



## TRUSTEE CHAIR-ELECT'S REMARKS

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13 January 2026

Ravishankar, Paola — on behalf of The Rotary Foundation and the countless lives this gift will touch, thank you.

Your generosity is not just transformational — it's visionary.

It tells the world that service, compassion, and bold action still lead the way. And it reminds all of us here that when humble generosity meets vision, the impossible becomes possible.

Ladies and gentlemen, once again, a big round of applause for Ravi and Paola.

Today, I want to speak about gratitude — not just as a feeling, but as a force. A force that moves people to act, to give, and to change the world. There is no better moment than this one to reflect on its power.

The Rotary Foundation is more than just an organization to me. It is a heartbeat, a force of change that turns hope into reality. We witness the undeniable power of service, the way compassion ripples across communities, breaking barriers and lifting lives. Rotary is not just a movement. It's a family, united by empathy and the belief that kindness is an action.

As Rotary leaders, we often focus (and rightly so) on strategy, service, and stewardship. Today, I want to lean into something quieter and yet just as powerful: gratitude.

Every thank-you note, every phone call, every story shared is a way to say to our donors, you matter. Your gift matters. And together, we're making a difference.

My friends, each year we set a comprehensive fundraising goal — one that includes our gifts to our Annual Fund, our Endowment Fund, and our PolioPlus Fund. I am pleased to share with you that our goal for 2026-27 is US\$500 million. While this is an ambitious goal, we know that we can achieve it. We did it last year. And I think we got a little bit of a kick start (nod to Ravishankar) this afternoon.

Let's talk specifically about PolioPlus. This is where each of us can make a tangible difference.

Here's my personal challenge to you: Mentor five clubs in your district that have never hosted a polio fundraising event. Help them create one. When each of those clubs raises

just US\$1,500, that amount is matched 2-to-1 by the Gates Foundation, turning it into \$4,500. That's real leverage. That's real impact. And with your leadership, it brings us closer to our \$50 million annual PolioPlus goal.

Tonight, as we gather for our polio Deliver on the Promise Dinner, I know we'll be inspired. Inspired by stories of progress. Inspired by the passion in this room. And inspired by the knowledge that with just a bit more effort — and a lot more gratitude — we can reach our goals and change the world.

In late December of 2021, as president-elect, I had to take part in the easiest hard decision I ever made: to hold the 2022 International Assembly as a virtual-only event due to COVID-19.

The omicron variant was spreading fast, and gathering global leaders wasn't just risky — it was irresponsible.

I had a good cry, as did many of the governors-elect, whose bags were already being packed.

One of those leaders was Debbie. Fast-forward to May 1st of the following year, when Debbie was two days away from hosting her district conference, an event she was really excited about — and another she would not attend.

Debbie and her husband, Russell, were driving down a busy two-lane highway in North Carolina when a car in the oncoming lane suddenly veered across the center line, heading straight for them.

Russell, an experienced drag racer even at 80 years old, had seconds to decide. To the left: a line of cars. To the right: a ditch and a concrete culvert. He gripped the wheel, held his lane, and prayed.

The car hit them head-on. The driver lost her life. Debbie and Russell survived.

And then, as Debbie shared with me, blessings began to reveal themselves.

An off-duty state trooper had been trailing the reckless driver. He witnessed the crash, and within minutes, ambulances were on the scene. At the hospital, he told Russell that, had he swerved left, they would've collided with another car, possibly killing everyone involved. That car had a grandmother and two small children inside.

Another miracle: an orthopedic nurse happened to be in the line of cars. She saw Debbie's arm — broken, bone protruding — and calmly reset it with a stick and Russell's belt. The hospital said her quick action made all the difference.

And one more piece of good fortune: The driver who hit them had thousands of fentanyl-laced pills in her car. If those pills had reached the streets, countless young lives could've been lost. But they weren't. Because Russell held his lane.

Debbie missed her district conference. She endured pain and recovery. But through it all, she saw the hand of grace. And today, she and Russell remain committed to service. She told me that giving to The Rotary Foundation gives them immense joy and they have recently established the Russell and Debbie Doby Endowment Fund for their district — knowing that, even in tragedy, lives can be saved, and hope can be restored.

Their generous gift is at the Arch Klumph Society level, and today, during this session, we celebrate their official installation into the Arch Klumph Society. Please join me in welcoming and sharing gratitude with Debbie and Russell.

I also want to share with you today the story of Moh Eid.

Moh was formerly a humanitarian response specialist for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in Palestine and now serves as a program officer for the Rotary Peace Centers, supporting peace fellows at Makerere University in Uganda and Bahçeşehir University in Türkiye.

He is also an engaged member of the Evanston Lighthouse Rotary Club, which meets at our international headquarters.

Last May, I read a social media post from Moh.

He shared the heartbreaking loss of his brother Ibrahim, a humanitarian aid worker, killed alongside a colleague who worked for the Red Cross. Ibrahim was devoted to helping victims of war, even after sustaining an injury the previous year.

Allow me to share an excerpt of his social media post:

Just like that, my family lost our brother.

But I'm holding to a special memory, three years ago I was in Türkiye for work, and he was in Jordan for work too.

We made plans for him to come and spend time together in Istanbul. I didn't know that would be the last time I'd see him in person. But I'm grateful it happened. I'm grateful for the memories we made!

Thank you, Ibrahim, for 32 years of love, fun, childhood wrestles that I wish I won less of them, and countless adventures. I'm grateful for the wonderful soul you were in this world. May you rest in peace, Habibi!

These words spoke to me. They showcase that we are *all* the same regardless of language, culture, or country. We all want the same things for our families — love and peace.

As Rotary members, we stand united in fostering peace, not just through words, but through action.

Today, I want to share with you a very special action, one created by Chuck and Carol

Stocking. Chuck is a member of the Rotary Club of Toledo, Ohio, USA.

Deeply moved by Moh's loss, Chuck decided he wanted to find a way to support his friend. In doing so, he has created the Ibrahim Eid fund to support peace fellows at the Makerere peace center in Kampala, Uganda. Chuck's goal is for this to be a million-dollar fund, and a few weeks ago, they personally made the first gift of \$100,000.

My friends, please help me extend immense gratitude to Moh Eid, Chuck, and Carol Stocking.

Peacebuilding is at the core of our programs, embedded in every initiative and program and project supported by The Rotary Foundation. We strive to create environments where peace can flourish and build cycles of impact that sustain change.

Every day, through the work of our Foundation, lives are spared, hearts are lifted, and communities are strengthened. Rotary is not divided; we are one, united in the pursuit of a better future for all.

Find your passion within the Foundation's programs. Whether it's health, clean water, education, environmental relief, or *peace*, each effort contributes to a world where kindness prevails.

I want to leave you with one final story.

Some time ago, I was visiting my brother. We went shopping one afternoon, and the only thing I wanted to purchase was a gratitude journal. This was a trend a few years ago, where you would write down three things a day that you were grateful for — the premise being that it helped you to manifest the power of positive thinking. I thought this was a good thing.

We were in a lovely little boutique when I found "my book." Very quietly, I said to my husband, "This is my gratitude journal." I looked around a bit more and then went up to the counter to pay. I watched as the clerk went down to one end of the counter and took out this beautiful tissue paper and carefully wrapped the book.

He then went to the other end of the counter, where he found a blue box with gold lines all over the top. He finished it off with an elaborate ribbon and then came forward to give it to me.

He said, "I couldn't help but overhear what you said — that this is going to be your gratitude journal. I want to be your first entry in your book. I want you to write that the man that sold me this book made it an even more beautiful experience." He is indeed the first entry.

Governors-elect and partners, when you arrive in your breakout rooms in just a few moments, you will find a personal gift from President-elect Yinka and myself — a gratitude journal and note cards. And tonight, you will receive an email with a two-page gratitude toolkit. This kit contains sample gratitude language and best practices for

emails, calls, personal notes, and much more.

At Rotary, gratitude isn't just a gesture. It's a reflection of our values. When we thank our donors, we honor their belief in a better world and recognize their role in making it possible.

Let me close by sharing what will be the three entries in my own gratitude journal today.

The first, with gratitude to Ravishankar and Paola for your life-altering gift and, most importantly, for your generous and kind hearts.

The second entry, with gratitude to Debbie and Russell for your bravery, perseverance, and your profound love of Rotary.

And the third, in gratitude to Moh, Chuck, and Carol. Moh for your beautiful brother. And Chuck and Carol for being healing humans.

My friends, I will be forever grateful to walk this journey with each of you. Because when we lead with gratitude, we don't just raise funds — we raise hope.

Let gratitude be our compass. It fuels purpose, deepens fellowship, and strengthens the legacy we build together.