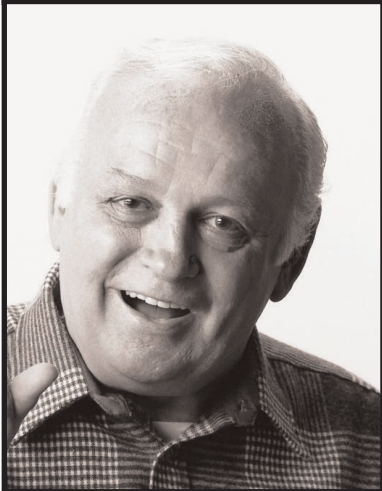




# Arab Americans

## A Century of Civic and Cultural Achievement



**W**e are a diverse people, 3 million strong, coming from all areas of the region that make up the Arab World. We are Christians and Muslims. We are Syrians, Lebanese, Egyptians, Palestinians, Iraqis, Jordanians, and Yemenis - from North Africa to Southwest Asia.

Today, we are a part of the American success story. The Arab American community is an example of the contributions an ethnic group can make when it has access to the economic and political life of this country.

From our earliest settlements in the industrialized Northeast and Midwest to those in the Southwest and West, Arab Americans have played an important part in building communities and institutions in most of the major cities of this country.

We excel in the professions and in public service. Most importantly, we play a significant role in the small business sector of many cities. Arab Americans are doctors, lawyers, teachers, elected officials, and entertainers. We are autoworkers in Detroit, grocers in Chicago, investment bankers in New York, and petroleum engineers in Texas.

Since the onset of Arab immigration to America over one hundred years ago, most in our community have assimilated into the mainstream of U.S. life. Although Arab Americans are economically and socially diverse, we share common treasures brought with us from our native lands - a rich heritage and culture, a strong extended family network, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a creative drive for excellence - that have enabled us to enrich America and its people.

It is against this backdrop and in this spirit that Arab Americans seek to make their mark in national politics.

We want to discuss civil and political rights in America from the perspective of a people who cherish these rights and want to safeguard them for ourselves and those who will come after us.

We want to present proposals on economic priorities and education policy from the vantage point of an ethnic community that has benefited from the American experience and wants to enhance the opportunities for our fellow citizens and new immigrants to our shores.

Finally, Arab Americans want to continue participating in the debate on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. As an American ethnic community, we want to provide a bridge of understanding between the American and Arab people. We want to help forge new relationships between them based on mutual respect, concern for human rights and self-determination, and the establishment of normalized productive ties in all areas - political, economic, and cultural.

It is our hope that discrimination and political exclusion are a part of our past. Political empowerment has come thanks to the hard work of Arab Americans across the country and to the open mindedness of those who have understood that political participation is a basic right and responsibility of all Americans.



We are keenly aware of profound challenges facing this country and the Arab American community both domestically and internationally.

At the dawn of a new century, America faces new responsibilities and burdens. At a time when some call on the United States to come home, we believe our community still has a vital role to play in fostering peace and justice at home and abroad.

Arab Americans want to play a part in focusing attention on these challenges and in stirring a national debate on such key issues of concern. And today, after many years of political involvement, we feel empowered and ready to play this role. We have, through hard work, accomplished a great deal in overcoming political exclusion.

During the past two decades, Arab American organizations - including the Arab American Institute - have sought to tap the best in our community in order to realize our full political and cultural potential. In the political arena, the path to empowerment has been long and arduous, but a decade of work has established Arab Americans on both the national and local levels as a political constituency of note.

The Arab American Leadership Council, organized by AAI in 1989, has grown to include more than 400 Arab American elected or appointed political officials, over 40 elected state officials, 25 mayors and scores of local political party leaders around the United States. These include U.S. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham, OMB Director Mitch Daniels, former HHS Secretary Donna Shalala, and former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell. Members of Congress of Arab descent are Nick J. Rahall (D-WV), Ray LaHood (R-ILL), John E. Sununu (R-NH), John Baldacci (D-ME), Chris John (D-LA) and Darrell Issa (R-CA). We are equally proud of those who served our country in the past, such as former Governor Victor Atiyeh of Oregon, former Governor John H. Sununu of New Hampshire, and former Ambassadors Ed Gabriel, Tom Nassif, Sam Zakhem and Selwa Roosevelt.

One century after the Arab immigrants first arrived in this country hoping to realize the American dream of being able to raise their families, run their businesses, and attend their churches and mosques in a free country -- we, as a community, have arrived -- proud of our heritage and proud of our achievements.

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Photos below: courtesy of *Arab Americans: Making a Difference* by © Casey Kasem

Arab Americans are immigrants and the descendants of immigrants who came to the United States seeking political liberty and economic opportunity.

