



**THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**THE CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

November 13, 2020

I write with enthusiasm adding my voice to underscore the potential significance of Coalition for Hope's Project Excelsior.

Over time I've had the privilege of serving as special counsel to then-Florida Governor Lawton Chiles, who was a three-term U.S. Senator prior to, and subsequently as a senior advisor to the White House Special Envoy to the Americas during the latter stages of the Clinton administration. At the outset of the George W. Bush administration I served as a foreign affairs officer within the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and was assigned as an interim foreign policy advisor to GEN Peter Pace, USMC, Commander, US Southern Command, that's headquartered in Miami.

I served as board chair of the Florida International Volunteer Corps, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit that engaged primarily within the Caribbean and Central America involving a range of humanitarian projects intended to improve the quality of life through sustainable development and durable relationships that corresponded to such efforts. And I was appointed to the Florida Division of Emergency Management's "Emergency Management Advisory Group (EMAG)" by its director in recognition of my interagency, intergovernmental and international background and experience.

I currently serve as senior director for Florida State University's Center for the Advancement of Human Rights in Tallahassee, Florida, where one of my areas of emphasis includes operationalizing human rights as an element of a more informed national security strategy. I also serve as a senior policy advisor for Coalition of Hope.

Rather than recount aspects of Project Excelsior or the specific capacities of the two ships with which you already may be apprised, my emphasis in this instance is on the resulting value-added. Consistent with the name of this remarkable 501(c)3 not-for-profit, the hope this project could conceivably generate should not be underestimated. This is especially the case amid but clearly not limited to current circumstances when people around the world are impacted by and isolated given the pandemic which like natural or other disasters tends to disproportionately impact those who are most vulnerable, where emergency response and medical capability is elusive.

While the concept of repurposing naval vessels toward humanitarian ends isn't a novel one, the added dimensions this effort would bring to bear portends meaningful and arguably otherwise unattainable outcomes within the course of responding to compelling and unmet humanitarian needs that could conceivably prove to be a critical difference in the lives of many, and the quality of their lives in the immediate aftermath of tragedy. Moreover, COH's commitment to the principles articulated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to diversity and inclusion, taken together

transcend demographic, political or other differences. Project Excelsior would extend a lifeline to people woven with respect and dignity based simply on immediate exigencies without hidden agenda or quid pro quo.

In closing, I would be remiss if I failed to observe both the continuing resonance and relevance of the sensibilities and vision Robert Kennedy conveyed in South Africa in 1966 -- "Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

It's a privilege for me to be associated with this effort, and to contribute to what may help generate another tiny ripple of hope.

Respectfully,

Mark Schlakman, Esq.

