



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich on the Occasion of his Oath of Office

**Remarks of Jeff Bleich
On the Occasion of his Oath of Office
United States Ambassador to Australia**

(As prepared for delivery – December 20, 2009)

Thank you. And thank you all for being here. I'm particularly impressed that you all braved a storm that shut down the rest of the federal government today. Our friends in Australia call this New Zealand weather.

It is great to be back at the White House with you all today. Seeing all of these great friends I can't help but think how proud I am to have been part of this team, and how much I really miss you ... And the bowling alley.

I'm especially grateful to Lisa Brown for those beautiful words and to you Chief Justice Roberts for swearing me in. We go back a long way, and it's a real honor to be sworn in by you. Finally, I'm very grateful to Elizabeth Ward, the charge d'affaire of the Australian Embassy for coming here and representing our great friends from Australia.

I'm thrilled to have so many family members here. My very proud parents. They are the two people beaming up here in the front row. Chief, just a warning, afterward my father may want to take 1 or 2 ... Thousand photos with you. My smarter big sister Deborah – and yes it's okay to tell me that she looks younger than I do. And her husband Michael, who I'm proud to have as my brother. My Aunt Carol and my cousins. I see my college room-mate, Gus. And of course my own beautiful family who I'll talk about a little more in a minute.

I haven't been able to keep up with all of my emails since leaving the White House. As some of you know I was confirmed by the Senate on a Tuesday night at 10:15 p.m., and raced out to post soon after, and I've had a flood of emails and questions from many of you here. So since so many friends are here, I'd like to respond to some of those emails now.

First. Yes – to those who asked – there *were* actually senators on the floor at 10:15 at night on a Tuesday night. Actually I prefer Jim Messiness' explanation for the unanimous vote that every senator, regardless of their political views, shared a desire to send me 10,000 miles away from them.



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Second, thank you all for the suggestion about learning how to speak Australian. We are, after all, two great countries separated only by a common language. Becky and the kids and I have begun extensive training and, no worries, mates, we're picking up 'strine.

Third, because we are all friends here, yes I did tighten up the security on my facebook account recently if you've been trying to reach me. I promise that if you stop sending me emails referencing Fosters Lager and your favorite Crocodile Dundee line, I'll re-friend you.

Finally, yes, there are guest rooms, and no you can't actually move in until we get there first.

I remember how precious time is here in the White House. So I'll keep my remarks to two brief points. First, I have to thank some of the people who made this opportunity possible, and then I'd like to offer just a few words about the job that awaits us 10,000 miles from here.

My thanks begin first and foremost with President Obama. The U.S. has no greater partner in the world than Australia, and so I'm especially indebted to him not only for his friendship, but also for trusting me to be his personal representative there. I'm grateful to Secretary Clinton for her friendship and confidence, along with providing our mission with an extraordinary team from the state department – including our desk officers Jane Carpenter-Rock and Andrew Moore. And I am grateful to the members of the U.S. Congress, in particular to Senators Kerry, Lugar, Webb, Feinstein, and Boxer for their guidance in this process and in our fight to build a safer and more prosperous world.

These are all pretty cool people to get to thank. But I would never have had the chance to gain the support and trust of these people, or have had a fraction of the opportunities that I've had, if it were not for the deepest and most enduring partnership in my life.

You've all met our kids now, and most of you have heard know my wife Becky. She and I have been married 25 years this year, and we've been dating for 29 years. Actually Becky didn't realize we were dating for that first year, but I still count it anyway. We have loved each other through richer and poorer, in sickness and in health. Last week, as proof of our devotion, we even tried Vegemite together. But being in D.C. this year and away from Becky and our kids, helped me appreciate more than I ever had before that the only thing that beats working in the White House with such an extraordinary group, is having dinner with family each night. They are in every way the very best of me and I'm looking forward to working out of our house so that I can see them more.



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Everything that I've done of any significance, I did as Becky's husband and Jake, Matthew, and Abby's dad. The only constant throughout these past 17 years has been the wonderful quality of those relationships. Those partnerships.

And that is what I'd like to say about this new job in Australia. The president's instructions to me in Australia and throughout the Asia Pacific is to remember always that our fortunes depend upon our partners and we need to never neglect the things that brought us together and give us our strength. We are all better off in a world with more friends and fewer enemies. And so our friends deserve just as much attention as our adversaries.

The partnership between the United States and Australia is among the greatest ever achieved by two nations. It goes beyond just having mutual policy goals and interests, it even goes beyond having a common heritage. We are friends. Or as the Aussies say, "mates." Nothing brought this home more to me than after my nomination was announced coming home from the White House the night after my nomination was announced. You know it was a typical day here and so I worked past midnight and I didn't have a chance to check personal email all day. And when I got home I saw that I had a couple hundred emails on my personal account. I was just too tired to deal with them, so I went to bed and got up early to tackle those in the morning. But when I checked my account, I had about 2,000 new emails. And I thought, "Great, I got a virus." But it wasn't a virus. It was Facebook friend requests from Australians. There was a nice couple in Perth who encouraged me to visit the Kimberley. There was a guy in Melbourne who suggested I should pick Collingwood as my Aussie rules football team. And then a bunch of other guys who said he was an idiot and Collingwood was a bunch of thugs. People described visits to the U.S. How happy they were that they married an American. It was more than just an alliance; it reflected the hundreds of thousands of tender human connections that bind us.

It is this extraordinary connection that helps explain why on every dimension, from combating climate change to exploring outer space to fighting terrorism, to intercepting loose nukes to fostering free trade across a great ocean, we are joined together. Tonight in remote and lonely parts of Oruzgan province, U.S. and Australian soldiers are breaking bread together, sleeping in the same makeshift homes, and are willing to lay down their lives for one another and for our nations. In California and Australia I've met firefighters who are training together to face the terrible brush fires that have devastated our homes and our lives. On every crucial issue we face today, we have no greater friend in the world than Australia. And because of this, we do not bog down in small issues or short-term self-interest. But we work together to take on the great global issues.



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And yet, while we celebrate this wonderful relationship, it is too rare. Too few nations in this world have ever achieved this type of relationship, where they can truly trust and work long-term across borders. Too often nations, like people, focus on the issues that divide them, rather than what we all have in common.

The special U.S. and Australian relationship, like a solid marriage or any long-term partnership is not an accident or a freak of nature. It takes respect, and trust, and work and commitment and a shared sense of values over a long period of time. It requires love of others. It means not keeping score day by day. But having faith in each other that over time we will be better off together than we ever were on our own.

For the past 50 years, regardless of which party was in power, our nations have stayed true to each other, and our long-term goals of peace and prosperity. And through this effort we've transformed the great ocean that divides us into a tranquil sea that binds us. Together we have built a rare zone of peace and stability half-way around the globe. Think how often we talk about war zones, and how little time we ever devote to honoring and deliberately creating zones of peace.

That is the challenge the president has posed for me and for the other chiefs of mission around the world: to re-engage in the work of partnership to improve stability around the globe.

That is why serving as a diplomat feels like such a natural extension of the work I've tried to do as a lawyer here, and as a husband and father. I've never seen my job as temporarily resolving conflicts; the goal is always to create a new peace. Sometimes we have to use force as we are doing today in Afghanistan. But ultimately the measure of success in any battle is the peace that follows. I look forward not merely to confronting whatever faces us in the Asia-Pacific region, but also to look ahead to creating a peace that will last once the battle ended.

I am deeply honored to serve our nation aboard at the dawn of this new era of international diplomacy. And I am grateful to be able to pursue that partnership with our true Aussie mates.

I can't bring all of the president's gifts with me. Especially his jump shot. But I hope to bring his vision and his heart. And Becky, Jake, Matthew and Abbey truly are my heart. Together, as a family, we commit to helping build a world where nations commit to find common ground, to create the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings.

In short, let our partnership with Australia be symbol of partnership for all nations.