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SPEECH BY REP. GERALD R. FORD, R-MICH.
REPUBLICAN LEADER, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BEFORE THE 21st ANNUAL MICHIGAN DISTRICT KEY CLUB CONVENTION
AT TRAVERSE CITY, MICHIGAN
8:30 A.M. APRIL 15, 1972

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY

Good morning. It's great to be here with you this morning and to see all these freshly scrubbed young faces. It reminds me of when I was young and felt I could lick my weight in wildcats. That was quite a while ago, though.

Maybe you've heard about the fact that the House Majority Leader and I are going to visit mainland China in a couple of months. I am really looking forward to the trip.

I can see it now. I get off the plane in Peking, and one Communist says to another, "Well, there goes the neighborhood!"

I'm practicing using chopsticks. But it'll be just my luck that when I get to China and sit down to dinner the first course will be soup.

They say the Forbidden City is in China. I always thought it was downtown Traverse City after midnight.

But I'm sure you're having a great time here in Traverse City. And certainly each and every one of you can be proud of himself. You can be proud of yourselves because you belong to one of the finest service organizations in the world, the Key Club.

I look at you and I see what perhaps you yourselves do not see--that you are honest and courageous and hungry to find the meaning in life.

There is meaning in life, and you will search it out because you are seeking challenge. Above all, you want to make a contribution to society...and you are already doing that.

What you want most is to feel that you count--that you stand for something. You will achieve that feeling of standing for something only if you believe in something--only if you have faith...in yourself, in God, in your fellowman, and in your country.

This morning I hope to give you a little insight into yourselves and into this great country we call America. I find today that too many people do not know what it means to be an American and what it means to live in America.

(more)

One way of achieving the feeling that you stand for something comes from seeing yourself as a part of the great history of the United States of America. You are part of it, because you are the people and the American people are America.

The late President Dwight D. Eisenhower was a great American who knew what it meant to be a dedicated citizen of this wonderful land of ours, and this was one of the reasons we all loved him.

Ike was not a silver-tongued orator but he spoke words of wisdom because he was a good man and he felt deeply about the American people and his country.

President Eisenhower lived to see racial turmoil and disorders on college campuses. But to the end of his life he remained steadfast in his faith in young Americans and in the land he loved.

Three years before he died, President Eisenhower granted an interview to a White House correspondent. The occasion was his 75th birthday. And he said:

"I still have tremendous confidence and belief in my country. No matter what we try to do in the world there is only one place from which we can do it--a firm, sound base. That firm, sound base is the strength of the United States. And, the United States' strength is not just its military might. Indeed, it's not just its economic might. It's also its moral might."

Ike went on to speak of the great virtues--individual self-reliance, patriotism and dedication.

Then he said: "I'd like to think we live by such words as decency and fairness, and the realization that each of us is a member of the proudest nation in the world--and then act that way."

These are the lessons we find in the lives of great Americans--the lessons we find woven throughout the strong fabric of our nation. Live the good life, the moral life, the decent life--and be proud of it. "Be a member of the proudest nation in the world--and then act that way."

Look at our history not as an assignment of so many pages to be read in a textbook but as a vibrant, living story of the men and women who spent months tossing about the Atlantic Ocean in tiny sailing vessels to reach a strange new world, who survived threats of shipwreck, mutiny, Indian attack, hunger and disease, and established a way of life that was to change the world.

We have great need of heroes today to put new inspiration and backbone into a country grown weary and tired and, God forbid, bored.

(more)

Where can we find such inspiration, the moral courage we so desperately need today?

Think awhile about the simple words uttered by President Eisenhower just before he died. He said: "I have always loved my wife. I have always loved my family. I have always loved my country."

Ike lived a good life because he treasured moral values. Because he treasured moral values, he had moral courage. You, too, can live the good life. You, too, can be courageous and bold--and count for something.

We are historical human beings, we Americans, each of us who is worthy of the name. We spring from ancestors who were heroes, every one--men and women whose spiritual courage and back-breaking toil became the soul and sinew of a great nation. No radical student leader who feels bored with or guilty about the life of affluence bestowed upon him can destroy our sense of purpose.

Why should we doubt ourselves? Why should anyone in his right mind question the great virtues President Eisenhower held dear--decency and honor and the love of a man for his wife and his family and his country?

We are strong here in America--strong as individuals and as a nation because ours is a glorious heritage. Our nation performed mighty acts as a young giant and indeed recorded some of its greatest feats in just the last 30 years.

It was America that was stung into action at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, and then for four years fought the first truly global war as no nation has ever fought before...and won a tremendous victory.

It was America that went to work the minute the guns fell silent, to build peace and to rebuild the world. We resurrected Europe. We occupied Japan only to make it a democratic nation and one of the most prosperous on earth. We reluctantly accepted the role of Free World leader forced on us by the Soviet Union and the Cold War. We defended Greece and Turkey against Communist aggression and subversion and saved South Korea from Communist takeover. We formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and fashioned it into a great military force to keep the peace in Europe. We lifted the Berlin blockade and kept a free people free. We have fought valiantly in Vietnam for the right of a people to decide under what kind of government they will live. The American people have been divided on Vietnam and we are ending our involvement in that conflict. But let there be no doubt about this. Our purpose in Vietnam was noble.

(more)

Ours is a glorious nation. Ours is a glorious history--and you Key Club members are part of it.

You are part of a nation dedicated to freedom and the highest ideals of man, a nation that is determined to vanquish poverty and hunger, a nation that has catapulted men through space to explore the surface of the moon, a nation that has resolved to solve the problem of racism, a nation that is exalting the quest for human excellence.

Life in America does have meaning. It speaks of what is best in man.

So live a life that is meaningful, a life that is rooted in the great virtues of family love and love for your country.

Man walks this earth but a brief span of years. What matters most is not how long he lives but how well.

Here is a little bit of advice, a capsule of wisdom I hope you will accept:

"Live among men as if God beheld you; speak to God as if men were listening."

And now, God bless you, and good luck to you all.

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