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The close cooperation between our two countries extends well beyond these athletics, as we’ve seen over this past month. In Washington, D.C., Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo and Minister of the Environment, Energy and Marine Affairs Ségolène Royal took part in the 2016 Climate Action Summit, where they spoke of their efforts to make France more sustainable overall, and to battle climate change at a global level. In California, the French coding school “42” announced the opening of its first U.S. location, which will now recruit talented students at the heart of Silicon Valley for this revolutionary computer science program. And right here at the Embassy of France, a number of American leaders, including Ambassador Charles Rivkin and Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, remarked upon the enduring strength of French-American economic relations in a globalized world. Whether on or off the field, we’re stronger when we come together.

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Minister Ségolène Royal and Mayor Anne Hidalgo discuss climate initiatives at a summit in Washington, D.C.

FOR LEADERS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, the signing of the COP21 agreement on April 22 marked only the start of a significant international effort to lower the rise in global temperature and create an overall healthier planet for future generations.

As two of France’s most visible leaders in environmental sustainability, Minister of the Environment, Energy and Marine Affairs Ségolène Royal and Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo attended the 2016 Climate Action Summit in Washington, D.C. At the high-level event, 700 representatives from businesses, cities, multilateral and civil society institutions discussed ways to accelerate global action on climate change.

At a press conference with fellow mayors Kasim Reed of Atlanta and Denis Coderre of Montreal, Mayor Hidalgo spoke about the actions the city of Paris has taken to reduce diesel emissions. Just this past month, Paris held the first of what will be a series of monthly car-free days on the Champs-Elysées.

When addressing the attendees of the Climate Summit, Minister Royal—who serves as the president of COP21—thanked all those who had worked to advance the agenda of the Paris Agreement, which was signed by 175 state representatives. Minister Royal also urged states to follow the examples of regions like Quebec, California and Ontario in implementing carbon pricing to make significant changes in energy use. “In order for the Paris Agreement to succeed,” she said, “we must act quickly and fairly together, and we must seize the opportunity to rise up to this challenge and shape the world of tomorrow.”

Secretary of State John Kerry attends meeting of International Syria Support Group in Paris

ON MAY 9, French Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development Jean-Marc Ayrault hosted a ministerial meeting of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris. The ISSG consists of countries that support a political resolution of the conflict in Syria.

During the meeting, the French minister spoke about international efforts to rebuild Syria and enable refugees to return to their home country. Minister Ayrault identified three principal goals in the pursuit of a peace process. First, the cessation of all military operations, except when used for combating terrorist groups recognized by the UN, second, the implementation of international humanitarian law to provide protection and aid to Syrian civilians; and finally, the relaunching of negotiations to establish a transitional government in Syria. It is the hope of the ISSG that this government will adopt a new Syrian constitution and organize elections, should this political transition be achieved.

Co-chair of the ISSG and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was in attendance at this meeting, where he spoke about America’s efforts to reinstate a nationwide cessation of hostilities in Syria, as well as the full delivery of humanitarian assistance. While in Paris, Secretary Kerry emphasized the importance of involvement by all parties to find a lasting solution to the Syrian crisis: “The most we diplomats can do is try and bring the parties together and put together an agreement that asserts the international community’s imperative,” he said. “It is going to be up to the commanders on the field and the interested parties, which includes us,” to carry out these goals.
Coming to an election near you: French website Voxe.org is working to mobilize voters around the world

Back in 2006, when Léonore de Roquefeuil was in her first year of undergraduate studies at Sciences Po in Bordeaux, she experienced a moment of inspiration. Protesting the introduction of the First Employment Contract (or Contrat Première Embauche), she felt “more alive than ever before.”

But when she spoke with her fellow protesters, she realized something: many young people did not understand what the First Employment Contract actually was. It was at this point that she joined a project that would eventually become the non-profit Voxe.org, an online platform that seeks to better explain complex legislation to users in order to foster a more informed electorate.

Voxe.org’s most important feature is its comparative elections tool, which allows users to compare candidates’ proposals side-by-side. Roquefeuil, now the CEO of Voxe.org, and Laila Lawa, who currently serves as the chief of staff for Voxe’s U.S. team, spoke with News From France about the need for a tool such as Voxe.org in an era when voters are overloaded with conflicting information from 24/7 media outlets.

**Why is there a need today for the tools such as those that Voxe.org has developed?**

Laila: Considering what is going on in politics today, being well informed is necessary lifeblood for Americans and for anyone who cares about freedom. In today’s media environment, we don’t get an unbiased understanding of the policies that politicians are putting out there.

**How did you develop the comparative elections tool?**

Léonore: The tool is crowdsourced, which means that we call on teams of voluntary contributors who add content about the platforms of certain candidates. Our team then verifies the sources, and checks to be sure that the information came directly from the candidates and was not modified in any way. We want to ensure that there is no bias in the content that is offered to users. In this way, it functions much like Wikipedia.

Laila: The platform is really straightforward and easy to use. In my opinion, it can actually help increase political participation. A lot of times apathetic citizens say the reason that they don’t vote is because they don’t have enough information about the candidates. This is a way to really democratize that information. Citizens can quite literally ensure that other people are educated about the elections and take part in the political process by recommending the app to those who need it.

**Have you noticed any improvements in citizen participation since you’ve launched your website?**

Léonore: For the time being, we are measuring our impact by the number of visitors along with the amount of time they spend on the site. Our main goal is not to get people to vote at any price. Instead, we aim to reduce passive abstention from voting. This abstention is usually caused by a lack of information and awareness, which in turn leads to low registration on voter lists.

We have done surveys to measure if our comparative tools aided users in making a choice or bolstered their choice (90% of users said yes) and if the tools changed users’ opinions unexpectedly (55% of users said yes).

**What are your goals for the future?**

Léonore: We are working on a number of new projects. We are continuing to develop and improve the comparative tools. We just launched one for the presidential elections in Peru, and this year we plan to cover the Brexit, the elections in the Dominican Republic and then in Ecuador. At the same time, we’re busy preparing for the presidential elections in France in 2017. We’re also developing a new mobile application, What The Voxe, which will allow users to become informed and engaged in just a few clicks. And finally, we’re testing Voxe Academy, a school for civic education.

En chiffres...

The last year that France’s national team won the euro championship cup, held in Belgium and the Netherlands. They clinched a victory over Italy, with David Trezeguet scoring the winning goal. “Les Bleus” also won in 1984 over Spain. That year, France also hosted the tournament.

The height above normal level that Paris’s Seine River had risen as of June 2. Heavy rains and flooding caused a number of tennis matches at the French Open to be canceled. Such rainfall hadn’t been recorded since May 1960.
At the Invictus Games, “wounded warriors” find new sense of strength

FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN THE MILITARY, serving one’s country is a lifestyle. But what happens when they can no longer perform tasks that are essential to their job? For hundreds of thousands of wounded, ill or injured soldiers, this reality can be particularly hard to adjust to. Through the Invictus Games, these men and women find a new way to serve their country, as competing athletes in a Paralympic-style sporting competition created for “wounded warriors.” This year, the French team took on a number of different challenges in Orlando, Florida, where the 2016 Invictus Games were held. They returned home with close to 40 medals—but most importantly, with a newfound sense of courage and strength.

The initiative
The Invictus Games were launched in 2014 by Prince Harry of Wales, who became interested in working with veterans after serving two tours in Afghanistan. He was inspired by the Warrior Games, a series of sporting competitions organized by the U.S. Department of Defense for wounded, ill and injured servicemen and women from both the American military and British Armed Forces. At the Warrior Games, Prince Harry saw that for the participating athletes, this event was much more than just a competition. It also provided a way for soldiers and veterans to heal, both physically and psychologically, while continuing to serve their country, albeit not on the battlefield.

Prince Harry therefore created the Invictus Games, an international event similar to the Warrior Games, open to service members around the world, both active duty and veterans. The title of the games was inspired by a poem of the same name by William Ernest Henley, an amputee who wrote about perseverance in the face of grave illness and injury: “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.”

The first Invictus Games took place in London, and were a great success. But that was just the beginning of the Invictus story. From May 6 to 12, the second edition of the games was held in Orlando, Florida. More than 500 military athletes from 15 different countries were invited to participate, including 31 from France. Having previously been posted all over the world, these French servicemen and women were brought together for a special event to compete for their country.

The French team
In France, preparations for the 2016 Invictus Games began several months prior to the event. The National Center of Sports and Defense based in Fontainebleau coordinated the selection and training of the French team. In early February, 31 members of the French military were chosen to represent France at the Invictus Games. For the next few months, they trained to compete in their respective events. Ten different sporting events were offered at the games, including basketball, volleyball, swimming, track and field, and archery. Many of the sports were adapted to suit the needs of injured players, especially those who have lost limbs.

The members of the French team who competed in this year’s Invictus Games have served their country in many different capacities, whether in the National Police, Land Forces, Marines, Air Force, health services or as non-combatant personnel. Despite having sustained life-changing injuries and conditions—many have endured amputations, brain damage, paralysis and post-traumatic stress disorder—they have adapted to fight harder than ever, channeling their competitive spirit into athletics.

This is a strong message to all soldiers serving in the army: we do not forget our wounded.

—Lieutenant Colonel Mouille

The positive effect of sports on recovering members of the military has been well documented. Various studies by organizations such as the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and the Psychology of Sport and Exercise Review have found that participating in sports has a positive psychological event on veterans, improving their overall self-esteem and mood, as well as giving them a renewed sense of energy and enthusiasm.
The service members representing France at the Invictus Games spoke openly about how sports had helped them to find strength after they had been injured. Commander Philippe Robert said that sports taught him that "neither the origin nor the nature of the wound is important, and that even with a handicap, we can play sports and deliver an excellent performance." Sergeant Major Franck Gibot of the National Police said that competitions such as the Invictus Games allowed him to feel "normal" again after returning from his deployment in Afghanistan. "After the war, the fight continues," he emphasized.

France's Ministry of Defense strongly supported France's Invictus athletes. "Even if they cannot fight, they still represent France and their regiment," said Lieutenant Colonel Mouille. "This is a strong message to all soldiers serving in the army: we do not forget our wounded."

Bringing home gold, silver and bronze
It was no surprise that with a strong and well-rounded team, France performed extremely well at the 2016 Invictus Games. Most of the athletes competed in multiple sporting events, and the team brought home 37 medals in total—11 gold, 11 silver and 15 bronze.

Standout players included Linda Coyac, a 1st-class Master Corporal in France's Land Forces, who took home two bronze medals in individual track and field events, including the women's 200 meter and the 100 meter dash. Major Franck Robin came in first place in the men's hand bike race, and Damien Brou and David Travadon finished second and third in the men's road bike circuit race, respectively.

French teammates Djamel Mastouri, who has served in a non-combatant personnel role, and Jonathan Hamou, a Sergeant in the Air Force, shared a special moment on the track when they ran neck-in-neck in the men's 1500 meter race. They won gold and silver, respectively. In the men's 400 meter dash, Hamou took gold while Mastouri won silver by a difference of a mere 0.04 seconds. It was Hamou's first gold medal.

The French team performed particularly well in archery, where they took home gold. Sergeant Major Franck Gibot of the National Police, a member of the archery team, spoke of his pride at having come this far: "It is amazing what the Invictus Games have done for us...we are truly humbled to be part of this experience and to share the same path again with fellow servicemen and women from around the world whom we fought alongside and now with whom we share the road to triumph, to be Invictus."

Finding strength through teamwork
The Invictus Games delivered on all that Prince Harry promised during the opening ceremonies: that the audience would be inspired, moved, and above all, entertained. Throughout the four-day event, French participants had support not only from their teammates, but also from all of the family and friends that came to cheer them on. They were happy to be fighting again for their country, and to see that they had so many people to encourage them in the process.

The French Invictus athletes were well received back home, where Defense Minister Jean-Yves le Drian congratulated them: "Beyond these excellent results," he said in a statement, "I salute the courage and tenacity of these soldiers, veterans and civilian personnel who, in their journey as wounded persons, found a way to recover through sports." You can be sure that these exceptional athletes are already training for the next round of the Invictus Games, which will be held in Toronto in 2020.
When former U.S. Ambassador to France Charles Rivkin described France and America’s economic relationship at the first-ever French-American Business Week, it was as a “past, present and future friendship.” The current and future ties that Rivkin spoke of, particularly in the economic sector, were central to the two-day conference organized by the French-American Chamber of Commerce, in close cooperation with the French Embassy, on May 18 and 19.

Over the course of two days, business leaders from both France and America took part in both panels and networking events that looked at how the two countries could expand business relationships and support bilateral trade. Topics addressed included cyber security, corporate social responsibility and transparency, as well as the positive impact of women in business. A special session was dedicated to sustainable development, exploring innovative urban approaches to transport, energy, the circular economy and governance.

Three keynote speakers discussed the different ways that French-American relations have played a role in their own professional lives. Arne Sorenson, CEO & President of Marriott International, spoke about his work in the tourism industry, while Charles Rivkin, now the U.S. secretary of state for economic and business affairs, stressed the need for new trade legislation such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) to create opportunities for cross-investment between France and America. Associate Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer closed the conference, speaking about his personal ties to France (he speaks French and is a member of the prestigious French Academy), as well as the ways that globalization factors into the Supreme Court’s work on a daily basis.

First-ever French-American Business Week takes place at the French Embassy

When French entrepreneur and businessman Xavier Niel opened innovative coding school “42” in Paris in 2013, it was with the goal of challenging the traditional fields of technology and education. Convinced that France’s education system did not train students to enter into the 21st-century workforce with the skills necessary for success, Niel joined with business partners Florian Bucher, Nicolas Sadirac and Kwame Yamgnane to invest in 42. The coding school has been immensely successful in France. On May 17, Niel and his team made an exciting announcement: 42 will be expanding to Fremont, California, in the heart of Silicon Valley.

For the revolutionary coding university, Silicon Valley was a logical next step. Located in the international hub of all things tech, students at the new California location of 42 will be able to develop their IT skills right next door to major companies such as Apple, Facebook, Google, etc. 42 stands out due to its unique approach to learning. Accepted students pay nothing to attend, and do not receive training in a traditional classroom, but rather through “Peer-to-Peer Learning,” a collaborative method of self-education. With three to five years of training from 42, Niel and his team believe that graduates will be prepared to work at the best technology companies in the world.

The new 200,000 square foot building housing 42 in Fremont offers A digital image of the original 42 coding school in Paris. Both locations were designed with collaborative learning in mind.

the most innovative technological tools to its students, including iMac computers, a high-speed broadband network and large capacity storage servers. Aspiring coding students can now take the online test to enter the 42 program for the 2016-2017 school year.

Revolutionary French coding school “42” set to open a new location in Silicon Valley
Since 1960, adventure-seekers around the world have been attempting what was once considered impossible: to sail from Europe to America in one fell swoop, in the fastest time possible. The Transat Bakerly, as the race is called today, began as the distant dream of a number of British sailors, but was officially launched when The Observer stepped in to sponsor the initiative in 1960. The first-ever race began in Plymouth, England and ended in New York. Sir Francis Chichester won this race, completing the route in 40 days. Ever since, sailors from around the world have embarked on the journey every four years, braving life-threatening storms and heavy winds while adapting to the ever-changing technologies of sailing to compete for the top title in this race. The end destination has changed over time—for a number of years it was Newport, Rhode Island, and then Boston—but for the first time since 1960, the 2016 Transat Bakerly race ended in New York.

For France, which boasts a strong tradition of sailing, the Transat Bakerly has always been an important and closely followed race. Numerous French skippers attempt the crossing each year, although only one person can bring home the top prize. This year, 33 year-old French sailor François Gabart was victorious. In just eight days, eight hours and 54 minutes, Gabart crossed the finish line in New York on his 100-ft. trimaran, Macif. From Plymouth to New York, he traveled a total of 4,634 miles at an average speed of 23.11 knots.

On May 10, with the New York skyline in view, Gabart raised his hands in victory. He and his team were welcomed by supporters that evening in New York harbor, where they popped champagne in celebration. Happy but exhausted from the journey, Gabart attested that the Macif was “really difficult to sail,” and that competition can sometimes be grueling. “You can’t stop,” he said, “you don’t have time to sleep, you don’t have time to rest and you have to think about the boat all the time. This is a rhythm I wouldn’t be able to sustain for much longer.” He did say, however, that being the first competitor to arrive in New York as the sun set was “perfect.”

French sailor François Gabart raises his hands in victory as he sails past the Statue of Liberty in New York.

EU Open House celebrates the sport of “football”

Each year, embassies of European Union member countries open their doors to the public for one special day in Washington, D.C. For the past several years, France and Germany have teamed up to host this event together. These European neighbors located at the heart of Europe share many things with one another. Together, France and Germany’s citizens make up 30 percent of the total European population, and the two countries are important partners in trade, education and tourism.

This year, the Embassies of Germany and France wanted to celebrate a pastime that both countries hold dear to their hearts: “football,” otherwise known as soccer in the U.S. In June, France is hosting the UEFA EURO 2016, a European soccer championship that takes place every four years (both countries have taken home the winning trophy in the past). At the EU Open House, attendees had the opportunity to try their hand at scoring a goal, and even practice dribbling with professional German soccer player Julian Buescher, who is part of the Washington, D.C.-based team D.C. United.

There were goodies galore, from French and German flags to mini soccer balls to samples of regional cheeses and jams. Many guests enjoyed posing for photos at the “selfie station,” whether as tourists in front of the Eiffel Tower or as embassy spokespeople standing at a podium. As always, there was fun for both kids and adults, with face painting, a rocket-launching station, live music and lots of delicious French and German food. After another successful year, the French and German Embassies will soon start planning for the 2017 EU Open House.
Brocéliande

TO THE NORTH OF THE ATLANTIC COAST in the region of Brittany lies a mythical area that is the stuff of legends. While the forest is officially called Paimpont, it is also widely known as Brocéliande, the site of the legends of King Arthur. Whether or not you believe in these legends, the sites of Brocéliande will make you feel as if you are living in a Medieval fantasy.

One of the most popular sites in Brocéliande is the Château de Comper, a 13th-century castle that now serves as the Center of Arthurian Imagination, a museum featuring exhibitions, events and tours related to Arthurian legends. The castle is surrounded by a lake, in which a fairy named Viviane is said to reside in a crystal palace built by Merlin.

When hiking through the forest, visitors may happen upon some of the most important symbols of the legends of King Arthur. Some of these include King Arthur’s sword as well as the Fountain of Eternal Youth. Even outside of the forest, vestiges of Arthurian legend remain, such as in the Church of Saint-Onenne, where the art is inspired by scenes from these stories. While these tales may be mere fantasy, when you visit Brocéliande you should have an active imagination and most of all, a love of greenery and nature. This is one of France’s most stunning forests.