

REMARKS BY HARRY STRACHAN
INTRODUCTION OF RICARDO POMA
WILSON AWARD FOR CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP

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Acknowledgments: Wilson Center – Other Honorees

Mitt [Romney] is a hard act to follow ... but the Bain Capital partners here tonight would echo what he said about Ricardo.

I also thank the Wilson Center for the opportunity to be a part of this event honoring four great citizen of the Americas: Woods Staton, Maria Helena Quiñonez, Susana Raffalli, and my good friend, Ricardo Poma.

Meeting Ricardo Poma

I first met Ricardo Poma around 1971 at a strategy workshop for a non-profit foundation at Ayagualo in the mountains above San Salvador.

Ricardo was a recent HBS graduate. He had turned down attractive work opportunities in the U.S. and Europe, purposefully returning to El Salvador with three goals:

- to help his father grow the family businesses,
- to help modernize the Salvador economy by getting active in industry associations, and
- to help the less advantaged through innovative social programs.

In the nearly 50 years since then, I've watched Ricardo make significant contributions in all those areas. In the process, he has become one of the most admired business leaders of all Mesoamerica.

Ricardo the Business Builder

In 1977 Ricardo's older brother, Roberto, was killed in a kidnapping, a terrible blow for the family. Ricardo and his father, while moving the family to safety in Miami, had to restructure the businesses for markets that had collapsed in the civil war.

They decided not to abandon El Salvador, keep all their businesses going, but realistically downsize. They retained their talented managers. When the opportunity to grow returned, they were ready.

Three things since then have contributed to their extraordinary success:

- The people-centric culture evident even in the tough years.
- The 100-year-old family tradition of operating excellence.
- The aggressive innovation and geographical expansion led by Ricardo in the last 30 years.

Ricardo the Social Entrepreneur

In 1993, Ricardo undertook a major new social initiative -- to build a top-notch university to produce transformative leaders. His vision was to recruit talented students from all areas of the country, and all socio-economic sectors, with a needs-blind admissions policy.

What impressed me, when Ricardo invited me to join the Academic Council, was that he had carefully studied different educational models in Chile, Mexico and the U.S. He had assembled a group of supporters, many also here tonight. And he was going to lead the effort himself as Rector.

25 years later ESEN is housed on a beautiful campus designed by world famous architect Ricardo Legorreta. It has three degree programs, six research and extension centers and 2000 alumni. Many already hold important leadership positions.

Ricardo's Personal Qualities

Finally, I've watched Ricardo as a father, family leader and mentor.

Those who know Ricardo have experienced what first impressed me about him at Ayagualo.

- He listens well and is deeply respectful.
- When he speaks, it is thoughtful, practical.
- He has strength of conviction, but not an ego-need to impress.
- He continues to be curious to learn, ambitious to reach across the divides to make his region a better place.

It's an honor to present this award to Ricardo Poma.