

Ambassador Bob Strauss

120 is about the time I plan to peak.

I thank you Rabbi Schneier and I guess I understand with Bill Schreyer's name being so close to Schneier, I can understand why you got the award. I haven't quite figured out why I did, yet. But, I'm pleased that I did. Bill Schreyer is an old friend, and I'm pleased that I accepted it and received it with a distinguished friend like you. And I especially am pleased that Inez and Dwayne Andreas are here tonight. I don't know of two people who belong as the presiders in anything as worthwhile as this institution. And the two of them will probably bring a sensitivity with respect to human suffering, unsurpassed by anyone, who have probably fed more hungry people than any couple in the world. They are special friends and Helen and I are pleased to be with them.

I'm sorry that I didn't speak before you did, Arthur Schneier. You told two stories that happen to be the two that I was going to tell, and I despise you for it, I don't just dislike you.

The story you told about Anatoly Dobrynin is exactly as it took place. You spoke of him serving 7 presidents and that's somewhat remarkable, but it seems to me even more remarkable that, and far more impressive, that Mrs. Dobrynin, Erna, served one great meal. It's almost impossible to believe a few weeks ago we were having dinner in their home, Helen and I with the

two^{of} them. We had a marvelous meal and a marvelous evening, and we spoke of America, we spoke of freedom, and we spoke of Russia, and we spoke of problems, and we spoke of tragedy, and we spoke of triumph some day. And here we are together, tonight, and Ambassador Vorontsov, the Russian Federation Ambassador to the UN. It's hard for me to believe that last March/April we were together on a number of occasions planning the first trip, not the first trip for President Yeltsin, but the first Yeltsin/Bush Summit, and the two of us planned it, and here we are, ^{all} together, in the same room, in this marvelous country we live in. -- Marvelous for among other reasons, marvelous for the concerns that we have about the country that you gentlemen, you people, represent.

This is a, I don't really have a speech tonight. I don't know really what I want to say, I had some notes. I must confess that I'm both foolish and vain enough that I've enjoyed very much hearing what was said about me, and receiving this award. And I must also tell you that I am sensible enough not to pay a heck of a lot of attention to it. I would like to comment, if I may, somewhat, somewhat in a structured way a bit about what's going on in Moscow tonight. If someone at that table would give me a glass of water, I'd comment on it a little bit more clearly. I have a cold, and I losing my voice, thank you very much.

The Russian\$, our Russian friends, as most of you probably know, are just completing the Congressional meeting of about 1,000 members of the Russian Parliament, Russian Congress. 40% of them are, more or less, anti-Yeltsin. Far more than the old harder line Communist mold. About 20% are, 17-20% are pro-Yeltsin, and the rest are flowed in between. I have been speaking with my, I started to say my office, it's my former office, I speak to them each morning, early - 8 hour 9 hour time difference, depending on which state I'm in, makes it easy to get up at 5, 5:30, 6 and get an hour's worth of information out of Russia. And, I've done that each day. I promised President Yeltsin when I left that he was not losing an Ambassador and a friend, he would continue to have a friend, and he would just have one more Ambassador in this country; and he has several anyway and one more didn't seem to bother him very much, and I've been trying to do that.

My judgment is, from what I know of it, what I've seen of it, what I've heard by phone, is that President Yeltsin survived what could have been a real disaster. He lost, just today, a very key vote on trying to make his Prime Minister, Yegor Gaidar, more than an acting Prime Minister, but a permanent one. He lost that vote. And I think the loss of that vote was something of a surprise. The Parliament voted not to confirm him. He also gave up some power over his ability to appoint four other key executives. He gave that up the day before on a

vote when he yielded to, in an effort to reach out to some of those who were opposed to him, and agreed that his appointments of four individuals would be subject to parliamentary or congressional confirmation, much like we have Senatorial confirmation in this country. He, that passed. So he has a problem with getting them confirmed now in April, and he has a problem of Yegor Gaidar, whom he has great confidence, as do I.

I think that some good things came out of Congress. It wasn't a total loss. One, he took on his opponents and he took them head-on, and he told me three weeks ago that he was going to do that, and he did. He passed some legislation that was going to help, including I might add, legislation that relates to the right to own and buy and sell the small plots of land that people farm but don't own, and now will be able to own and it is the first major step, I think, towards private property ownership, and I think it's a very significant step in privatization.

I would say to you, as a politician, wearing my politician hat, that it's hard for those of you in this room to comprehend what's going on, unless you keep in perspective, and we tend to get it out of perspective. My wise friends, whether they be from the business or the academic or intellectual community, whatever community in this country, have a lack patience with our inability to get things done in Russia, and you have to keep in mind that what this country of ours must have looked like,

what our Congress in the Congressional debates must have looked like the first year of this Republic. And you, it's hard to keep in mind, and you must keep in perspective that this, President Yeltsin has been in office less than one year, and they are just beginning to learn, as a child would learn, about a toy, beginning to learn how to deal with democracy - that democracy doesn't mean the right to do whatever you want, the right to be irresponsible. It means a lot more, and the Russian people will learn that and become more sophisticated.

I will tell you that they know, because they know from their heart, not just their mind, what democracy itself means. That it means freedom. It means freedom in its broadest sense. And these marvelous, sensitive, strong people understand that and understand it very well. The Congress I would say, is a loss overall for President Yeltsin, and it's a winner for a mixed bag of opponents, a bag of opponents that opposed his reform program for many reasons. Some good, and some not so good. Who am I to say that Yegor Gaidar, a young man for whom I have great admiration, but who can say that his policies are the right policies. I'm sure that they aren't the right policies. Some are good, and some are not so good.

Dwayne Andreas spoke earlier in the evening of a trial and error that's going on. And we have trial and error in this sophisticated country of ours. And they are having a very difficult economic trial and error period. And, I think, that

when you stop and think that as this reform of President Yeltsin begins to take hold, is that you stop and think though the people who have or who have something to lose, it's almost incredible that they even keep going, because it, they take on the intellectuals, they have to take on the business owners. They can take on almost every sector of the economy. People lost vested interest that they have. Rights that they thought as bureaucrats, or as part of the military, or as part of the intelligentsia. Rights that they thought belonged to them by being at the top echelon in this very strange society.

And so, there are many people who have much to lose, much to lose. And so it is that many people have reasons to oppose - some good and some purely selfish. If you look at the Congress there, I would say that the self-style sort of centrist in which the business community, the enterprises were included, were people who were jockeying for power. Some of them very well motivated; some of them not so well motivated. Most of them wanted sort of an indefinite status quo, an indefinite status quo while they kept their power in a bit of democracy. The old guard surely wanted the status quo for other reasons. They wanted, hopefully, to turn the clock back, to turn the clock back - to some extent or - to a great extent.

And as to the public generally, I think that Dobrynin will tell you that when you talk to people over the age of 50, there is grave concern and grave doubts. And while a great majority

of them will like the freedom that has come, there is a great nostalgia for the security of the old. Maybe you had to stand in line an hour and a half, but you knew you would get a loaf of bread for a ruble, or a few kopecks, and you stay in line for two hours, and you got two pounds of sausage for a ruble or so or two that you knew you could afford. And people who have lived that way for 45, 55, 65 years, it's understandable that there is some nostalgia for the security of the old, as well as a longing for the new.

But, I will tell you also that those young men and women or those men and women 45-50 years old and younger, they have seen the West, and they have seen opportunity, and they understand what democracy really means, and what a market economy really means, and they would never turn back. They have seen the West and they like what they have seen.

Politically, I guess the nub of the problem, the dilemma really is in this Parliament that is elected, that really is more powerful than the President. People think of the strong Russian presidency, the truth of the matter is that it is a very weak presidency. The Parliament is strong. The presidency is weak. It's understandable why it was strong. In the old days it was fine to put the power into the Parliament for the leadership of the country because it made no difference. They came to town twice a year. All that it did was get a free trip to Moscow because the rules made no difference, there were a couple

of votes and they were passed by acclamation and everyone went back home and six months later came back to Moscow. They had a free trip. It's a different game when you're trying to get democracy established.

Let me quickly more on and say that with respect to Boris Yeltsin. He's tough, he's smart, he's sensitive, the people like him. With all of his problems, people say, "How can you still be optimistic, Strauss, about Boris Yeltsin?" Well, I know him, I've seen him, and I've seen the Russian people relate to him. He's under siege from all quarters. He's under siege from all quarters, but I don't think, as President, he is threatened by any. His presidency isn't threatened.

No more turbulence on the streets of Moscow than in New York. As a matter of fact, less. No more turbulence than on the streets of Washington, D.C. As a matter of fact, less. Political turbulence, violence, or anything else. I don't understand why there isn't more turbulence, but there isn't.

I saw Boris Yeltsin up close for 16-17 months, and this I can say to you. I don't know what his future is with any certainty, but I do know that he's not just another politician in a tight spot. He's not just another politician in a tight spot. But, he's a committed, political and social revolutionary, seeking the means to break Russia out of a terrible tradition of desperatism and trying to bring it into the civilized world, and he has made one helluva lot of progress. With all of

his problems, and don't ever forget it for a minute. He despises Communism, and he's committed to reform, and as yet, he has shown no sign of backing off. In many ways, it seems to me that his revolutionary politics, if I might call it that in Russia, is sort of a mirror image of his personality. He's a product of the Soviet Union with all his background, and yet now, he has both feet planted on the cutting edge of change and a new world. And he is having a difficult time, as I said, as he is in the process of really undermining, and that's what he's doing. Really undermining the role of the Russian governing class for the last 75 years.

And so it is with all that's going on, the country in chaos in many areas, in economic chaos, production declining, inflation spiraling, almost reaching hyperinflation. Distribution of food products in terrible shape. Things seem to go along, and in all my travels throughout Russia, I continue to be amazed at the normalcy of life in each community. I continue to be amazed. And I can say to you that with all the negative aspects, when you look at it on a micro basis, that there are many positive things going on on a micro basis. And the question on my mind is how long, how long can the patience of the people last? How long can the patience of the people last? And that is the big question, and that is the big question for those of us in the West and particularly in this country. For I would say to you that if people tell you the charges between a weak

Russia, a weak Russia that could never be stabilized, politics of the world again are a strong and democratic Russia. That my friends is not the choice. There will be no weak Russia.

Russia is a great country with great people and great human and physical and natural resources, and there will be a great free democratic Russia or if we walk away from it, we in the West fail to give a hand as they solve their problems in their way, knowing there are limits to what we can do, strict limits for what we can do, we can only lend a hand, we can't interfere too much. But if, indeed, we are not engaged in lending a hand where we can, then I say to you the alternative is not a weak Russia, but a strong Russia in the hands of a vesper, who fills the vacuum, a fascist type vesper who fills the vacuum that's created when the West fails to stay engaged. And people ask, "Why are you on television so much, and why are you travelling around so much?" Well, I committed to Boris Yeltsin that I would tell the story as I saw it -- the good, the bad, and the indifferent about Russia. And I think there, if I indeed have a continuing role, and I hope I do, it's to try to bring what information I can through the background experience I had bring it to the people, because there's one thing I know when America gets ready to make its charges as to whether they stay engaged or not, that you give the American people the facts. You tell the American people the truth and they'll make the right choice

every darn time. And don't ever forget that. Thank you very much.