

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2016*

**Remarks at a State Dinner Honoring Prime Minister Matteo Renzi of Italy**  
*October 18, 2016*

*President Obama.* Good evening, everybody!

*Audience members.* Good evening!

*President Obama.* *Buona sera!*

*Audience members.* *Buona sera!*

*President Obama.* On behalf of my—Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House. And welcome to the final state dinner of my Presidency. But in the immortal words of a great Italian American, Yogi Berra, "It ain't over till it's over." And so we have a wonderful evening ahead of us as we celebrate the great alliance between the United States and Italy with our great friends, Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and Mrs. Agnese Landini.

Now, I have to say, this is a remarkable crowd. I will confess that, at first, I was a little nervous about this dinner. After all, Matteo is called *Il Rottamatore*—The Scrapper, The Demolition Man. [*Laughter*] And Roberto Benigni is here as well, and he has promised not to jump on the tables. [*Laughter*] Ask any Italian or Italian American, and they'll tell you that the dinners can get somewhat animated. People can get excited, especially if your grandmother thinks you're not eating enough. And so Michelle and I decided to just think of this as a typical Italian Sunday dinner: surrounded by family and great friends—*paisans*—and pasta.

But tonight we're reminded that American democracy has been graced by the touch of Italy. Our declaration that "all men are created equal" was penned by Thomas Jefferson, and it was a concept shared by his friend, also from Florence, *Firenze*, Filippo Mazzei. We stand before the Lincoln Memorial and see the work of the Piccirilli brothers. We look up at the dome of the U.S. Capitol and marvel at the touch of Brumidi. Then again, some days our Presidential campaigns can seem like Dante's "Inferno." [*Laughter*]

Most of all, we see the spirit of Italy—and the friendships between our people—in so many proud Italian Americans. I suspect that many of you here tonight are thinking of your own families—parents, grandparents, great-grandparents—who left the old country, who toiled and sacrificed and gave everything they had so that the next generation could succeed. And your presence here tonight shows that America is a place where if you work hard, no matter what you look like, what your last name is, how many vowels you have in your name, you can make it if you try. And even if we are not Italian American, or Mets fans, we can celebrate that Mike Piazza is finally in the Baseball Hall of Fame. [*Laughter*]

I also want to take this occasion to once again thank my great friend Matteo. He may be the youngest Prime Minister in modern Italian history—he makes me feel old, which is unfortunate. [*Laughter*] When I came in I was the young guy; now he's the young guy. [*Laughter*] But from the first time we met, I could see that he represented the energy and the optimism, the vision and the values that can carry Italy, and Europe, forward. He is, as you say in Italy, *buono come il pane*.

Matteo, I cannot thank you enough for your excellent partnership as we've worked to advance the security and prosperity of our citizens and the dignity of people around the world. I understand that when you were growing up, your mother would tell you stories about Robert

Kennedy's commitment to justice and that she would end by telling you, "Matteo, fight." As you fight for the cause of reform, know that we stand with you. I believe that Italy, and the world, will continue to benefit from your leadership for many years to come.

Now, one of the reasons that I'm so confident that Matteo will continue to make outstanding contributions is because he has an outstanding partner in Agnese. Our wives keep us humble. As our Italian friends know, Matteo's first claim to fame—when he was just 19 years old—was, he was on Italy's version of "Wheel of Fortune." [Laughter] This is a true story. And Agnese points out that several of the sweaters and the suits that he wore were too big—which is an affront to Italian fashion. [Laughter] Matteo may deny it, but there's video, and you can judge for yourself. [Laughter] Giorgio Armani is here, and he would be ashamed to know that the Italian Prime Minister used to wear things like this. [Laughter]

Now, you are not alone, because when Michelle was in Milan for last year's Expo, she spoke with some young people about the importance of eating slowly and savoring your food—unlike President Obama, who she said, sometimes "shovels" his food down—[laughter]—which is true. [Laughter] So the point is that Matteo and I both married up. And because of our wives, we eat better, we dress better, we are better. And we thank you both.

In closing, I just want to reminisce about my last visit to Rome. Thanks to Matteo's Minister—Ministry of Culture, I had the opportunity to visit the Coliseum. And one of the perks of being President is, you can go to the Coliseum and nobody else is there. It was late in the day. It was quiet. The Sun was going down. And as I walked across those ancient stones, worn by the history of 2,000 years, it was a humbling reminder of our place here on Earth.

In the grand sweep of time, each of us is here only for a brief moment. So many of the things that we focus on each day—the political ups and downs, the successes and the setbacks—those things are fleeting. What matters in the end is what we build. What matters is what we leave behind, the things that will endure long after we are gone. As the poet Virgil reminded us, "Fortune favors the bold."

And so I want to propose a toast: To the enduring alliance between the United States and Italy; to our friends, Matteo and Agnese; and to the friendship between the Americans and the Italians. In pursuit of the world we can build for future generations, may we always be bold; may fortune smile upon us. *Salute*. Cheers.

[At this point, President Obama offered a toast.]

And with that, let me bring to the stage the Prime Minister of Italy, Matteo Renzi.

*Prime Minister Renzi*. Mr. President, Madam First Lady, dear American friends, *cari amici italiani*: It is an incredible honor. It's an incredible privilege to be here with you on this occasion of the last state dinner of President Obama. I am really excited and really great because I think this is a special moment for the history of this country, as the Presidency of President Obama was a special moment in the life of this great country.

So thank you so much. Thank you. It's an honor for Italy, dear Barack, but it's also an honor for us. So thank you all, from Agnese and myself, for your warm welcome.

But I'm really in a difficult situation, because it's impossible for me to reply after the President Obama, and also this afternoon I spent time to imagine an organization of something to give thanks. And it's impossible. I think, for Mr. President, that we can organize after the finish of your service a dinner in Florence, after the little walk in Uffizi's Gallery and in front of David, and we can prepare Sasha and Malia to verify if really ice cream—Italian ice cream—is

better on the water, and then not a state dinner, but we with the *osteria*, with the Florentine wine and Tuscan wine we can taste. And we can verify if the tomatoes of the garden of White House are better than tomatoes of Italian products. *[Laughter]* We can try that.

I know, Michelle, your tomatoes are great. But after the last week's, let me be very frank: Your speeches are better than your tomatoes. *[Laughter]* And thank you so much. Thank you so much as Prime Minister, but thank you so much also as father of a young daughter.

And, Barack, you know I'm a huge fan of you. You know I follow from the first speech in—first, not first—first speech for the Presidential run in February 2007 in Illinois. But when I listened to the speech of Michelle in Philadelphia, I think finally, finally, maybe when I see—"when they go low, we go high," I told you, finally, I found someone of the same level of Barack Obama: Michelle Obama. *[Laughter]* So this is good.

Just—but let me conclude with a personal consideration. I come from a city called Florence, so I really—I love lots the history of my country. And during the Renaissance in Florence, masters and students used to work together to produce masterpieces and also not masterpieces, but the goal is masterpiece—masterpieces they have endured across centuries. And those workshops—this workshop was called *bottega*. *Bottega* was the place in which masters and students together tried to do better, tried to build a future. New generation acquired inside the *bottega* a comprehensive vision of the future. And I think, Mr. President, dear Barack, this is what you have done for us in this period.

Eight years, very important for international community, not only for the United States of America. And I think your service was a service as a master of Renaissance, because you work with us to give us an opportunity and we worked together exactly with the spirit of *bottega*: try to make better, try to give a special opportunity to new generations.

So, as a Florentine, I think I'm really grateful to you for your service and also for your message of the ideal state of government because with your message, a lot of new leaders around the world today could imagine the future as a good place in which imagine our destination and our generation.

Thank you so much for that, Mr. President. Thank you so much, master of Renaissance.

So, in Italy, there is an expression, is an expression who come from the shared table, a shared moment of a—particular moment in the dinner and lunch—is an expression who come from Latin: *cum* and *panis*. *Cum* from Latin is "with"; *panis* is "bread." *Cum panis* comes a lot of things; the expression "company" comes exactly from that. Why? Because the values in the table are exactly the values of sharing not only bread, not only wine, not only food, but sharing a friendship and common values. I think this is the real relation between the United States of America and Italy. We share the same values, the same friendship. And yes, in the table, *cum piú panis*, we share the bread. We share the food. We share also the wine. But we share above all the future and the common values. For all the reasons, I propose a toast: To President Obama, to First Lady Michelle, thank you so much for your incredible journey. Thank you so much for your incredible service. Thank you so much for the values you inspire not only in the United States of America, but around the world. Thank you, President.

*[Prime Minister Renzi offered a toast.]*

Thank you, President. *Salute*.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:21 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Agnese Landini, wife, and Laura Bovoli, mother, of Prime Minister Renzi; and fashion designer Giorgio Armani. Prime Minister Renzi referred to his daughter Ester.

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