

A funny thing happened on my way to becoming the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Energy...

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Ambassador Howard W. Gutman

A funny thing happened on my way to becoming the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Energy . . . that's a laugh line, but okay...Think about it, it'll come to you, I assure you.

I ended up as the free entertainment for the Chamber of Commerce Gala in Brussels.

Michelle and I could not be more thrilled than to be here tonight to meet and hopefully make friends with each of you. You see, as you will hear, we have in our first month in Belgium been all over the country. We have shaken hands of all ages; we have listened to voices from all backgrounds.

And we have relished every stop we've made; we've treasured every hand that we shook; and we valued every voice that we heard. But tonight, we feel as though we have returned home. Because although we have just met, we feel that we are among old friends. And it is nice to be home among you. And not just because Michelle has been searching desperately for tennis partners.

So who are we? By what road did we get here? What have we been doing since we've come? More importantly, where is our future together going to bring us, both in your office and at your home? And perhaps most importantly, will I be sufficiently entertaining for the 20 minutes that I have been asked to sing for my supper?

We will answer the first five questions and leave the last one for you.

But to look back or to look ahead, I want first to focus on a single moment in time: it was 4:00 in the afternoon on this past September 18 on a brilliant sunny day in Bree, in the eastern part of Belgium. Michelle, my son and I had arrived in Brussels roughly three weeks earlier. To that point, I had addressed my embassy and met with each member individually. I had met and shared laughs with the King; I had shed tears with others on 9/11 as I spoke to our embassy. I had engaged with the Foreign Minister and the Defense Minister about the issues that matter dearly – Afghanistan, the closing of Guantanamo and the need to transfer prisoners, and the like. I had done two dozen print interviews and a dozen broadcast interviews and attended occasions and ceremonies of all sorts as the invited guest.

But at 4:00 o'clock on September 18, I was about to do something I had not yet done – meet with the Belgian people. Not the ones who had asked me to attend and who had to be nice, the ones who knew I was coming. Not the ones in the tuxedos in the fancy ballrooms, but the ones in sneakers. The ones who didn't come to see me. They had come for a glimpse of their hero, Kim Clijsters, following her stunning victory at the U.S. Open. The ones who were about to be told that the first speaker was not their Belgian hero, but the Ambassador from the United States. The ones whose reactions would be most genuine, most unvarnished, and most revealing to me.

Now, history instructs that a U.S. Ambassador need not worry about how a Belgian audience would receive him. The graves of hundreds of young American soldiers at Flanders Field who died fighting with Belgians in World War I; the more than 13,000 American soldiers buried in Belgium in World War

II, and the true devotion of the thousands of Belgian families who have adopted those gravesites stand as a daily tribute to our past as the closest of allies.

But the past – even for dear allies – does not automatically become prologue. Allies must always renew their bond through mutual respect and mutual interest. In the last several years we were all keenly aware that that bond has weakened. And there I stood with trepidation as my name was being announced. Trepidation about where we stood in rebuilding a better partnership with Belgium, where we stood in building that partnership with Europe, and about where we stood as citizens of the world. About how far we have come, and how much ground remains to be covered.

How would they react to America eight months into the administration that had brought me to Belgium?

Well they cheered that day in Bree, and they cheered again when I relayed the message having called the White House relaying the message from President Obama about his feelings for Ms. Clijsters. Yes, we had perhaps spent too much of the past years talking past one another, rather than engaging in a conversation with each other. But the new conversation had plainly begun.

And what we have been doing at Embassy Brussels since that day is furthering that conversation. And in so doing, we strived for that true partnership in part by refusing to be bound by convention. By convention of the past, or even convention of how Belgium supposedly works.

You see, we are trying to build a better future. That better future cannot be limited by past conventions.

For I think the people of Belgium, the people of Europe, and the people of the United States and indeed most of the people of the planet understand that this time, we have to get it right. And we have to get it right together. The United States indeed well understands that to get it right, we have had to become, and remain, better learners, better listeners and better partners. And not simply because it is politically expedient, but because it is the right thing to do. We share the problems; we must work together on the world's solutions. We realize, at least today, that there are no zero sum games, so that to get it right – to sail rather than to sink – we have to get it right together. That we will all find health, safety and prosperity, or none of us can. That the problems that we face that unite us are so much greater than any differences or prejudices that have previously divided us. And that as our world becomes flatter, we must become better neighbors. That given our mutual respect and mutual interest, no voice of extremism, no economic hardship, and no threat to our climate can ever be allowed to separate us. That the world we will leave has to be better for our children. It has to be safer and more harmonious than the one we were left.

So when it became time for my first official speech last Wednesday, we were told to come to the American Chamber or to give it at the Parliament or to perhaps to the think tank. Instead we went to Charleroi. Charleroi, which the future has left stranded deeply in the past. Charleroi, where no U.S. Ambassador had ever been.

We were told that none would come and that none would care. Instead, we were met by marching bands and cheering crowds; by firefighters lined up to shake our hand while they stood in solidarity with the firefighters who had died in 9/11; by Harley Davidson riders lined up and revving their hellos. They saw our new partnership in Charleroi and they read and heard about it throughout

Wallonia. But the mission was especially satisfying to me. They also had read about it in De Morgen – in a full page story written by a Flanders resident who had never previously been to Charleroi. Build a partnership and they will come.

And having had dinners of many sorts, we held an Iftar to mark Ramadan in the Embassy. We lined the fancy rooms of my Residence with prayer mats and we celebrated what unites us, recognizing that we had too long remained quite divided. Build a partnership and they will come.

And then Saturday afternoon, armed with two Hollywood stars from the movie Fame, we went to Mollenbeek. To a community center that glistens with the smiles of young children and roars not with riots, but with laughter. Build a partnership and they will come.

We went to Tremelo for Father Damien, and during the Mass, we spoke quietly with royalty and ministers. But as we unveiled the statue of Damien on television and in front of thousands, we spoke loudly of Charleroi, of Mollenbeek, and of our partnership with all.

The conversation has indeed started. The people of Belgium and the United States understand that this time we have to get it right on a meaningful economic recovery; we have to get it right on changing climate before it changes us; and we have to get it right in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We can never even appear to compromise the principles we believe in for short-term gains, and thus we must work together to close the detention center at Guantanamo. Belgians and Americans understand and share a commitment to addressing the needs of the least advantaged people on the planet, particularly those in Africa. The conversation had begun.

In fact, although Michelle, my son and I just recently arrived, our conversation actually started in January 2007 when I met a young African-American Senator named Barack Obama for the first time. Up to that point in time in January 2007, the story was a familiar one: poor boy makes good and good lawyer makes better. You kind of all know the story.

My father had been a Holocaust survivor who had survived the war in Poland without being caught. He came to America in 1950 not knowing a word of English, but believing that land offered a better opportunity for his children than the land he'd left offered for him.

When he died when I was 16, I started working as a dishwasher and a waiter and went from student loans to Columbia University and Harvard Law School. Graduating Harvard Law School near the top of the class, I was able to get a clerkship on our US Court of Appeals and then on the United States Supreme Court.

From there I went to the prestigious firm, took time off for the special assistantship for counter intelligence and counter terrorism to our FBI. I became a political advisor with the worst track record in American history. My first job was advancing Lee Hart, Gary Hart's wife. There is nothing like advancing the wife when it's revealed that the husband's been unfaithful.

I had an equally stellar career right up to being on the brief on Gore v. Bush: one of the lawyers assigned to the case, for Gore. We lost by one vote.

Then the 2008 campaign started, and I was close to a dear friend of mine. Then the governor from Virginia, now a senator from Virginia, named Mark Warner. And we tested the water for 17 months as I practiced law. We traveled the nation, testing the theory that the candidate who could see a little further down the road will ultimately be more appealing than the candidate who remembered the last time they had been there. After 17 months on the campaign trail with Mark clearly setting the world on fire, he had then been on the cover of the New York Times magazine with the cover saying, "The Alternative to Hilary," he decided he was not having any fun, despite the fun I was having, and he quit the campaign. So my 2008 campaign ended for all time in October 2006.

I swore I was done; I had had 17 months doing it; I was over it. So Evan Bayh called, and I told him I was done. And John Kerry called, and I told him I was done. And then one day in the last week of January in 2007, I was at my desk and I got a phone call. I had never met Barack Obama but he was on the line. And what he said was that he was due to go home that Monday evening at 9:30 to write his speech announcing for president to be read that next Saturday, but if I'd come for an hour, he would stay until 10:30 and gladly spend the hour talking to me. Now I didn't plan on working for him, but how could really tell a man, "Why don't you go home at 9:30?"

So I went to deliver the message that I wouldn't support him—that I was done. I never delivered that message. Rather, later that evening, after an hour with Senator Obama, I went home and told Michelle – two years before our election – that I had just met the next President of the United States. That Barack Obama would certainly be the next president. Because if you spend an hour with Barack Obama, you realize that the world can be a better place today than it was yesterday and that tomorrow can be even better still.

Michelle asked me whether I really thought our country was ready to elect an African-American to be president. And I told her that in the entire hour that I had been with Barack, it never occurred to me that he was African-American. Vision and judgment knew no race. Then I believe that the U.S. finally understood that the problems that we face that unite us are far greater than any differences or prejudices that have previously divided us.

And he has never disappointed me since.

He's a man I say has no blood pressure, and whose suit never creases. I was with him in February 2008, in what I saw was the greatest speech I had ever seen delivered. What happened that night if you'll recall, is after being way down in the polls in October 2007, but knowing we could get there, Barack Obama had surprised and won in Iowa. And in the time between Iowa and New Hampshire, the polls showed us winning big—double digits—12 points up in New Hampshire two days before the primary. We win New Hampshire, it's a two-round knock-out and Barack Obama is the next president of the United States, because right after New Hampshire is South Carolina, and we couldn't get beaten in South Carolina—and go 3-0 and it's all over.

So 48 hours beforehand and 12 points up, the dream that had seemed so improbable now seemed so likely. So the plan was for the 60 of us who were in New Hampshire to wait in a tavern, because he was going to be speaking in a high school that had bleachers but no real seats. And as soon as the

returns came in; he would come by the tavern; speak to the 60 of us; we'd all go over to the high school; he'd give his winning address; and we'd be off celebrating the victory of the presidency.

A funny thing happened on the way that night: the polls stayed open, the returns came in, and Barack Obama lost the New Hampshire primary. And in front of us in those hours, it had all crumbled—the two years of work, the certainty of the presidency—it had literally all crumbled. So 60 of us stood in that tavern not knowing what to do or where to go, because the returns had gone late and now the nightly news was on and Obama had to get to that high school to make the speech. But we were told to wait and that he make the speech in the gym, and he would come back and see us.

He did—and if anyone wants to check on YouTube—his speech generally in New Hampshire that night was a wonderful speech. But then picture the scene at midnight, on a cold New Hampshire night, when Barack Obama went from thinking he was about to win the presidency, to having seen it all crumble. And think about the 60 of us in that tavern. I was just disheartened. I couldn't even look up.

And in came Barack; suit not creased, no blood pressure at all. And he strolled to the mike, at midnight, having worked that long day. And he said he would speak briefly because we had just seen him on TV, and he had only two things to say. The first one was he wanted to thank us in his typical way. And of course when Barack wants to thank you, he thanks you in paragraphs and it was eloquent.

But the second part was what I will always remember—of what I call the greatest speech I have ever heard. Because Barack then said, "This is going to sound like spin to all of you, and I assure you it's not, I am disappointed as any of you: I am disappointed to my core. But I've been talking to David Plouffe about a problem we were facing. We had won so easily in Iowa, and then came to such a big lead to New Hampshire, the win was going to come too easy, and the first minute we stumbled in the White House, the headlines would be, 'He Rode the Era of Good Feeling.'" It had been the reconciliation of race relations; it had been a wave that came over Americans—they didn't know what they were doing. He said we were winning so easily that we would win, but not be able to govern.

'And never forget,' he said 'that what we're doing has nothing to do with winning an election, it has to do with governing and changing the world.' And the darndest thing is, as I looked into his eyes, he believed it. So when I saw inside that man that night, I knew we could do no wrong. I knew he could win, and I knew he would change the world.

I believed it the night in Grant Park when Michelle and I were ten feet from the podium as Barack won the election. And I knew it weeks later when I was fortunate enough to sit on the podium for the inauguration. I was right that the U.S. would finally understand that the problems that we face that unite us are far greater than any differences or prejudices that have previously divided us.

But understanding is plainly only the first step. We all have work to do. We each face an individual call to action.

For me, the call came rather directly. When the President called me in March of this year. He called to thank me for my friendship, and he told me that he believed people in Europe and around the world were taking a fresh look at America. The question was, what would they see? Would they see our renewed commitment to dialogue and to focusing on the common humanity of people from all around

our planet? Would they see the integrity of our words; the transparency of our deeds? I was deeply honored by the President's call, and honored to be part of what you all see, along with Michelle and the rest of the members of our Embassy, when you take a fresh look. So I pledge to visit—and I will get there—every city, every commune and every village in Belgium—all 589, those to which American Ambassadors always travel and to those that never see an American Ambassador.

And can't you already feel it, particularly in this room? Can't you just touch it? The feeling of renewed friendship and partnership between Belgium and America, that is traveling through the Grand Place in Brussels, up through Antwerp, through the Ardennes, across Dinant, and to Namur, and even to Charleroi, because I feel it every day.

So where do those roads take us, where do they lead us? First to the national issues, and then maybe some of the issues financial and local in this community.

THE ISSUES

Afghanistan

To start with, we have to rebuild Afghanistan and we have to rebuild it together. As Belgians, as Americans, and as the world. Because what happens there affects us all. Sometimes it seems far away, not only from Belgium and Brussels and even Charleroi, but from Texas and Miami. It often doesn't seem real. And war – losing eight people yesterday, Americans – is the greatest sacrifice any nation or alliance can ever make.

But terror is as real as the crumbled steel of the World Trade Towers, the blown out windows of buses in London or the trains in Madrid. But if New York, Washington, Madrid and London can still not rest assured, how can Texas, Miami, Brussels or Charleroi?

And as parents concerned with the blood of children, terror plainly knows no age limits. This is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity.

Moreover, Belgians, Americans and many others are helping Afghans to create a safer environment throughout their country, on our way towards helping to establish a lasting framework for reconstruction and development. We know these efforts go hand in hand, and time is not on our side. So it's important that we get this right, and to get it right now.

Now some of you might not be asking the questions, but you know, all your Belgian neighbors are, which is, "Can we afford to trust America on this issue this time? Haven't they given us so much cause for doubt?"

They should never be afraid to ask that. They have every right. You have every right. And until we trust each other as neighbors, we cannot begin to build a better world.

But I think they have the answer in their grasp. I am fortunate to represent a country I have long loved, in a country I am growing to love and obviously on behalf of a President in whom I believe to my core. But the Belgians have heard him many times. And they have seen him deliver. As promised, he is responsibly bringing to an end the role of U.S. combat troops in Iraq. He has removed American combat brigades from Iraqi cities, and set a deadline of next August to remove all combat

brigades from Iraqi territory. He will not put an American soldier, or ask an ally to put one of theirs, in harm's way one minute longer than is needed to protect all of our sons and daughters.

And since arriving in Belgium I have met with the Supreme Commander of the NATO Forces Admiral James Stavrides. You will find none better. Like the President, Admiral Stavrides well understands that the problems in Afghanistan cannot be solved simply by military might. Imagine that, a supreme commander who says, "We can't do it all." He understands it's going to require civilian support, which is going to require money and expertise. The international community remains committed to Afghanistan's development, and has altogether pledged \$110 billion since 2001, with the United States supplying about half that total.

Belgium is doing its part, by pledging at the NATO summit not only to expand and continue its military aid and its military assistance. And so today, Americans and Belgians are helping Afghans to rebuild the country, helping Afghans to build the roads, the schools, and the clinics that are improving the lot of every Afghan. Afghanistan is not an American problem: it's a problem facing the world. It won't be solved by America alone, by its might or its strategy; it will be solved by a partnership of the world's citizens. The road of our partnership leads right to a safer Afghanistan.

Economic recovery

You heard Scott's review—I can never match it. But the part I always find amusing is that when politicians and journalists and some business leaders talk about the economic crisis as though it is completely something new—a recent development. They pretend that prosperity flourished for all until some bankers happened to fool the world last fall.

But in Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan, and Southwest Virginia, and for Charleroi and the formal industrial and mining capitals throughout the world, they know better, we know better. The crises existed for decades whether or not Wall Street or The Bourse ever slowed down to notice it. It was created for many not by the sudden collapse of real estate mortgages, but by the slow deterioration of industries and mines more focused on their past hay day than on their futures. So this time, for Detroit, for Newark, for Southwest Virginia, for Charleroi – we have to get it right and we have to get it right together.

Clearly a financial economic recovery based on real international cooperation, based on transparency and based on lasting meaningful reform is necessary. Without it, no lasting recovery is possible. But such financial reform is not sufficient. This time, we need to see a little further down the road and we need to look together.

For where others see crisis, true leaders see opportunity. Inherent in the collapse of most of the economic functioning is the opportunity to rebuild it and to build it better. To honor the past by transitioning to the job-creating industries of the future -- biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, agri-bio foods, clean energy. And in so doing, this time we can leave no one behind. Because in these fields—in a world of technology and alternative energy, of research and information – if you can build it in New York, if you can build it in Paris, if you can build it in Mumbai—you can build it in Newark, you can build it in southwest Virginia and you can certainly build it in Charleroi.

So together we have to get it right. Johnson and Johnson is doing it, Google has come, Hewlett-Packard has come: they're getting the message. But we have got to do it right—we've got to invest,

invest in the cities, and invest in the future. Now I think some of the Belgians get it as much as anybody, because twice in one week I sat in Wallonia and heard Rudy Demotte talk about his Marshall Plan 2.Vert, and I have met with Kris Peeters about what industries are collapsing and which ones are coming up, and he gets it. And I've talked to Charles Picqué about the future of Belgium, and he gets it. So if we all get it, we have to get it right.

Climate change

Can there be any doubt? No matter who's bought tables here at this dinner, can there be any doubt? Is there any debate? Could it not be clearer that we no longer can afford to borrow heavily to pay over a billion dollars a day for a fossil fuel addiction that at times fuels those who most oppose our security?

Now I can say this here, because I have said it to the following people. I got hired, or approached, by a company I love dearly who bought a table here, Exxon Mobil. I got approached by their international head of public relations, Ken Cone, by Susan McCaren, and by one of my dear friends, Gene Bandesneider who's a leader in Washington. They are terrific citizens in Washington. But they came to me and asked, "Why is Obama anti-business?" A fair question in this room. Does Obama understand the importance of supporting business? A similar question came from Pfizer, where my dear buddy Jeff Kindler, one of my oldest friends is the CEO. Jeff and I met in 1977 in law school, practiced law together, we were law partners.

Same problem: because if you listened to Obama in the debates, the two biggest villains were big oil and big farmer. So both farmer and oil came and said, "Is he anti-business? Doesn't he realize our important role?" And I said to them that he is extremely in favor of business. The world is changing; business has got to change with it.

We are getting criticized already about Copenhagen—not running fast enough or far enough. So for whatever you hear coming from Barack Obama's mouth, it's not enough for the rest of the world. Now in fact, we will be there by 2050, and we are working as hard as anybody. We have invested as much as anybody in alternatives going forward. But yet we are getting criticized. So if I were dependent on fossil fuels, I would change gas stations to energy centers. I would continue to invest in fossil fuels—one of the most important resources we have, but I would start buying electric car companies as well. And I would follow the lead that Europe has set and that America is doing its best to catch up, because that is where it's headed.

That isn't from Barack Obama, that is from the planet. And if I were in pharmaceuticals like I tell Jeff all the time, take a look at our healthcare debate. I would be in the lead, I wouldn't be following behind. It's again not because Barack Obama is against business, but unless you're part of the solution, you have to be part of the problem. And if anyone doesn't think our healthcare system is broken in my country, you haven't ever turned on a television set.

So I think the future is bright for many industries under the Obama administration. I think it's bright for the energy industry. They've got to take a full grasp of themselves and be a full-service energy industry. I think it's bright for pharmaceuticals, but they have to lead in the solution, not slow it down.

I think it's bright for the defense industry, another important player in this room. But if you bank completely that a war economy will exist, shame on you when we finally get to peace.

So it's for CEOs to see the same little further down the road that the Obama administration has tried to do, but they will be partners right with you.

I've tried to be candid, I've been too long. To give you a sense of where we are, and where we need to be going, but I haven't addressed one question: where is Belgium in all this? That I think is a fascinating question, and I have some thoughts. For me I think that Belgium is often sold short by many.

Since we've come I've heard Belgium is but a small country; we can only do our part—a small part—in building that better and more prosperous world. I completely reject that. It's not about the size of the country, it's about the heart of the leadership. So if Paris eats ten ears of corn, Belgium doesn't have to eat two, they can eat 20. And those ears of corn can be supporting Afghanistan—not with men, not with money, but with deeds.

The leadership in Belgium is as fine as there can be. I've sat with Pieter de Crem, I've sat with Minister Leterme, and I've sat with the prime minister. They can get out in front of Afghanistan as much as anybody can. They can get out in front of Guantanamo; Europe clamored for its closing, and what did Barack Obama do?

I was sitting on that podium the day of the inauguration, as was my partner Greg Craig. Greg had just become White House Counsel. While the inauguration was still going on but as soon as the oath had been administered, Greg got the keys to the White House, so he got up and he had to leave. He didn't see the end of the ceremony. He went to the White House to close Guantanamo. So Europe clamored for it; Barack Obama operated as fast as possible, and now we're in it together.

We talk in terms of ones and twos, and I really could not be more appreciative for all that Belgium has done in recently taking another Guantanamo detainee. But we can talk in terms of tens and fifteens and we can close it together. It is a problem for the world.

So do I think Belgium has the leadership ability and the heart to be out in front? Without a doubt. Do I think Belgium has to be paralyzed by regional differences? Not for a minute. Because the regional ministers get it and the national leaders get it: we're all in it together.

So I hope for great things. I look forward to continuing to work with people—I have spectacular relations. I look forward to helping each of you in your communities; whether it is in pharmaceuticals, in fossil fuels, in banking, or the rest of the wonderful members here. There's limits to what we can do, but if you come with a request and you show me the roadmap, we will help you get there if it makes sense to us—and you are not going to come unless it does. Each of the issues I raised today are things we are aware of, we just need help with a roadmap on how to get through, and we will be there.

And lastly, Michelle and I could use some help. Invite Michelle to your tennis games. Let us meet your groups of friends, and teach me the rest of Belgium. From being a shooter to shooting beer, I have a lot to learn.

Lastly, tomorrow is Tuesday; Dutch class is at 7:00. Wednesday we have got French class, and you all are invited. Thanks so much.