

Ex-ambassador who lost job over ‘genocide’ talk speaks in Fresno

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Former U.S. Ambassador to Armenia John Evans, whose outspoken use of the phrase ‘Armenian genocide’ ended his Foreign Service career, appeared at Fresno State on Monday to talk about the mass killings and his decision to speak out.

“I felt the time had come to call a spade a spade, to use the term that 95 percent, if not 98 percent of historians believe is correct,” Evans said in an interview. “At some point somebody had to stand up and say this isn’t right.”

Evans was in Fresno as part of an Armenian lecture series at Fresno State, and to promote his newest book “Truth Held Hostage: America and the Armenian Genocide — What Then? What Now?” The book explores Evan’s historical research and the decision he was forced to make. Split into three sections, the last delves into what is next for the future of Armenians, Americans and Turks.

“We’ve had the 100th anniversary, we’re now in 101 and 1 day, so where do we go now, what is the way forward, what can we all do?” Evans said.

Even though U.S. policy continues to refrain from using the term, Evans said the Obama administration has made significant strides that no other president has done, from positively referencing former U.S. Ambassador to Armenia Henry Morgenthau, who reported on the murders of Armenians, to Raphael Lemkin, the Polish-Jewish scholar who coined the word genocide.

“The 2009 proclamation on April 24 by President Obama was the high-water mark of American presidential statements on this issue,” Evans said. “It did away with doubts about whether or not there was intent on the part of some to basically remove the Armenians of Anatolia, and that was one of the questions that some people had been making. He made that very clear.”

When Evans used the term genocide in 2005, he had known what the State Department had wanted him to say, but he made the decision and stood by his words. Although he was forced to make an apology, he said he never retracted his statement. Evans said he knew that those above him wouldn’t speak, and that those below him wouldn’t dare, so in the end it came down to him.

“There are very few people in the U.S. government who in their hearts don’t know the truth,” Evans said. “They know that there was a genocide, they know what the facts are, and they simply don’t want to complicate America’s relations with Turkey.”

Not since the Reagan administration has the U.S. recognized or used the term genocide, Evans said. Even though President Obama has made his remarks, the truth remains hidden.

“We know what is in his heart, but its not on his lip,” Evans said. “The truth is out there, but it’s held hostage.”

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