

Remarks to the Staff at the American Embassy in London

February 25, 1969

Mr. Secretary, Mr. Ambassador, ladies and gentlemen:

I appreciate your very warm welcome as I step for a moment on American soil in this whirlwind trip of Britain and several European countries.

I must not let the remarks of the Secretary of State go by with that reference to being upstaged. I can tell you that we have these little colloquies from time to time because we are old friends going back many, many years.

I can remember a time 10 years ago when I was a young Vice President and he was a young Attorney General of the United States. Now, I suppose it could be said that he is a young Secretary of State and I am an old President.

But I do want you to know that in speaking of your Ambassador and our Ambassador, that when I spoke of the giants I used that term quite objectively and quite deliberately. It is very easy in the diplomatic circuit to use adjectives freely and particularly the adjective "great"---everybody is a "great" man and this was a "great" party and you are a "great" staff, and all that sort of thing.

When I use the word "giant" and apply it to David Bruce, I am simply referring to the fact that in my travels around the world, going back over 22 years, in meeting American Ambassadors in 73 countries of the world, a few stand out.

Virtually all were outstanding and were good representatives of the United States, but a few were men who would be in any post a great credit to this Nation and men who we can ill-afford to lose in the service of the Nation.

When I look back over his service--his service in the post as Ambassador to this country for 8 years, longer than any American Ambassador has ever served as Ambassador to this country; when I look back over his service also as Ambassador to other nations and his work in government over the years, particularly in the foreign policy field--I can certainly subscribe to the fact that, of all those we could describe as giants, he rates very, very high. Not simply because he has been, as he obviously has, a man whom you all respect--you who work for him and with him but also because through the years, whether it was a Republican President or a Democratic President, whether it was an Eisenhower or a Kennedy or a Johnson or a Nixon or a Truman, we disagreed on some things, but we all agreed that David Bruce was a giant.

Now, having spoken of the giant, I want to speak of the people who make giants possible. I will use an analogy, one not exactly appropriate but one that will illustrate the point.

It has been said that one of the reasons that we can see further than those who went before us is that we stand on the shoulders of the giants who went before us

And so it is with a man like David Bruce, one who has rendered such distinguished service in so many posts and such distinguished service here. He would be the first to say that his record would not be so outstanding had it not been for the fact that he has in this Embassy one of the outstanding staffs.

I don't refer just to Mr. Kaiser [Deputy Chief of Mission] and to others who are in the top echelons, but I am referring to the people up and down the line. I imagine in this room are people who typed out my schedules--or "sheduels" I should say. [Laughter] I can imagine there are those who ran them

off on mimeograph machines--oh no, you have got new things where you just push them through like that !

I can imagine that many others have worked overtime in trying to handle the telephone calls, and saying "no" nicely when you said that we could not do this or that. As the visitors come--the VIP's, sometimes a VP, even sometimes a President, and sometimes a Secretary of State--what a tremendous extra burden it puts on a staff.

I know there are hundreds here in this room, in this Embassy, that neither Secretary Rogers nor I will ever be able to thank personally, who helped to make this visit the success that it is from a logistic standpoint. Whether it succeeds from a diplomatic standpoint depends upon us, but I can assure you that what you have done has made our work much more easy because you have handled our arrangements so effectively that we are able to move knowing that everything is arranged in just the way that it should be.

I express my appreciation to each of you who have worked on this trip. But I would like to go beyond that. During the past month and a week that I have served in this office, I have done something that some tell me was unprecedented for a President. I went to each of the departments of Government to pay a visit to the top people in Government--the 400 or 500 who hold the top career posts and appointive posts in the State Department and the other 11 Cabinet departments.

I went there first to get acquainted and second to bring a message to them that I now want to bring to you. The message is this: that ours is a great country. Our Nation has tremendous responsibilities. Our British friends, as we meet with them first because they are kind and generous and hospitable, but second, because as pragmatists they realize the fact and point out that the decisions made in the United States, due to our power and our wealth, will affect them and affect the peace of the world for the last third of this century, if not longer.

So as we think of that awesome power, we think of our Government and what our Government does. We think not only of a President and a Secretary of State and an Ambassador and the top officials of his staff, but we think of the 3 million people who work in Government, in all the areas of Government, and we realize that administrations will change and perhaps 400 or 500 people at the top will change, and they will change the policies and perhaps change the direction of an administration, and sometimes they will be rated as successes and sometimes as failures; but whether they succeed, if they do succeed, will depend not only on what they do but it will depend upon the loyalty, the dedication and devotion of thousands, in a case like an embassy as big as this one, and millions, as we look around the world, of Americans working for Government who have given their lives to Government service.

I just want you to know that I know that. I want you to know that I appreciate that.

I want you to know that in my travels around the world--and I mentioned earlier that they have been to 73 countries; I have been entertained by Ambassadors; I have been briefed by briefing officers; I have received the courtesies that are extended to Congressmen, to Senators, and to private citizens--and sometimes I have been a private citizen as I have traveled, not by my own choice---but I have been a private citizen and I can assure you that never have I failed to appreciate the Foreign Service of the United States in the broadest sense, not just the Foreign Service but those who work in USIA and AID, all the programs that are represented.

The point I am trying to get across here is this: that not only in the departments in Washington but in the far-flung agencies of this Government around the world there are millions of Americans in Government service who will determine whether the new leadership, when it finishes its role in Washington, will be a success or a failure and whether, thereby, that new leadership will have contributed to a better world, a more peaceful world, or whether we will have failed in the mission which we have set out to undertake.

So as I recognize our responsibility and what you can contribute, I want you to know that we are deeply grateful, not only for everything you did to make this visit possible, but grateful that you have dedicated your lives to public service.

We recognize that sometimes the jobs you will do will be boring, they seem to be. Sometimes they may seem not to matter. Sometimes you think maybe you don't get the promotion you should get and somebody else goes ahead, and perhaps what you do doesn't count as much as what somebody else does. But I have one illustration that proves my point better than anything else I could say:

You have had a very distinguished visitor to this country, Frank Borman, a few days ago. He made an immense impression here and in the other countries he visited. I recall, when I was at the White House I was congratulating him in a toast for what he and his fellow astronauts had done, his response, in that humility with grace which is his trademark and the trademark of his colleagues, was along these lines: He said, "We appreciate the remarks you have made about us. But," he said, "I want to point out that there are 400,000 Americans who, in one way or another, contributed to the building of the Apollo spacecraft and to this program." He said, "I want to point out that there are 2 million parts in an Apollo spacecraft. So, if something went wrong with one of those parts, which had been created by these 400,000 Americans, that tremendous, exciting journey around the moon could not have been possible."

That, of course, is what government is about. We make decisions at the highest level. Those decisions will depend on the devotion and the dedication of hundreds of thousands of people, yes, millions of people around this world, some of whom will contribute to the making of the decisions, others who will contribute, as you have, to the logistical factors which are so important in a trip like this, and others who will contribute to carrying them out.

I am deeply grateful therefore, as I stand in your presence, for the fact that America is so well represented today by a giant. But I am also grateful for the fact that this giant and all the others like him who have been successful are backed up; as a matter of fact, they become giants because they stand on the shoulders of others like yourselves, dedicated to public service, people we will never be able to thank personally, but people whom, through these words, I want to thank from my heart today. Thank you.

The Ambassador has reminded me that in this room, too, are many who are not American by background but who are British and who work in our Embassy and in our various missions.

I should also tell you that we are tremendously appreciative of your efforts and just as grateful as we are for the efforts of the others, because without what you do our Americans would not have it so good.

Thank you.

Note: The President spoke at 3:55 p.m. at the American Embassy in London following introductory remarks by Ambassador to the United Kingdom David K. E. Bruce and Secretary of State William P. Rogers which are printed in the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents (vol. 5, p. 340).

Richard Nixon, Remarks to the Staff at the American Embassy in London Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project
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