Independence Day Celebration 2014

Remarks by Chargé d'Affaires David Burger

Križanke, Ljubljana, July 3, 2014

Good evening, welcome, and Happy Fourth of July! The first thing many of you might ask – indeed, about a hundred people have asked me already this evening – is "Where's Joe?" I know some of you had your hopes up, but I have to disappoint you: No, he's not been declared persona non grata. He's still the U.S. Ambassador to Slovenia, but he was asked by the State Department to chair a promotion panel in Washington, to decide which officers will join the highest ranks of our diplomatic service. It's actually a great honor to be asked to run one of these panels: it means you have demonstrated integrity and good judgment over the course of a distinguished career. Ambassador Mussomeli will be back in Ljubljana soon, and sends his regards and regrets. You also know by now that – should he be confirmed by our Senate – the distinguished career diplomat Brent Hartley will be our next Ambassador to Slovenia.

First, let me thank our generous donors – American and Slovenian companies – for making this event possible. And a special thanks to our wonderful singers, the band, and the U.S. Marines. I also very much want to thank my staff at the Embassy for all their hard work to make this reception successful and enjoyable.

238 years ago tomorrow, 56 men signed the Declaration of Independence, setting into motion the world's oldest experiment in self-governance, one whose freedoms – speech, religion, assembly – are enshrined in every democracy's sacred founding documents, including Slovenia's. Tonight I hope we can all take a moment to remember that these ideas remain revolutionary: one need only look at the dictators around the world who wish to keep these rights only to themselves.

This evening, I will take advantage of Slovenia's strong protection of free speech, as well as the renowned patience and politeness of the wonderful people here, and refrain from the usual diplomatic remarks that recount every engagement between our two countries. I'm not sure even I could stay awake for that! Instead, let me be a bit more serious, and observe candidly that in my year here I have seen a major misperception of what my Embassy does – <u>and</u> what America's policy toward Slovenia is really all about.

So what are America's interests in Slovenia? Very simply: As a NATO Ally and EU member state, you've already committed yourselves to the highest standards of democratic values and economic opportunity for all citizens. And you have pledged to support these principles around the world. Our diplomatic dialogue therefore takes place on a higher level. It's not a matter of whether you support democracy in Ukraine, Syria, or South Sudan. It's a question of maximizing our joint effectiveness in achieving these goals. That's why your membership in NATO and the EU are so important. Through these critical organizations you are bigger than yourselves. You increase your effectiveness and have an expanded voice on the world stage.

And what are our interests in Slovenia itself? Also very simply: We want to see you reach your full potential as a Eurozone economy – to be stable and prosperous in order to live up fully to your commitments as an EU and NATO member. And on this score I can identify some issues that we hope all Slovenians will see as priorities. We make these recommendations as friends, but also – to be blunt – we make these recommendations because they are in our national interests.

I mention these items in full humility, and in full knowledge that the United States itself has many problems. Our 238 years as an independent nation have taught us that there is never an end state to what our Constitution aspirationally calls a "more perfect union." No country ever fully reaches that goal: the secret is in the attempt and the journey.

Successive governments in Slovenia – left and right – have struggled and faltered to make the structural reforms necessary to get Slovenia firmly on track. Your current economic and political challenges underscore the need for reconciliation in a society still troubled by the history of the Second World War. And despite the recent news that the country is slowly emerging from recession, it remains the case that Slovenia has a mid-twentieth century economic model in a twenty-first century world. The past six years have shown that this older model is unsustainable. Slovenia's economy is practically state-controlled – some estimate 70%. Political interference and poor corporate governance of many key state-owned enterprises result in an insider economy starved of creative capital and any chance for sustained growth. Privatization is not the entire answer but neither is it some dangerous foreign project aimed to rob Slovenia of its companies and resources. Turning over state-owned companies to the private sector has proven throughout Europe and indeed throughout the world to be a force that unleashes energy, creativity, and opportunity for all.

Our foreign policy interest is in a more prosperous, more stable Ally, one with whom we continue to work to take on the enormous challenges we all face in other parts of the world. That's really what the United States wants for this country. This is our shared interest and our shared value. Let us therefore toast tonight to those values that unite us: to democracy, to

prosperity, to justice, and to freedom. To the United States of America and the Republic of Slovenia!