

PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S VISIT TO AUSTRALIA - 1966

Speech of Welcome by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt at Fairbairn Airport, Canberra, A.C.T.

20TH OCTOBER, 1966

Mr. President and Mrs. Johnson, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Well, it has really happened! We have been waiting for a long time for the President to come to visit us. We have been hoping that he would come to visit us and now, as a product of this great conference which is to be held in Manila, we have him here in Australia with us.

Mr. President, this is not only a notable visit. It is an historic visit because you are the first President in his period of office ever to visit this country - indeed the only one - and it is historic because you are on your way to what we believe will be a conference directed to our hopes of peace and a better future and, we believe, fruitful in the results that it will produce.

Although the air of Canberra is chill and brisk, as it so often is, our welcome is warm and tremendously sincere, and you will find that warmth of welcome wherever you move around Australia or wherever Australians are to be found. Those unfortunate enough to be unable to see you in the cities, will follow your movements with close interest and attention as you move into the cities of Australia and on your journey north.

It is, of course, not surprising that there should be a warm welcome in Australia for an American President, because indeed there is a welcome in Australia for any of the citizens of your great country. We Australians have always found it easy to be on terms of close friendship with you. We have reason to appreciate what the United States has meant to this country, and in our time of greatest peril we recall with gratitude the contribution you made to the security of this nation. And so the American people stand warm and high in the hearts of the Australian people.

But we welcome you not merely as the leader of this great people, indeed the leader of the free world in these difficult times, but we welcome you and Mrs. Johnson as two warm likeable human beings whom we have come to admire and respect, and I am sure that as we in Australia get to know you better as we hope to do in these days of your visit, there will be established between you and the Australian people a lingering bond of affection which will persist down through the years.

Now, Sir, I am not proposing to offer you on this occasion a spate of Parliamentary oratory. You will be subjected to quite a barrage when you lunch with us tomorrow. But I do want you and Mrs. Johnson to know, and through you, the American people, whose friendship we value so much, that this visit has been welcomed tremendously by the people of Australia. We hope that you will find in the visit interest and enjoyment with us, and you will go away feeling not only a better knowledge and even deeper appreciation of the Australian people and what they mean, but that you will treasure through your lives the memories of this, the first Presidential visit to this country.

Finally, there is the circumstance that you, Mr. President in your period of office have revealed a close and deep awareness of the problems of Asia, and in particular of South-East Asia, and this is something which we appreciate tremendously. We think it means much for the peace and progress of the world as a whole, and your positive contributions to the aspirations you hold could be a landmark in the history of the world. We wish you well, and success in the endeavours you will bring to these great objectives.

Mr. President and Mrs. Johnson - Welcome to Australia!
