

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SEPTEMBER 25, 1974

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF TOASTS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
GIOVANNI LEONE
PRESIDENT OF ITALY

STATE DINING ROOM

10:03 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. President, it is wonderful to have you and Mrs. Leone and your three sons with us this evening. As I said this morning at the time you came and joined us, the United States has a great debt of gratitude and a great sense of friendship for Italy, because of the many, many people in this United States who have an ancestral background from Italy.

As I read and listen and look around our country, some 10 percent of our people have a background from Italy. We have superb artists, we have outstanding individuals in science, we have some very renowned athletes, we have many, many people in public life who have had a background from your country. And we are proud of them and their contributions to our country.

But I think, Mr. President, the broadest relationship that we have is what Italy has contributed to the United States without personal identification in the field in those areas that one could describe as grace, humanity, tolerance, and an awareness of beauty.

We have a great American writer by the name of Mark Twain who once wrote -- and he wasn't very complimentary to foreigners -- but one of his nicer moments, he wrote, "The Creator made Italy from the designs of Michelangelo."

And that was a nice comment. It was probably the best he ever made about any foreigners.

But to be serious, Mr. President, in all of the time that I had the privilege of serving in the Congress, the United States and Italy were building together. We were building in the process of reconstruction following the war. We were building in the process of Europe as a whole in the reconstruction period.

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This 25-year span led, of course, to our alliance, where we have developed a friendship and an agreement for diplomatic, military, economic and cultural expansion and reciprocity.

We dealt with Italy on a personal basis and we have worked together in our relationships with our allies in Western Europe. And the net result has been a better relationship between us as people and our Governments on behalf of our people.

But, Mr. President, it was a pleasure for me to meet you this morning and to be reassured of your willingness to talk in a frank and candid way about our mutual problems. And from one who spent a good share of his life in the political arena in the United States, I was greatly impressed with your wise statesmanship and your great knowledge of the problems in Europe and the rest of the world.

And so it was a privilege and a pleasure for me to meet you and to discuss these matters with you and to help in the process of building a better relationship between Italy and the United States.

And if I might, may I ask all of you to stand and join with me in the toast to the President of the Republic of Italy.

PRESIDENT LEONE: For the second time today, Mr. President, I take my set speech and I set it aside. I am putting it back into my pocket, because I want to speak from my heart. The set speech, the written paper, will remain. It will perhaps go into the archives of state, but my speech will spring from my heart.

You, Mr. President, have said some very nice things about me and about my country. Now the things you said about me I am sure were totally undeserved and they merely stemmed from your very great kindness. But what you said about my country makes me very proud indeed.

You recalled the contribution that Italy has made to arts and to civilization. We present this heritage to you which is the heritage of centuries. We present it to you as our friendly ally, not with pride -- which might perhaps be justified -- but as a sort of visiting card for you to understand us better.

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Italy has inherited the greatest legal tradition of all times and Italy is the mistress of the arts. It can, therefore, only pursue ideals of democracy and freedom for all. And what other nation can better support us in these ideals than the United States.

Your Constitution, Mr. President, the first written Constitution that ever existed, has laid the foundations of the free world. And we are making this visit to this great country with the Foreign Minister, Mr. Moro, who is an authoritative representative of my Government, to reassert four things: The first is the faithful, loyal and constant friendship between our two nations which is based, as you said, in part also on our common ancestry.

The second point is the Atlantic Alliance. That is the second point we want to reassert. As I said this morning, it is seen by Italy, by the United States, and by all the member countries, as an instrument for detente and peace.

And we want to reassert, thirdly, our firm belief in the need to build a united Europe which will be complimentary to the Atlantic Alliance and which will not be against America but with the United States of America.

And fourthly, we want to tell you how very much we support your policy of detente in which you have the great cooperation of your Secretary of State, which policy of detente expresses the will of the peoples of the world that thirst for peace and justice.

Now if these four points are confirmed -- and they have already been confirmed, indeed, by our talks this morning with you, Mr. President, and this afternoon with your Secretary of State, and I am sure they will be confirmed again in the meeting you were kind enough to arrange with me tomorrow -- if they are reconfirmed, Mr. President, then I can only say that I thank God for allowing me to represent Italy in this great country.

And, Mr. President, you were good enough to extend your greetings to my whole family, and this is somewhat unusual, because in Italy we tend to hide our families away, and I have grown away from this tradition. I have brought my wife and children with me to present to you a typical Italian family, one that is a sound family that is respectful of moral values and that is united.

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Mr. President, may I take this opportunity to say how satisfied I am with the talks that we have had and how very glad I am that you have accepted my invitation to come and visit us in Italy. This has already made a favorable impression outside.

And I hope that the burden that is now weighing on your shoulders -- but you have very square shoulders, indeed, I know that you are an athlete, I am not referring only to your physical strength -- I hope that burden will yet give you some time to come to Italy where I can assure you of a very warm and affectionate welcome from the people of my country. And I hope that Mrs. Ford will be able to come with you.

And so I say to you, God bless you and I invoke the blessings of God upon you as I do upon my own family.

And so I want to say now, thank you to the United States of America and thank you very much for the music that you provided tonight. It was a touch of sentiment that I very much appreciated. I appreciated the Neapolitan song that was played.

I told you, Mr. President, in our private talk that Naples is my home town. It is very beautiful, generous, and poor. And many parts of Italy are poor and that causes us some concern.

I am mentioning this not with cup in hand at all but merely as a matter of interest.

And so now, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I give you the toast, the health and prosperity of President Ford and his family, and the success and well-being of the people of America and the consolidated friendship of the peoples of Italy and the United States of America.

END (AT 10:22 P.M. EDT)