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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

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

THE FRENCH EMBASSY

10:36 P.M. EDT

PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING: Mr. President, it is a great pleasure for Madam Giscard d'Estaing and myself to welcome you and Mrs. Ford this evening here in this French abode and to return to you some of the warm hospitality that you and the American people have extended to me since the beginning of my visit.

Now this is the fifth time we have met in 18 months, and during the past two days we have had useful and trusting talks together. We are getting to know each other well, and I would like to take this opportunity to tell you how delighted I am with the contacts and, if I may say, with the friendship that has been established between us.

A few weeks ago, Mr. President, you said that French-American relations were better today than they had ever been. I share your view wholeheartedly, but I would like to add that we owe this state of affairs largely to you, to your personal conviction and your breadth of vision and I hope that I will not be accused of interfering in your country's domestic affairs if I testify to this here, but that is a risk I am prepared to run.

I agreed to make this visit for obvious reasons. Given the role France played two centuries ago, it was only fitting that France would be first in joining in the celebrations for the Bicentennial of the United States and sharing with special feeling the joy of the American people.

But something else struck me. Though our countries are lined by so many memories and share the same values and belong to the same alliance and are so often led by major world affairs to exchange views and pool their efforts, nevertheless our countries' knowledge and understanding of each other is too often insufficient and superficial, and even their trade relations are not commensurate with the place each one holds in the world economy.

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Now, such a situation is paradoxical. It is also harmful and should be corrected. For this reason I am pleased at the renewed interest on both sides that my visit at your invitation has generated between our two countries. For the people of France, it has been an occasion to discover the realities of present-day America as they have been presented on this occasion by our combined information services.

I would like to think it has also helped the American people to become better acquainted with the France of today, the France that is changing by virtue of her younger outlook and her sense of effort.

For this reason I also set great value, as you know you do, too, Mr. President, on the cooperation that we have decided to implement in an area that is limited but full of human implications. I am referring to the war on cancer. I shall follow its development personally.

For this reason, lastly, I hope that there will be more and more contacts and meetings between our two countries and that, in fact, will be the aim of the two foundations which have just been established, one in New York and the other in Paris, in order to promote relations between the United States and France.

Under the guidance of well-known figures, they will work together closely to further exchanges and dialogue between our two countries. Now, one of the objectives of my visit to which I am most attached will thus be achieved. I know, Mr. President, that it meets your wishes, too; that is, that France and the United States should know each other better in order to understand each other better.

Our two countries will thus be able to sail in company just as they did when the first French fleet came to fight by your side. In fact, the arrangement of the tables for this dinner is symbolic in that it reproduces the battle order.

I can't help but pause here just to say how much I admire the freshness and the naiveness of the sentiment of the men of those times. I would like to draw your attention to the menu card and the engraving on the first page, which is a picture that I chose myself among the Archives in our country and the engraving commemorates the independence of the United States.

The very first line, which is dated the Fourth of July, 1776, the 13 colonies that since have become known as the United States -- well, I can but confirm that since that time they certainly have become very well known as the United States of America.

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Here I must also refer to the names of the French ships that came to the aid of their American allies. Here again we note the great variety in the names of the ships which will also perhaps reflect the variety in the relationships between our two countries. I see that there is a ship called La Sensible, and even the Le Fantasque, and by a curious intuition for those times, I see that there was also a ship known as the Concorde.  
(Laughter)

But perhaps more to the point, I think you will agree is the fact that the La Victoire is among us. So, it is in memory of that last ship that I would now like to raise my glass in honor of the President of the United States and Mrs. Ford, and all the distinguished Americans who did us the honor and pleasure of accepting our invitation and also in honor of the great American people to whom I say on this, their birthday, many happy returns of the day.

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

Thank you very kindly, Mr. President, for your very thoughtful and very generous words. Mrs. Ford and I are most appreciative and highly honored for the opportunity to join with you and your many friends here on this occasion this evening.

Once again I have a first-hand opportunity and a welcome opportunity, I might say, to enjoy the incomparable hospitality and cuisine of the French people as well as yourself. France's reputation, as we all know, for its hospitality is just one of the many dimensions of French contributions to the world as a whole.

Frequent mention has been made during your visit, and appropriately so, Mr. President, of France's role in our struggle in this country for our independence. Yet, the French influence in America long preceded 1776. Much of the new world was opened by French explorers such as Marquette and LaSalle. Their influence is very obvious, very apparent in the names of American towns and American cities, north and south, from Detroit to Joliet to New Orleans.

French influence is still very vivid in Louisiana, which you, Mr. President, will visit later this week. Closer to home, we enjoy the superb artistry of L'Enfant and design of our beautiful capital city. It was he who selected the site for the Capitol Building and for the White House itself, creating for the latter a beautiful President's park where your helicopter landed just yesterday.

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French philosophers have profoundly influenced and inspired the nature of our democracy and the spirit of our laws in America. Thanks in a very large measure to the writings of Montesquieu and Rousseau, our nations share a heritage of human values. These values are today the very basis of our philosophy, of our freedom, our justice as well as our equality.

America remains greatly inspired by the wisdom and the vision of France in the history of our great country. It is especially gratifying to celebrate the Bicentennial of our independence with the distinguished President of our country's oldest friend and oldest ally. Ours is a partnership and an alliance unique in world history, a relationship which each has extended the hand of friendship and assistance to the other in the hour of maximum peril.

As in the past, our security and our prosperity still depend upon our willingness to work together, to cooperate in meeting common problems and meeting common challenges.

We meet tonight, Mr. President, in a time of peace. Continued peace requires that every democracy remains strong and prepared to defend its liberty. As Washington said, "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving the peace."

In a gesture symbolic of the commitment of both of our nations in safeguarding the security of our peoples, Madam Giscard d'Estaing will travel to Mississippi in the next day or two to christen the United States Navy's newest destroyer, the DeGrasse, and I compliment you and wish you well on that fine occasion on Saturday.

This ship, Mr. President, named for the French Admiral whose fleet made possible a very decisive victory at Yorktown will contribute to the strength and to the capability of our own Navy. The DeGrasse will also contribute to the objectives and to the goals that we share with France, to preserve the peace, to protect our freedom and to keep the sea lanes of the world fully open to the democratic nations.

Mr. President, for two hundred years France and the United States shared dreams, shared challenges, shared victories in every sphere of human endeavor. The mutual esteem and inspiration which mark our relationship today flow from common ideals, determination and mutual reinforcement. I foresee a very vital partnership for generations to come between our two nations.

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I might say on a personal basis, Mr. President, it has been a unique and a wonderful experience for me to have made your acquaintance and to have worked with you, and I look forward to a continuation of that experience for what I hope is the benefit of our countries for a good many years to come.

It is altogether fitting that the nation which two centuries ago gave the world two very fundamental charters of liberty -- our Declaration of Independence and the declaration of the rights of man -- should still stand together for freedom and for justice for all.

So, let us toast that partnership on the eve of this third century.

To the health of the President of the French Republic and to the liberty, equality and fraternity of the people of France and the United States.

END

(AT 10:58 P.M. EDT)