

## Marine Appreciation Luncheon

June 4, 2012

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Ambassador Howard Gutman

I am delighted to be here and to see so many of you here today. Could there be a more important lunch at our Embassy? At the Tri-Mission.

First, since Ambassadors Daalder, Kennard and I do not get a chance to get together often, especially publicly, let me note what an honor it is to serve with the two of them. As I noted at the Marine Ball, the truth is that even if I did not think Ambassadors Ivo Daalder and Bill Kennard were among the finest who ever have represented America at NATO and with the EU, I would have to say something nice about them. But the good news is that you don't have to trust my word, for you should all know it from your own observation and experience. Has there been a more challenging time in Europe? Incumbents are falling in every election. People no longer talk about increased prosperity but about survival. And yet, on every policy issue that the United States has raised in Europe – no matter how tough the hill—Bill Kennard has scaled it and delivered. As to Ambassador Daalder, NATO just had the Super Bowl of Super Bowls. And Ambassador Daalder just ran for touchdowns, blitzed and spiked. The NATO Summit was masterful and the credit largely was Ambassador Daalder's.

Today is Marine Appreciation Day. But why? Why have a lunch and a day for Marines? Well, comes the answer, we appreciate them. But we appreciate all of you. Like them, you work hard daily to serve the United States. To foster Belgian-U.S., or US-EU, or US-NATO relations. And we indeed sincerely appreciate all you do.

Well, continues the answer, they make sacrifices. But indeed, so many of you have made sacrifices. You have left homes and families and travelled around the world. You go to difficult places. So many of you are unsung heroes. And we applaud your sacrifices.

But, indeed, we gather these tables, we come together, we prepare these lasagnes and quiches, only for the Marines. Because, we each know that there is something special, something more, when we look at our appreciation for them, when we look at their sacrifices.

So the challenge for any speaker is to identify that extra debt that we all owe them; that extra admiration we have for them; the special spirit that drives us to cook lasagne for them alone. And indeed, it is in facing that challenge, that any speaker must fail. You see, our conception of their service, our understanding of our debt, is personal for each of us. We each feel in our hearts uniquely why we so much want to say thank you.

So, for me, I have focused on two symbols – two recent occasions when I personally have thought – that the Marines are special; that Marines earn our extra admiration, our extra appreciation, and, yes, our lasagna.

I get notices throughout the day on my blackberry each day of what is happening in the world -- called OPS Alert. And recently, on March 21, the morning Ops Alert informed us of a coup d'état that

was unfolding in Mali. Subsequent Ops Alerts that day quickly told us of looting, rioting, violence, injuries and chaos in Mali.

And then came the Ops Alert that poses the greatest fear for every Ambassador. The rebelling military troops, fully armed, had surrounded the U.S. Embassy. They had engaged with the locally employed security staff and were urging them to walk away, to walk off the job, before they got hurt and to leave the embassy and the Americans to the rebelling troops. The Ops Alert noted that the Embassy employees had taken refuge safely inside the Embassy. And then the most important line of the Ops Alert came – it said that the Marines had taken their positions on the roof.

I will serve lasagna on every roof.

We need no other reason for our special admiration. They always have our backs. They are always willing to go to the roof when we go to the safety inside. If you need them, when you need them, they will always be there. Marines are always there for us and, for sure, we will always be there for them.

Now there have been no roof defenses in Brussels. There are not likely to be any. But there are plenty of 3:00 am's in Brussels. And, as you know, once in a while, with a problem back in Washington, I need to come to the Embassy at 3:00 am. You are all sleeping. But there is one person I can always count on at 3:00 am – the Marine standing duty. He or she is standing duty precisely so the rest of us can sleep. I remember to say thanks at 3:00 am; we need to say thanks at every other hour.

So thank them for all they do and have done today. Thank them when you pass them at post tomorrow. And never forget that every day is Marine Appreciation Day.

One final thought. They will all get a certificate. But these Marines travel all over the world. They travel to places far from home, far from America. So with their certificate, I am giving every Marine a piece of America to take with them, a baseball. A piece of America from us.

Thanks so much and all the best.