

Welcome to Election Night 2012

November 6, 2012

Ambassador Howard Gutman
Inaugural Remarks Bulletin & American Club of Brussels Election Night Event

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

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. By coming out to support this event and others involving the U.S., by caring to your core about our election, about our country, about the Belgian-American relationship, you build the international bridge that links our countries, that promotes mutual respect and understanding and that helps lift both countries daily.

Now some people think I am a Washington insider. And I do have to admit that I have a secret tonight. You see, I already know who wins the election today. And I am willing to tell you and you don't even have to keep the secret to yourself. Indeed, you can spread the word.

The winner of the election today is . . . the United States, Americans, Belgians and all who cherish democracy and freedom . 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. That is an achievement 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.

I can't address an audience of Belgians and Americans without celebrating even just briefly our recent mutual successes. You see, after speaking past one another and having tensions during the mid 2000's, when only 8% of Belgians viewed U.S. leadership favorably and 65% viewed it unfavorably, the relationship between Belgium and the United States has been growing closer by the year. And in the annual survey of every country in the world that was released in May 2012, just 5 months ago, Belgium finished first in the world with the largest increase in its favorability towards U.S. leadership. Belgians view U.S. leadership favorably by more than a 2 to 1 margin. It's not hard to guess what would happen if Belgians got to vote tonight!

We will all instead watch to see what the American voters decide. But whatever happens in this or in any election, we should never go back, we must never go back, to the time of somewhat frosty relations between Belgium and the United States. For regardless of who sits in the White House, regardless who lives in the Ambassador's Residence, we will always share values and always hold our collective future in our hands together.

Whatever happens tonight, Michelle and my time in Belgium is growing shorter. I am already the second longest serving U.S. Ambassador in 31 years. The election may cause us to leave in January

or perhaps we will have some extra time. 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.