosses every national boundary and is carried through every passage of time. It is an ideal that can continue to encourage each and every one of us, both here and in Hungary, whatever our respective role might be in putting into practice the democratic values to which Kossuth dedicated his life. Thank you.