



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Fulbright Dinner

Ambassador Bleich’s Remarks at the Fulbright Presentation Dinner Parliament House

(As prepared for delivery – March 21, 2013)

Thank you Professor Schwartz for that very kind introduction. I’d also like to thank Tange and her staff for all the hard work and planning that made this evening possible. And it’s great to have Minister Chris Bowen with us today. Also welcome to Margaret Harding from ANU and Stephen Parker from the University of Canberra.

Finally a special welcome to our distinguished visitors from the Kansas State University. They have given me the honor of announcing their new partnership establishing a Fulbright Distinguished Chair in the vital field of Agriculture and Life Sciences and a Fulbright Senior Scholar. Congratulations on this new initiative, and thank you for joining the Fulbright family in Australia.

Many of you know that when Senator Fulbright first thought of this program, the world was emerging from the devastation of World War II. Every year, we honor those veterans who served at ceremonies here in Australia. And, often these vets – now in their 80s and 90s – talk about the spirit of the men with whom they served.

Young people, strangers, were thrown together in far-flung areas and became bound by deep bonds of faith, trust, and mutual respect. Americans and Australians in war didn’t care where the other guy went to school or what he did for a living. They cared about one thing: character. In those circumstances, the only question they had was this: "Is this someone I can trust with my life?" We discovered in each other a rare character and an uncommon ethic. We don’t fold under pressure. We don’t leave our mates behind. We don’t lose our faith that there are better days ahead. “She’ll be right.” And this gives us the strength, even in the hardest times, to sacrifice today for the good of others tomorrow.

On the battlefield everything is reduced to its essence. Each moment, each sound, each experience, each word, literally could be your last. It gave those who fought a rare appreciation for what matters. Those who survived, recognized better than any of us, both the terrible costs of war, and its solution. To avoid future wars, we need to build that spirit across all nations -- to build bridges of trust and understanding across even the greatest divides.

As in Yeats’ brilliant poem, “Easter 1916,” people understood that from the terrible devastation of war, the world needed to summon a new resolve, a new openness, a new kind of engagement. He wrote:



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Fulbright Dinner

“All changed, changed utterly:

A terrible beauty is born.”

“A terrible beauty.” Fulbright’s gift was to turn terror into beauty; to take the weapons that had been used to destroy, and make them into something that would bind us and protect us. The Fulbright Program literally turned swords into ploughshares – it took the proceeds from surplus war equipment and used it to pay for peaceful exchanges of knowledge, culture, and human understanding.

You -- our scholars – embody that beauty. You are creating great beauty from music and science, law and medicine.

The greatness of the United States and Australia’s relationship is trust. That is not reflected by how many treaties and laws we have crafted, but rather by how few. The Fulbright Program was the first treaty between our nations, even before our ANZUS Alliance. And Fulbright’s spirit remains the bedrock of our relationship. We are bound by common values. In a world with billions of people, there will never be enough laws, or guns, or fences, or bombs to keep us secure. It is the social ties – the faith that other people value their lives and their children and want peace just as we do – on which humanity’s future rests. These things are not legislated – they are formed through what Fulbrighter’s do – the thousands of interactions and tender connections among people.

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.”

When we go somewhere new, our senses are heightened by the newness of the experience. Our brains fire differently, and we see connections that were never visible to us in our home country.

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.



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Fulbright Dinner

So let me end with a final thought from the world of science that for me captures Fulbright. It concerns the ultimate terrible beauty – what happens to us after we pass.

Each and every one of us is made of a set of atoms -- the same atoms that have swirled through every planet and galaxy since the beginning of time. Bill Bryson explained this well in one of his books. He wrote: “The nuclei of every atom you possess has almost certainly passed through several stars and been a part of millions of organisms on its way to becoming you. We are each so full of atoms and those atoms are so vigorously recycled that up to a billion atoms in each of us probably once belonged to Shakespeare.”

Now when I read this, I thought this couldn't possibly be true – a billion atoms from Shakespeare. So, I checked out the Jupiter scientific website. And sure enough, as I suspected, Bryson was probably wrong. Each of us does not have one billion of Shakespeare's atoms in us. Rather, each of us has about 200 billion atoms that were once in Shakespeare's body! So the truth is that there really is a little bit of Shakespeare – and everyone else – in all of us. Perhaps even a few more Shakespeare atoms in some of our scholars here tonight.

So thank you to our supporters and to our scholars tonight. Your experience is a human embodiment of this great connection that reveals the Shakespeare in all of us. By pursuing this exchange you tighten our connections to one another, you bind us more tightly across a vast planet, and in doing so you make us and our world more secure.

Thank you.