



It is wonderful to be with so many friends and supporters. It would delight and humble Ash to know this effort was launched by so many hands. I am grateful to you all.

I also would not be the wife of a former Secretary of Defense if I did not mention that while we are at this beautiful dinner, our service members are deployed across the globe—many in harm's way—and we wish for their safe return.

I want to begin with a few acknowledgements:

First, my beautiful stepdaughter Ava is here tonight—despite it being her birthday—and I am so glad she is. Ava is an incredible talent—a brilliant biologist who is at the forefront of the scientific advancements that most fascinated Ash.

Second, Laurence—you and your family's steadfast support of Ash's life's work is the type of committed philanthropy that we need more of in our increasingly transactional world. As many of you know, Laurence lost his beautiful wife Carolyn this year, so Laurence, I know you well understand how incredibly special and meaningful it is that you are extending Ash's legacy with your unwavering support for this professorship.

Meghan- I will embarrass you in a bit.

Finally, Eric Rosenbach—you underpinned so much of Ash's success—first as his Chief of Staff in the Pentagon and again, as his co-director here at Belfer. You and I have seen A LOT of stuff-- and it is only fitting to be here together tonight.

As some of you know, I am an Upstate New Yorker—it is where I grew up and where I learned to drive—and with a January birthday—I did so in some nasty winter conditions.

The first time you hit ice, it takes your breath away. The car slides out from under you, and suddenly nothing responds the way it should. Everything you thought you were prepared for vanishes in an instant, and all you can do is fight to stay upright.

Three years ago, I hit my iciest patch yet. Ash died suddenly in our home of a widow maker heart attack. As Joan Didion said, "You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends."

Just a month earlier, we were on a plane together, watching the sun set from the small window, holding hands. I felt happy. 2022 was pulling us out of COVID, and things were finally feeling normal.

I had no idea that within weeks I'd be in an ambulance, following behind Ash. Within minutes of arriving at the hospital, they let me know what I already suspected--he was gone.

When you learn to drive on ice, you are taught to fight the instinct to jerk the wheel away from the skid even though all you want to do is hold on tight, fight it, and try to stay on your original course. But the real trick, the counterintuitive, uncomfortable trick, is to steer into it.



That lesson—learned on icy roads in upstate winters—was one Ash carried into far more complex terrain. He believed deeply that while technology is unstoppable, it is shapeable. It will move forward whether we are ready or not, just as the car will slide when it hits ice. But what matters—what defines outcomes—is how we respond in that moment. Do we resist, deny, and cling to what we thought was steady ground? Or do we do the harder thing: lean in, understand the direction of change, and begin to shape it? Steering into the skid is not surrender—it is the only path back to control.

This professorship is, at its core, about teaching students to do exactly that. To face technological and scientific change not with fear or false certainty, but with clarity, agency, and intention. To understand that while they cannot stop the forces reshaping the world, they can influence how those forces are applied, governed, and experienced. It will equip them not just to keep up, but to lead—and ultimately help guide where we go next.

In the months following Ash's death, I was paralyzed at the thought of how to properly pay tribute to such a giant. Seemingly everyone had an opinion – but nothing seemed quite right and to be honest-- neither my head nor my heart was up to the task.

As you can imagine, when something so out of your control happens, you are stripped of any sense of agency. You don't feel like you can trust anyone, not even yourself.

As she stepped into her role as Director, Meghan invited me to lunch—and in Casablanca parlance, it was “the beginning of a beautiful friendship”. Meghan's bold vision for Belfer perfectly combined many of the threads Ash was pulling on—with her own intellectual pursuits and fresh thinking—all infused with her boundless energy and creativity. Meghan, you have given me about as much control in this process as I could hope for and it has helped me to get back on the road.

As many of you know, Ash's legacy wasn't in his books, his policy achievements or his many degrees and titles—it was always people—both his students and the troops he commanded. He encountered his former students all over the world and the thought of positively impacting the trajectory of a young person's life at a pivotal moment thrilled him. After all, that intervention is what launched him into a life of service.

I often invoke Eliza's last lines in the musical Hamilton “Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?” So, the question is no longer who will tell his story—but how far it will reach. And because of all of you, the answer is: farther than we can imagine. It will live on in the students who pass through this program, in the ideas they pursue, and in their lives, they go on to shape. That is a legacy not confined to memory but carried forward in motion. Thank you for helping to ensure that Ash's story continues to be written in the most meaningful way possible.