



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Fulbright Dinner

**Ambassador Bleich's Remarks for the
2013 Fulbright Symposium Gala Dinner
August 22, 2013**

Thanks to Professor Steven Schwartz for that introduction.

Tonight is bittersweet for me since this will be Becky's and my last Fulbright event before I leave this post. It has been an honor to co-chair this Commission with the Prime Minister, and to serve with such extraordinary people as Tange, Steven, Tom, our sponsors, and scholars. It can be easy lose touch in this job. But there have been two things that have been sure to keep me humble. One is the awesome talent displayed by these Fulbright scholars each year. The other is the fact that Becky and I brought three teenagers with us. They've kept this title from going to my head – including by calling our dog, Lucy, the "Dog Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary."

Becky and I have recently begun the hardest part of this job – saying goodbye to a people and a country that we have come to love.

Some former Ambassadors have been offering me their advice about this process. Their main recommendation seems to be denial. As one former Ambassador told me, "You know it is over on the day you get in the back seat of the car, and nothing happens."

Luckily, the excellent people at the Embassy are prepared for this problem and are preparing to help me out. I've recently noticed that there seem to be more Marines around the Embassy, so I asked the Marine Staff Sergeant. He said that they had, in fact, gotten more guys in lately because they thought they'd be needed to drag me out.

Apparently they aren't convinced that soft power will be enough in this instance.

So, tonight gives me a chance to reflect on this experience and it has made me think mostly about a place we've visited frequently during our time here: the Deep Space Communications Center a few minutes from here in Tidbinbilla. It features the dish that received Neil Armstrong's transmission from the first Moon landing; it is the place where, last year, Becky and I counted down the seven minutes of terror as the Curiosity probe entered Mars' atmosphere and began its historic mission on Mars.

But the most fascinating thing there is a photo in one of their offices from the Voyager 1 space probe, which they have been tracking since it was launched 36 years ago. In 1990, Voyager captured an image and relayed it back to Tidbinbilla. It is a picture of our planet from an unimaginable distance – 6 billion kilometers away. In the dark gray of the photo, off to the side is a grainy "pale blue dot" – tiny and insignificant. You have to search hard to find it. And yet – as Carl Sagan described this image – that dot is the sum of all



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human experience. “The aggregate of our joy and suffering, all of our religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”

This “mote of dust” this "pale blue dot" is the only home we have ever known. And yet, for centuries we have allowed ourselves to hate barely distinguishable inhabitants of other parts of that dot. We have spilled rivers of blood to claim temporary dominion over one small portion of that dot. Here on earth, our minds are consumed with contests, and threats, and arms to keep us safe. But from a greater distance it becomes obvious that our existence depends not on these – but on finding more connections, more understanding, and more trust.

This is the work of diplomacy, and it is something that Senator Fulbright intuitively understood. He had seen firsthand the terrible destruction brought about by “hard power” in WWII. He – and the veterans who survived – recognized better than any of us, both the terrible costs of war, and its solution. To avoid future wars, we needed to build bridges of trust and understanding across even the greatest of divides. And so, Senator Fulbright devised a program designed to turn our swords, not just into ploughshares, but into paths and bridges that connect us – paths for research, and art, and music. He took those dollars from surplus weapons of war, and used them to send our best and brightest young people as ambassadors for understanding: to meet new people, to learn new things, and to build the connections that will last a lifetime.

The image from Voyager is spell-binding to me because it reminds us that we are all traveling with one another all the time. We see our home from this different vantage, and suddenly we see many things about our lives differently.

Mark Twain – a great traveler and lover of Australia – wrote of travel that it “is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness... Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.”

That is the Fulbright experience.

Whenever we go somewhere new, our senses are heightened. We are aware of different smells, sounds, the color of the sky. We see connections that were never visible to us in our home country.



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When we learn a new language, we discover that words exist to give shape to thoughts that were once unformed in our minds.

We arrive wary in other countries only to discover not our differences, but how much more we have in common. It is these moments of revelation that have sparked human understanding throughout history. This is the genius of Fulbright.

Fulbright remains at the very core of U.S. and Australia's relationship. It was one of our first treaties. It predates even ANZUS. It represents the ultimate goal of our relations -- making this pale blue dot better, brighter, and safer. It is ultimately not our strength but our social ties that make us safe. The faith that other people value their lives and their children as we do, and want peace just as we do – it is that on which humanity's future rests. Connections like there are not legislated – they are formed through what Fulbrighters do – the thousands of interactions and tender connections among people.

Let me leave you with this final thought: When Carl Sagan looked at the image of our Earth – our home – taken from an unimaginable distance it made him think that this image “underscore[d] our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.” Fulbright looked at the terrible battlefields of WWII and thought the same thing. All of you – especially our scholars – are doing your part to ensure that we continue our journey through space bound more tightly, more securely, and with greater understanding.

Thank you.