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## **New Institute on Religious Freedom Transforms Discussion on College Campus and Beyond**

New York City, NY - On March 2, 2016, Ben Vinson III, Dean of the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences at George Washington University, told a distinguished audience gathered at New York's Knickerbocker Club that the university's newly established **Ambassador John L. Loeb, Jr. Institute for Religious Freedom** is having a transformational impact across its campus and around the globe. Endowed by a \$2.5 million gift from Ambassador Loeb, the new institute has attracted participation from numerous departments in the Columbian College as well as from the university's schools of law and medicine.

Vinson cited the importance of the Loeb Institute in light of the current epidemic of religious violence abroad and heated debates over the place of religion in U.S. politics. "The Loeb Institute is committed to developing new courses for students, research opportunities for faculty, collaborative programs with civic education organizations and links to public and private secondary schools," Vinson noted. "The Institute is taking full advantage of its location in the nation's capital to stimulate education and research on the worldwide implications of religious diversity."

[Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.](#), who served as U.S. ambassador to Denmark from 1981 to 1983 and as a delegate to the United Nations, provided the funds to launch the new institute because he felt an urgent need to raise the public's awareness of the nation's historic roots of religious freedom, the separation of church and state and the continuing relevance of the American tradition of religious diversity. Ambassador Loeb emphasized, "The idea that religious freedom is an inherent right guaranteed by a nation's constitution is one of America's greatest inventions—one that has served as a model for countries around the world."

Ambassador Loeb's commitment to the idea of religious freedom extends to his founding the [George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom](#), which helps students, teachers and public leaders worldwide to go beyond "mere" toleration of religious differences to sincere respect for each other's beliefs and observances. The Institute reflects George Washington's aspiration, expressed in his Letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport in which he wrote: each of us must give "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." Founded by Ambassador Loeb in 2009 has offered its own educational programs and partnered with national civic education organizations to reach tens of thousands of teachers and students in the U.S. and abroad.

That same year, The George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom opened the [Loeb Visitor Center](#), which serves as the gateway to the Touro Synagogue National Historic Site in Newport, Rhode Island. The Visitors Center exhibitions celebrate America's First Amendment rights and offer an opportunity to learn how religious freedom and the clear separation of church and state came to be part of American law and culture. Visitors find inspiration in the personal histories of colonial American Jews and their influence at the nation's beginning.

Today Ambassador Loeb is a businessman, philanthropist and art collector. He was also a partner of the Wall Street investment banking and brokerage firm Loeb, Rhoades and Co.

**For more information** about the Ambassador John L. Loeb, Jr. Institute for Religious Freedom, visit <http://loeb.columbian.gwu.edu/>.

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