

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

**Remarks at a State Dinner Honoring President François Hollande of France
February 11, 2014**

President Obama. Good evening, everybody. *Bonsoir.* Please, have a seat. I have now officially exhausted my French. [*Laughter*] Michelle and I are so honored to welcome you to the White House as we host President Hollande and his delegation for this historic state visit between our nations, the first in nearly 20 years.

I think we have a translation. Is that correct? No? You don't want me to translate. [*Laughter*] Apparently not.

At our press conference today, I quoted Alexis de Tocqueville, that son of France who in 1831 set out across our young country and chronicled our American democracy. And those who have—are familiar with de Tocqueville are always amazed by how well he understood this nation of ours and captured its spirit as well as anybody ever has. And tonight I'd like to share some of his lesser known observations.

About American dining, de Tocqueville wrote, "The absence of wine at our meals at first struck us as very disagreeable; and we still can't understand the multitude of things that [Americans] succeed in introducing into their stomachs." [*Laughter*] So some things do not change. When François came here years ago as a student to study our fast food, I suspect he said the same thing.

About the White House, de Tocqueville's traveling companion wrote, "The President of the United States occupies a palace that in Paris would be called a fine private residence." [*Laughter*] And he wrote—and I very much can relate to this—"The power of the King of France would be nil if it were modeled after the power of the President." [*Laughter*] And the King did not have to deal with the filibuster. [*Laughter*]

Now, Americans took lessons from France as well. One young American lawyer went to Paris and was deeply moved to see White and Black students studying together. And that young American was Charles Sumner, who—inspired by what he saw in France—became one of our greatest abolitionists, helped to end slavery, and is one of the reasons that all of us can be here this evening as full citizens, free and equal.

Now, it is true that we Americans have grown to love all things French: the films, the food, the wine. Especially the wine. [*Laughter*] But most of all, we love our French friends because we've stood together for our freedom for more than 200 years. Tonight I again want to pay tribute to President Hollande for the principled leadership and personal friendship and courage that he has shown on the world stage. Thank you, François.

We started this visit yesterday at Monticello. And I'd like to end where we began. Thomas Jefferson wrote: "So ask the traveled inhabitant of any nation, in what country on Earth would you rather live? Certainly, in my own, where [are] my friends, my relations, and the earliest and sweetest affections and recollections of my life." But Jefferson added, "Which would be your second choice? France." Of course.

And so I propose a toast: To our friend and partner President Hollande, to all of our friends from France who are here today, *vive la France*, God bless America, and long live the alliance between our great nations. *À votre santé!* Cheers.

[*At this point, a toast was offered.*]

President Obama. Please, François. Cheers!

[*President Hollande spoke in English as follows.*]

President Hollande. Mr. President, dear Michelle, Members of the Congress and French Parliament, ladies and gentlemen: I hope that translation exists. [*Laughter*]

Mr. President, I would like to thank you for the warm welcome that you have extended to me and my delegation. France and the United States of America are bound by ties of history: great history of French citizens such as Lafayette, who fought alongside the heroes of independence to allow your dream of freedom to prevail; the glorious history of the Americans who came to fight on French soil during the First World War and, then in June 1944, to liberate the European continent from Nazi oppression.

This afternoon it was a great moment and a great honor to award your Unknown Soldier with the insignia of the French Legion of Honor and to award medal to six glorious veterans of the Second World War. I promise we shall never forget them.

More recently, after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack, France shared Americans' pain. On that frightful day, someone has warned, we were all Americans. This is the very reason why we endured together in Afghanistan.

Monsieur le Président, now I will speak French.

[*President Hollande spoke in French, and then concluded his remarks in English and French as follows.*]

President Hollande. I raise my glass in honor of the United States of America, of the President Barack Obama, Michelle: Long live the United States! *Vive la France et vive l'amitié entre la France et les États-Unis.*

[*A toast was offered. President Hollande's preceding remarks were then translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

President Hollande. Our two countries share universal values, and we have feelings for one another. We love Americans, although we don't always say so. And you love the French, but you're sometimes too shy to say so. [*Laughter*] Too withdrawn. But we share the same universal values: freedom, democracy, respect for the law. These principles guide our action.

Ever since I took office at the Presidency, we have been defending them together. In Mali, the French Armed Forces were able to rely on the efficient support awarded by the U.S. soldiers and equipment. In the Central African Republic, your support has accompanied our operation aiming at restoring security in this country, torn by its actions and violence between religions.

Together, we have removed the unacceptable threat of an Iranian nuclear weapon, and we have succeeded in reaching an interim agreement. In Syria, we together removed—through resorting to the threat of force—the threat of a worsening situation, and we managed to force the regime of Bashar al-Asad to accept the destruction of his stockpiles of chemical weapons. And again, together, we are looking resolutely together for a political outcome so desperately needed.

Together, the French and the Americans also want to work for growth and to introduce new rules that will prevent financial crises and enable us to fight more efficiently against tax

evasion. First results are here, and the strength and robustness of the American economy is a source of hope for all developed countries. Provided that we open up our markets and intensify our trade, we will succeed.

Together, we will also rise to the challenge of climate change. Paris will be hosting the climate change conference in 2015. It is up to us to convince our major partners to take the necessary steps before it is too late. And I know again that I can count on your commitment.

Mr. President, the relations between our two countries have reached an exceptional level of closeness and confidence, and there is one simple reason for that: We share the same vision of the world, and we show mutual respect. The United States of America and France are two great nations. What is expected of them is to keep a promise, a promise of freedom and the promise of progress, and also to keep a dream alive—that same dream made by Jefferson, Washington, Lafayette, and the French revolutionaries—a dream to change the world. By uniting our forces, by united—uniting our talents, we will be able to keep the flame of hope alive.

I raise my glass to the President of the United States of America and to Michelle Obama. Long live the United States! Long live France!

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:48 p.m. on the South Grounds at the White House. In his remarks, President Hollande referred to Lansdale, PA, resident George A. Shenkle; Keswick, VA, resident Arthur W. Ordell, Jr.; Madison Heights, VA, resident Robert L. Sales; Vienna, VA, resident John C. Cheban; Frederick, MD, residents Henry E. Ponton, Jr., and Charles S. Toms; and President Bashar al-Asad of Syria.

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