

Just As Proud, But Not Nearly As Happy

November 7, 2012

Election Night 2012
Ambassador Howard Gutman
Town Hall, Grand Place, Brussels, Belgium

Mr. Mayor, Dear Ministers, Dear Representatives of Various Belgian, European Union, NATO and Local Government Bodies, Excellencies, Fellow Americans, Fellow Lovers of Belgium. Cher Amis, Beste Vrienden, Dear Friends All:

Of the hundreds of thousands of email exchanges I have had in my life, I have printed out and framed only one. A few of you have seen it. It sits proudly in a frame on the wall of my den.

It occurred at 11:43 pm on the night of June 3, 2008 – four and a half years ago -- when I emailed then Senator Barack Obama to congratulate him on having secured the Democratic nomination in his first race for President. My email began: Senator -- I would have been just as proud had you lost. But not nearly as happy." He returned the email within a minute and a half, writing simply at 11:45 p.m. "I couldn't have done it without you."

Which brings us to this morning. To this magnificent setting of the Town Hall in the Grand Place, in the heart of Brussels. Where Michelle and I stand on behalf of a country we love to our core, the United States, and in the heart of a country that has become our second home . . . Belgium.

Which brings us to today, surrounded by you, our dear friends, ex-pats and Belgians, Embassy colleagues with whom Michelle and I have been blessed to represent our country for over three years, surrounded by Belgian officials and by diplomats from around the world from whom we have learned so much.

Which brings us to today, where had President Obama lost, I, indeed we, again would have been as proud, albeit in truth not nearly as happy.

We would have been just as proud first of our country. For today, the United States of America has again succeeded at the greatest achievement any country could ever accomplish -- the achievement of selecting our leadership through the will of the people. The achievement of again reminding the world that government belongs and must belong never to leaders, but always to citizens. The United States has again also succeeded as well at the greatest display of power any country could ever exert, the power to transition domestic rule within a party or from one party to another in a peaceful and lawful manner. Those are achievements that Belgium too recently shared. Indeed,, if you love politics and cherish the freedom of democracy, Belgium and the U.S. often host the Super Bowl or the World Cup of politics and democracy. It is yet another link that binds us.

Regardless of the outcome, we would also have been just as proud as well of what we as a country have done these past 4 years. We have reversed the greatest economic slide since the Great Depression, rebuilt our credibility with a world of allies who had long begun to doubt our words and grown cynical about our deeds, become part of the solution and not the problem concerning our

energy and climate future, ended one war and drawn the path to the exit from another, built bridges to the Muslim communities from which we can continue to build a more peaceful and secure planet, brought greater dignity to working women and to gays and lesbians, brought health care to the needy, and so much more.

Regardless of outcome, we would indeed have been just as proud as well of what we have done today as an Embassy and a Tri-Mission -- the U.S. Embassy in Brussels, along with our colleagues the U.S. Missions to the EU and NATO. We have today put on a magnificent celebration of our democracy that builds on the bonds of the partnership and true friendship that exists between Belgium and the United States. Could there be a more majestic setting in which to witness this show of democracy than the Town Hall in the Grand Place. We thank Mayor Thielmans and his wonderful staff for making today possible and even more so for his and their friendship for so long. And we thank all of you for coming and for having always been there for the U.S. and for working daily to build the Belgian-American relationship. And we thank the many members of the Embassy and USEU and NATO staffs who have worked so hard to make today possible, in particular, Jacqueline Deley who headed the effort, Brian Dick, who has built Belgian American bridges for a decade, and the world's greatest Residence Manager Inge Smets.

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Indeed, regardless of outcome, we would have had much about which to be proud. But in truth, there is no denying the particular happiness that today's outcome brings. Because as to Belgium and America, we have come so far. With Belgium, with President Obama and with a talented Embassy, we have rebuilt a partnership that was suffering in 2007 with just 8 percent of Belgians viewing American leadership favorably and 65 percent viewing American leadership unfavorably. Under President Obama and with Belgian friendship, we have together rebuilt that struggling relationship into what exists today, where Belgium has experienced the highest gain in favorability in the world this year and more than 2 to 1 now views your country favorably.

And our particular happiness at today's outcome is rooted in the fact that we – Belgium and America – realize there is so much more to do – and to do together. We have a better world still to build and to do so together. Our work continues tomorrow – on lifting our mutual economies for we all will rise or none truly can prosper, on long term security in the Mid-East, on freedom from terror, on climate, on social justice and so much more.

Our work indeed continues tomorrow. But, for today, we raise a glass to democracy and to partnership.

“To democracy and partnership.”

Thanks so much and all the best.