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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  
HIS EXCELLENCY GIULIO ANDREOTTI  
PRESIDENT, COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC  
AT A STATE DINNER

THE STATE DINING ROOM

8:20 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very, very much.

Mr. Prime Minister, distinguished Italian guests, ladies and gentlemen:

President Leone was the first State visitor that I had the high honor and rare privilege to welcome, as President of the United States.

Tonight we are once again celebrating the official visit of a very distinguished Italian leader, our guest tonight, Prime Minister Andreotti.

These two visits symbolize the very close friendship of our two countries and the continuity of American support for a very trusted and valued ally.

Earlier this autumn we welcomed the visit of the Italian First Lady, Mrs. Vittoria Leone, who added her grace as well as her friendship to the already impressive Italian contribution to our Bicentennial. The performances of the La Scala Opera, the loan of the Venere de Medici to our National Gallery, Italian participation in the Tall Ships Review, and many other Bicentennial activities were symbols of what Americans have gained from our relationship. For this, the American people are most appreciative and deeply in debt to the people of Italy and to your government.

The gift that Mrs. Leone presented on behalf of the Italian people, a portrait of Thomas Jefferson, which hung for nearly 200 years in the Convent of Lodi today hangs in the Oval Office in the White House complex. This is a treasured reminder of Italian-American friendship.

Mr. Prime Minister, for two centuries Italian culture has enriched the life of the United States with many, many unique contributions. Historians point out that Thomas Jefferson, in writing the Declaration of Independence, drew on the wisdom of his Italian friend, Filippo Mazzei, in the drafting of several now very immortal phrases.

As a matter of fact, our Capitol Building is enhanced by Italian art and Italian artisans. The very name America commemorates an Italian.

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Along with Italy's cultural contributions came millions of American immigrants. America is very, very proud of its citizens of Italian origin.

I happen to believe this is perhaps Italy's greatest contribution to America, and we are truly grateful for it.

We Americans have tried to reciprocate, Mr. Prime Minister, by showing the Italian people how much we value them as our friends. This was the spirit behind the Marshall Plan, and it was demonstrated again last May when an earthquake struck in northern Italy in Friuli. The response of the American people, our Congress, the Executive Branch, was immediate. Legislation was enacted in record time, and Senator Pastore was one of the initial authors of that legislation.

That contribution has been helpful in the construction or reconstruction of schools and hospitals in that part of Italy. It has helped to rebuild the lives and the homes of those people who were unfortunately the victims of that earthquake.

Mr. Prime Minister, present conditions pose a very severe challenge to the industrial democracies of the West, many of which have suffered from recession, unemployment, inflation and the abrupt and steep rise in energy costs.

As we noted this morning, Mr. Prime Minister, this is particularly a challenging time for Italy. But your government reacted vigorously and your government acted resolutely. I, and I believe, most Americans are tremendously impressed by your efforts and your successes.

Under your continuing strong leadership, I am confident that Italy can return to a balanced growth and economic vitality. This is important to Italy, but it is equally important to America -- in part because of the vital interests we share as industrial democracies.

The American people have made clear their commitment to democracy and democratic methods. I am equally convinced that Italy will maintain its very strong commitment to the common goals that we share as partners in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; to secure peace, democratic freedom and economic well-being for all of our people.

Mr. Prime Minister, I know that you are an admirer of the great Roman statesman, Cicero, his words, and I quote, "When good men of like character are joined in friendship, there we find the noblest and the strongest union."

In the discussions that we had this morning following your coming to the White House, we had an opportunity to reinforce my conviction that his words aptly describe the relationship between our two people.

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It is with pleasure and a great deal of confidence, Mr. Prime Minister, that I express the continued best wishes of the American people, as well as the continued full support of the United States of America, our government, for your government and the policies that it is following.

Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to join me in a toast to the Prime Minister of Italy, to the enduring friendship between our two countries and to our mutual commitment to peace, freedom and progress for all mankind.

THE PRIME MINISTER: Mr. President, first of all I am particularly grateful to you for having organized this gathering of so many prominent American personalities among whom I see so many connected with my country by origin and by spiritual affinity.

It is a delightful crowning of the first part of my working visit to Washington. This bears witness once more to the fact that the ties between our two countries are not represented only by political and economic interests and in general by collective interests. They are to be found in the ever more numerous individual and private contacts at all levels and in all sectors.

Your country offers us familiar images and echoes. We can see the classical aspects of palladian inspiration in your nation's capital. There is the presence of millions of individuals who are deeply loyal American citizens, still deeply attached to the land of their fathers.

This presence makes our relationship very spontaneous and creative. It ranges from the contribution of untold thousands to the individual achievements in the field of politics, science, arts, information, show business, music and cinema. We Italians look with pride to the other Italy transplanted in the United States and it is natural for us to think back to the hopes of our navigators, who came seeking a land of development and expansion for the overflowing energies of the Western World.

It is particularly appropriate to recall during the celebration of the Bicentennial of the Declaration of your independence that the strongest tie between our two countries is represented by this very possibility which was offered throughout the two centuries of your history, for the people coming from Italy to participate on an equal footing in the construction of your great democracy.

One of the Americans of Italian extraction who has succeeded in obtaining a position of prominence in this country is John Volpe, Ambassador of the United States, who is with us.

In thanking him for the constant and passionate contribution he has given to the cause of friendship and solidarity between our two countries, I wish to pay a well-deserved tribute to the whole Italian-American community.

Italy is at present going through one of the most challenging periods of her recent history. The international economic crisis has hit our country at a time when it was attempting to correct some of the most serious imbalances typical of an accelerated expansion between the different social strata and the different regions in order to meet the expectations of a society which wants to be more just and better balanced. Obviously the crisis has exacerbated those contributions which the dynamics of development had hidden or at least attenuated putting them now in sharper focus and making them, let's face it, more dramatic.

The Italian people as a whole have responded to these events with a deep sense of responsibility. The majority of the political parties, the trade unions and employers organizations are aware of the seriousness of the situation and they know that in order to surmount our difficulties, sacrifices are required of all of the Italians. This common will to overcome the crisis, this pervasive conviction that without a collective effort the country will not be able to get back on its feet sustain the minority government which I lead and encourage it to move with determination in the complex, political, economic and social climate of the country.

If in these difficult hours we Italians succeed in stressing what binds us rather than what divides us I am convinced that we will be able to recover and resume our economic and social problems.

Turning our attention to foreign policy, we become aware that there has been an increased acceptance of the major objectives which Italy pursues on the international scene. In our country there are no longer reservations about Italian participation in the European and Atlantic communities. The support which is now publicly expressed on the guidelines of our foreign policy must therefore be viewed as an indication of the growing popular consensus on the national goals and interests.

Italy's foreign policy has not suffered from the adverse effects of economic crisis or of the political difficulties. It does show unwavering continuity and total adherence to its commitment.

We are determined, Mr. President, to enforce our friendly relations with all peoples to seek wider and far-reaching avenues of agreement with the developing countries, to contribute actively to detente with the East.

I wish to emphasize that all these goals stem from the steady political platform, namely our participation in the process of European integration and our membership in the Inter-Atlantic Alliance.

These two goals are in no way contradictory for the European identity is not defined in opposition to the United States, but rather as an additional factor to the solidarity which binds.

Mr. President, the problems before the Italian government today have a dimension that goes beyond the boundaries of our country and, therefore, cannot be solved purely on a national basis. We are convinced, however, that an adequate solution to these problems must be found first of all in the will and the ability for recovery that Italy has always shown throughout her history.

We are deeply aware that it is first and foremost through our sacrifices that we will recover. What we ask of our friends is that they trust us as we trust them and that they believe in our commitment and in our determination.

Mr. President, allow me, please, to conclude on a personal note. This visit of mine takes place at a time when your Administration which has been marked by a strengthening of the cooperation by the Western countries

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is drawing to a close.

Your tenure has confirmed the continuity of a strong and positive relationship based upon mutual friendship and trust between the United States and Italy.

We Italians have consistently found in you, Mr. President, a sincere friend. We know that we can continue to rely on your friendship and understanding.

It is with this conviction that I raise my glass to make a toast to your personal happiness, to that of Mrs. Ford and of all of your family, to the prosperity of your great country and to the profound friendship between the United States and Italy.

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(AT 8:40 P.M. EDT)