

Eat, Drink and Be Merry

November 6, 2012

Election Night 2012

Ambassador Howard Gutman

The Renaissance Hotel, Brussels, Belgium

Good evening. What a joy for Michelle and me to be here tonight with all of you.

The truth is that waiting for this election, it has been a stressful day . . . well actually a stressful week . . . well actually about 2 years . . .

But there is no place that Michelle and I would rather spend it than at dinner with friends . . . and that is what this dinner is. I would like to thank the American Club of Brussels and The Bulletin for working so hard to put on a fantastic evening for us all, and for all they do daily for the ex-pat community and for Belgian-American relations. But I mainly want to thank each and every one of you. As I will tell the larger crowd in a little while, by coming out to support this event and others involving the U.S., by caring to the core about our election, about our country, about the Belgian-American relationship, you and they build the international bridge that links our countries, that promotes mutual respect and understanding and that helps lift both countries daily. And even more, so many in this room, have been there for Michelle and me over the past three plus years.

Now some people think I am a Washington insider and I will have some special inside information. And I too have watched the polling and listened to the pundits. But I have a confession to make. In preparing to make my speech at the Town Hall in the Grand Place for 8:00 am tomorrow morning, roughly 11 and a half hours from now, I wrote three different speeches. One in case we then knew the final result and President Obama had been re-elected; one in case we then knew the final result and Governor Romney had been elected; and one in case it comes time for me to speak and we still did not know which man will be elected. So if you are looking for inside information, I may be a better source about Red Devils football.

But the process of writing three such different speeches led me to understand that that was not necessary.

You see, regardless of the final result, today plainly will be about some clear winners.

Today regardless of result, there will be no tears.

Regardless of result, today will not be about what more we may have lost or what more we may gain, but about what we have been blessed to have had and what we will continue always to have.

Today will not be about what more we might have been able to do or might be able still to do, but about how much we have done, as a Nation, as an Embassy, as allies, and as friends.

And today, regardless of result, will not be about change, but about what must never change . . . about what we as allies, Belgium and America, and about what we as dear friends, Belgians,

Europeans and Americans, must always do together.

Regardless of result, there will be nothing about today to forget . . . today is about what we will always remember, what we will always cherish.

We will today of course congratulate whoever wins. But we will celebrate today two countries – Belgium and America – invested, indeed nearly mesmerized, by the issue of governance. We will celebrate what we have done. What the U.S. has done first as a country. For today, the United States of America will again succeed 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 will again succeed as well at exercising the greatest power that 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. It is yet another link that binds us.

And while we will eventually congratulate a man, today is about 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, and so much more.

And today, regardless of result, there will be no tears for me personally or for Michelle. How could there have been despair when you have already gotten to serve your country for nearly three and a half years? When you have had the privilege of being the second longest serving U.S. Ambassador to Belgium in 31 years and when therefore you have gotten to represent a man whom you so admire in a country Belgium that has always joined you in that admiration – no vote can ever change that and no vote is needed to confirm that. And, regardless of results, how can you have regrets when you have gotten to work with Belgium, with President Obama and with a talented Embassy to rebuild a partnership that was suffering in 2007, with just 8 percent of Belgians viewing American leadership favorably and 65 percent viewing American leadership unfavorably, 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 our country favorably.

Whether it is today, or later this week, month or year, or four years from now, change will come to the U.S. leadership and I know that change is never easy. And so to all I urge with all my conviction that when that change does come, we – Belgians and Americans, Europeans and Americans -- can never go back to that yesterday, we must never go back to that yesterday, when Belgians and Europeans were so cynical about America. No election should ever change the fundamentals of our partnership, of our true friendship. For here is a secret that we all should well know-- George Bush and Sam Fox, my dedicated predecessor, didn't define America any more than Barack Obama and Howard Gutman define America, and any more than Mitt Romney or a future President and a future Ambassador will define America. America is 310 million citizens who, while we may sometimes

express it differently than you, share the same values as you and will always deserve your friendship and support .

Whatever happens tonight, Michelle and my time in Belgium is growing shorter. The election may cause us to leave in January or perhaps we will have some extra time till next Spring or Summer until a successor is confirmed. We have no plans yet for the future after the Ambassadorship, but we hope that whatever the future brings, in business, consulting, entrepreneurship, boards and/or media, it will bring us back often to Belgium. And wherever we are, we will always carry a piece of Belgium in our hearts.

Thanks so much and all the best.