

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAY 17, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE
EXCHANGE OF TOASTS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING
PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

THE STATE FLOOR

10:22 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. President, Madam Giscard d'Estaing, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

We are deeply honored to have you and your party with us for this evening. Mrs. Ford and I consider ourselves extremely fortunate to have this opportunity to extend our hospitality to all of you officially as well as personally.

Mr. President, your visit to the United States to share with us the 200th anniversary of our Declaration of Independence and your presence in this historic house tonight are vividly reminders of the longstanding and outstanding friendship of our two nations and of France's aid to the United States for which we are all deeply indebted.

A very glorious chapter in human history, the narrative of French assistance to the winning of American independence, has been taught in American schools for two centuries. Every American school child learns of General Rochambeau, General Lafayette and Admiral de Grasse at Yorktown.

This is part of our great teaching heritage in America, and for very good reason. As millions of visitors to Washington will discover this year, this city contains many, many monuments to brave sons of France who helped us in periods of dire emergency.

Beginning with the statue of General Rochambeau and Lafayette Park just across from the front entrance of the White House, it is a historic place in our national capitol.

MORE

Tonight we pay special tribute to Admiral d'Estaing, who brought the first French fleet to our assistance in the Revolutionary War. Count d'Estaing's arrival on July 3, 1778 was stunning news to our opposition at that time and was a great blessing to the hard-pressed Continentals.

Unfortunately General Washington never met Admiral d'Estaing. I count it a special privilege as the 38th President that I can welcome one of his descendants to this house and personally express our long, overdue thanks for the distinguished contribution that was made by one of your predecessors in our struggle for our independence.

In his honor we have displayed in this room tonight a bust of the Admiral, which has long resided at the White House, and I am certain that all of you will agree that it is a distinct pleasure to have the Admiral with us on this occasion, as well as one of his family.

Mr. President, we welcome you tonight both to express our gratitude for the assistance of France 200 years ago and in recognition of the continuing important role which France and the United States must play as allies in the world today.

France and America will remain united by common devotion to the rights of man, by a shared concern for the welfare of all peoples and peace for all nations. The course of history has drawn France and the United States closer and closer together in time of war, but we have also stood together in time of peace, facing the challenges of recession, of inflation and the energy crisis.

These challenges are no less a threat to the peoples of both of our countries and the world as a whole than the wars of the past.

Mr. President, by working together we can triumph over these challenges, and we are on the way to economic recovery both in your country and ours and in the industrial societies of this world.

Much, much progress has been made through cooperation, through consultation, among the industrial democracies and we owe you a very special debt of the gratitude for your leadership in the past months.

Mr. President, our dialogue which began in Martinique some 18 months ago, continued at Brussels, Helsinki, Rambouillet and now in Washington, is of great importance to your people as well as to ours. The continuing dialogue has generated a spirit of mutual and very deep confidence fundamental to our relationship as friends as well as allies.

MORE

As in 1776, Mr. President, America welcomes the partnership of France and deeply values her friendship, her wisdom, her strength and France's longstanding tradition of leadership. Together we face wonderful opportunities for the future.

Two centuries ago, during the Revolutionary War, General Washington had a special dinner guest, the French General, philosopher and author, Chastellux. Writing of that dinner, he remarked favorably upon the calm and the agreeable conversation, but he disapproved of the ten-course menu. (Laughter)

He observed, however, that the frequent toasts were a sort of refrain punctuating the conversation as a reminder that each individual is a part of the company.

To all of our guests, French as well as American, I welcome you as part of our company, gathered this evening in tribute to France and in the honor of her President.

Let us toast to the health of the President of the French Republic and the friendship of France and the United States. To the President.

PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING: Mr. President, Madam, ladies and gentlemen:

This morning, after having left Paris at 12:00 and arrived in Washington at 10:00 (Laughter) I rather have the delightful feeling that I have managed to set back eternity by two hours. (Laughter)

Now this evening, after listening to you, Mr. President, I have the feeling that you have set back eternity by two centuries.

Listening to the warmth, knowledge and friendship with which you discussed what happened two centuries ago, I rather have the feeling of that dinner during which Washington suffered too many courses. (Laughter)

The note of simple dignity with which you have struck for this visit of the President of France, together with the words of friendship you have just spoken, clearly illustrate the true inspiration of our meeting, the present commemoration of a past event, but an event that is still alive for all of us and which we are happy to celebrate together.

We are not here as archeologists digging up the dead past. We are here for a warm, joyful celebration of a living idea, one of the great ideas of which it has been said that its spark is only to be alive in a single mind to set the world afire. I mean, of course, the liberty of men.

MORE

In the course of my visit to the United States, I shall have occasion to call to mind on the actual scene of events some of the high points in your struggle for liberty. But this evening, as I address the President of the United States, and with him the whole American people, I want to take the opportunity to say how profoundly gratified I feel at the understanding that exists between our two Governments.

I want to say also how convinced I am of the value of this understanding, not only for our two countries but for world progress. It is precisely because of our shared sense of the current need for Franco-American friendship, Mr. President, that we both wanted to meet immediately after we took office, and so I had the pleasure of welcoming you to Martinique 18 months ago.

I refer to that meeting because it was our first, but also because our relations continue to be inspired by the spirit of the talks we had there.

What has been referred to as the spirit of Martinique can be defined as openness and trust, mutual respect and a sense of solidarity. In no way does it imply, whether on our side or on yours, any weakening of independent judgment or of our own responsibilities. It might be appropriate to recall the words of Richard Henry Lee in 1776.

"It is not choice but necessity that calls for independence as the only means by which foreign alliance can be conducted." Such a sentiment calls for a common world to dispel misunderstanding, to turn away from recrimination and to promote dialogue.

I do not think there has ever been a time when contacts between our two Governments have been more frequent, consultation more sustained and cooperation more good willed. Also, it has never been clearer that though our methods may sometimes differ, our final objectives are inspired by that same ideal of liberty, peace and justice, which is the ideal of our two peoples.

Events have certainly demanded considerable attention from us. The problems are varied: European security, the Mediterranean, the Middle Eastern conflict, the tragedy of Lebanon, the evolution of Southern Africa, the economic stability of the West, a new balance to be established between industrialized and developing countries.

It is inevitable that the United States and France should be involved in all these problems.

MORE

Of course, France does not have at her disposal the same means of action as the United States, but the influence of France extends to a wide and established audience, and this yields to a politically independent voice, an increased defense effort, thriving friendships across the world, particularly in Africa and a dynamic economy still not fully recognized as such in this country.

These factors again added authority from the fact that nobody doubts France's commitment to the cause of peace. This enables France to be for the United States, as the United States is for France, an all the more solid ally in that her loyalty is devoid of any touch of subservience.

We have only to refer to experience to see that when world problems arise, Franco-American understanding and cooperation never fail to be of benefit. At Helsinki, for example, when detente was formulated in terms of principles which for both of us at once exclude confrontation and abdication, and then they were of benefit again in the case of the Rambouillet conference where the principal industrial powers shared a clear resolve to meet the responsibilities created by the economic crisis from which we are now emerging together -- these are two examples of the results to be obtained through shared initiatives.

Now, after having called to this gentleman a Ford to translate my speech, I will call for a Ford to understand me. (Laughter)

It is, Mr. President, my sincere wish that this visit may be the occasion for the Americans to acquire a better understanding of the French people to be sure our Latin roots have a formative influence on our character, to be sure we are impetuous and enthusiastic, but we are also loyal and determined. Such are the qualities which over the centuries have enabled us to ride out the storms of Europe.

It is because of these qualities that we can declare to France's partners today that whether in prosperity or adversity, France is a dependable friend.

I also wish that the understanding built up between us should remain the way it was expressed in the inscription that one of my ancestors had engraved on the tomb of a French officer killed at Boston on September 15, 1778, that "all attempts presuming to separate France and America might prove forever vain."

MORE

Page 6

It is in this spirit, Mr. President, that I offer to you, as well as Mrs. Ford and to your family, my warmest good wishes for your happiness and well being, and that I raise my glass to honor the independence of the United States of America and the 200 years of friendship between our two peoples.

END

(AT 10:47 P.M. EDT)