

Remarks at a Dinner Hosted by Prime Minister Keating of Australia in Canberra

January 2, 1992

This is an impossible situation, following two such articulate, young, and vibrant leaders of this country. But first, let me simply say thank you to the Prime Minister for his hospitality and to all of you for making Barbara and me feel so very much at home.

It feels odd to hear myself referred to as the leader of the free world. I told Barbara, somebody in Sydney said I was the leader of the free world. She says, "Hurry up and get out of the bathroom; we're late. Run." [Laughter]

I won't try to put you in what we call double jeopardy. You heard me over there, here next door in this beautiful building. And I'm also reminded of two sayings. One in our Congress is, "The speech you don't give is the one that helps you get re-elected." [Laughter] And I'm about to be running, I think, for President. And secondly, I love the one about the kid that went to church with his grandfather, and he said, "Granddad, what are all the flags along the side of the church for?" The grandfather said, "Well, that, son, is for those who died in service." And the kid said, "Oh, really? The 9 o'clock or the 11 o'clock service?" [Laughter] And I'm reminded that I went on for about 25 minutes today, so you don't need another full load.

I was reminded of something, though, today perhaps of some significance, international significance, that it is likely that I will be the last President of the United States who served in the World War II. And I heard very generous assessments by the Prime Minister and by the leader of the opposition about my service. And yes, I was shot down off the shores of Chichi-Jima. And I had only wished that I had met Dawn Fraser before because I tried to set the record for swimming away from the island. And if I'd known her I might have done a better job of it—[laughter]—and not been so scared.

But anyway, why, I think of the Coral Sea experience and what it means to the United States and, of course, what it means

to Australia. And I think back to my own little history: I was 17, about to reach my 18th birthday a month later, when the Battle of the Coral Sea took place. And I think those of us in that vintage, and there are not many in the room I'm pleased to say, but those of us in that vintage will always remember that and therefore will always have this very special feeling about Australia.

But one of the things that interests me on this visit is hearing some educators talking about the need to be sure that the younger generations remember this, not necessarily the smoke and the gunfire and all of that, but the significance of these two great countries standing together. And this visit for us has simply reminded me, and then I think through me as President, the American people, of the importance of this relationship. It is clear. It is unambiguous. There is great friendship.

And yes, we have some differences. And we faced up to them. They thrust me into the arena with three of the biggest farmers I've ever seen in my life. [Laughter] I won't single them out, but when I shook hands with one I made the mistake of giving him that kind of political embrace when you put your hand on his arm; it's all muscle, sheer iron. And I said, "I'd better listen to what this guy has to say." [Laughter]

And so, it's been a good, frank visit. We haven't held back. We discussed our differences. But I think they have been overwhelmed by the common interests that the United States and Australia have.

So, it has been for us an enormous privilege. We'll never forget it on a personal basis. And I happen to believe that it will simply reinforce this feeling of friendship and alliance and strength that is indeed the relationship between Australia and the United States of America.

So, thank you from a grateful heart for a fantastic visit.