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THE WHITE HOUSE

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO A JOINT SESSION OF THE CONGRESS

THE HOUSE CHAMBER



9:06 P.M. EDT

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, distinguished guests and my very dear friends:

My fellow Americans, we have a lot of work to do. My former colleagues, you and I have a lot of work to do. Let's get on with it.

Needless to say, I am deeply grateful for the wonderfully warm welcome. I can never express my gratitude adequately.

I am not here to make an inaugural address. The Nation needs action, not words. Nor will this be a formal report on the State of the Union. God willing, I will have at least three more chances to do that.

It is good to be back in the People's House. But this cannot be a real homecoming. Under the Constitution, I now belong to the Executive Branch. The Supreme Court has even ruled that I am the Executive Branch, head, heart, and hand.

With due respect to the learned Justices -- and I greatly respect the Judiciary -- part of my heart will always be here on Capitol Hill. I know well the co-equal role of the Congress in our constitutional process. I love the House of Representatives. I revere the traditions of the Senate despite my too short internship in that great body. As President, within the limits of basic principles, my motto towards the Congress is communication, conciliation, compromise and cooperation.

This Congress, unless it has changed, I am confident, will be my working partner as well as my most constructive critic. I am not asking for conformity. I am dedicated to the two-party system, and you know which party I belong to.

I do not want a honeymoon with you. I want a good marriage.

I want progress and I want problem-solving which requires my best efforts, and also your best efforts.

I have no need to learn how Congress speaks for the people. As President, I intend to listen.

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(OVER)

But I also intend to listen to the people themselves -- all the people -- as I promised last Friday. I want to be sure that we are all tuned in to the real voice of America.

My Administration starts off by seeking unity in diversity. My office door has always been open, and that is how it is going to be at the White House. Yes, Congressmen will be welcomed -- if you don't overdo it. (Laughter)

The first seven words of the Constitution and the most important are these: We the people of the United States. We, the people, ordained and established the Constitution and reserved to themselves all powers not granted to Federal and State Governments. I respect and will always be conscious of that fundamental rule of freedom.

Only eight months ago, when I last stood here, I told you I was a Ford, not a Lincoln. Tonight I say I am still a Ford, but I am not a Model T.

I do have some old fashioned ideas, however. I believe in the very basic decency and fairness of America. I believe in the integrity and patriotism of the Congress. And while I am aware of the House rule that no one ever speaks to the galleries, I believe in the First Amendment and the absolute necessity of a free press.

But I also believe that over two centuries since the First Continental Congress was first convened, the direction of our Nation's movement has been forward. I am here to confess that in my first campaign for President -- of my senior class in South High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan -- I headed the Progressive Party ticket, and lost. Maybe that is why I became a Republican. (Laughter)

Now I ask you to join with me in getting this country revved up and moving.

My instinctive judgment is that the State of the Union is excellent. But the state of our economy is not so good. Everywhere I have been as Vice President, some 118,000 miles in 40 States and some 55 press conferences, the unanimous concern of Americans is inflation.

For once all the polls seem to agree. They also suggest that the people blame Government far more than either management or labor or for the high cost of everything they have to buy.

You who come from 50 States, three territories, and the District of Columbia, know this better than I do. That is why you have created, since I left, your new Budget Reform Committee. I welcome it, and I will work with its members to bring the Federal budget into balance in fiscal year 1976.

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The fact is that for the past 25 years that I had the honor of serving in this body, the Federal budget has been balanced in only six.

Mr. Speaker, I am a little late getting around to it, but confession is good for the soul. I have sometimes voted to spend more taxpayer's money for worthy Federal projects in Grand Rapids while I vigorously opposed wasteful spending boondoggles in Oklahoma. (Laughter)

Be that as it may, Mr. Speaker, you and I have always stood together against unwarranted cuts in national defense. This is no time to change that nonpartisan policy.

Just as escalating Federal spending has been a prime cause of higher prices over many years, it may take some time to stop inflation. But we must begin right now.

For a start, before your Labor Day recess, Congress should reactivate the Cost of Living Council through passage of a clean bill, without reimposing controls, that will let us monitor wages and prices to expose abuses.

Whether we like it or not, the American wage earner and the American housewife are a lot better economists than most economists care to admit. They know that a Government big enough to give you everything you want, is a Government big enough to take from you everything you have.

If we want to restore confidence in ourselves as working politicians, the first thing we all have to do is to learn to say, "No."

The first specific request by the Ford Administration is not to Congress but to the voters in the upcoming November election. It is this, very simple: Support your candidates, Congressmen and Senators, Democrats or Republicans, conservatives or liberals, who consistently vote for tough decisions to cut the cost of Government, restrain Federal spending and bring inflation under control.

I applaud the initiatives Congress has already taken. The only fault I find with the Joint Economic Committee's study on inflation, authorized last week, is that we need its expert findings in six weeks instead of six months.

A month ago, the distinguished majority leader of the United States Senate asked the White House to convene an economic conference of Members of Congress, the President's economic consultants and some of the best economic brains from labor, industry and agriculture.

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Later, this was perfected by resolution to assemble a domestic summit meeting to devise a bipartisan action for stability and growth in the American economy. Neither I nor my staff have much time right now for letter writing. So, I will respond. I accept the suggestion and I will personally preside.

Furthermore, I propose that this summit meeting be held at an early date, in full view of the American public. They are as anxious as we are to get the right answers.

My first priority is to work with you to bring inflation under control. Inflation is domestic enemy number one. To restore economic confidence, the Government in Washington must provide some leadership. It does no good to blame the public for spending too much when the Government is spending too much.

I began to put my Administration's own economic house in order starting last Friday.

I instructed my Cabinet officers and counsellors and my White House staff to make fiscal restraint their first order of business, and to save every taxpayer's dollar the safety and genuine welfare of our great Nation will permit. Some economic activities will be affected more by monetary and fiscal restraint than other activities. Good government clearly requires that we tend to the economic problems facing our country in a spirit of equity to all of our citizens in all segments of our society.

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Tonight, obviously, is no time to threaten you with vetoes. But I do have the last recourse, and I am a veteran of many a veto fight right here in this great chamber. Can't we do a better job by reasonable compromise? I hope we can.

Minutes after I took the Presidential oath, the joint leadership of Congress told me at the White House they would go more than half way to meet me. This was confirmed in your unanimous concurrent resolution of cooperation, for which I am deeply grateful. If, for my part, I go more than half way to meet the Congress, maybe we can find a much larger area of national agreement.

I bring no legislative shopping list here this evening. I will deal with specifics in future messages and talks with you, but here are a few examples of how seriously I feel about what we must do together.

Last week, the Congress passed the elementary and secondary education bill, and I found it on my desk. Any reservations I might have about some of its provisions -- and I do have -- fade in comparison to the urgent needs of America for quality education. I will sign it in a few days.

I must be frank. In implementing its provisions, I will oppose excessive funding during this inflationary crisis.

As Vice President, I studied various proposals for better health care financing. I saw them coming closer together and urged my friends in the Congress and in the Administration to sit down and sweat out a sound compromise. The Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan goes a long ways toward providing early relief to people who are sick.

Why don't we write -- and I ask this with the greatest spirit of cooperation -- why don't we write a good health bill on the statute books in 1974, before this Congress adjourns.

The economy of our country is critically dependent on how we interact with the economies of other countries. It is little comfort that our inflation is only a part of a world-wide problem, or that American families need less of their paychecks for groceries than most of our foreign friends.

As one of the building blocks of peace, we have taken the lead in working toward a more open and more equitable world economic system. A new round of international trade negotiations started last September among 105 nations in Tokyo. The others are waiting for the United States Congress to grant the necessary authority to the Executive branch to proceed.

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With modification, the trade reform bill passed by the House last year would do a good job. I understand good progress has been made in the Senate Committee on Finance. But I am optimistic as always that the Senate will pass an acceptable bill quickly as a key part of our joint prosperity campaign.

I am determined to expedite other international economic plans. We will be working together with other nations to find better ways to prevent shortages of food and fuel. We must not let last winter's energy crisis happen again. I will push Project Independence for our own good and the good of others. In that, too, I will need your help.

Successful foreign policy is an extension of the hopes of the whole American people for a world of peace and orderly reform and orderly freedom. So, I would say a few words to our distinguished guests from the governments of other nations where, as at home, it is my determination to deal openly with allies and adversaries.

Over the past five and one-half years in Congress, and as Vice President, I have fully supported the outstanding foreign policy of President Nixon. This policy I intend to continue.

Throughout my public service, starting with wartime Naval duty under the command of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, I have upheld all our Presidents when they spoke for my country to the world. I believe the Constitution commands this. I know that in this crucial area of international policy, I can count on your firm support.

Now, let there be no doubt or any misunderstanding anywhere, and I emphasize anywhere. There are no opportunities to exploit, should anyone so desire. There will be no change of course, no relaxation of vigilance, no abandonment of the helm of our Ship of State as the watch changes.

We stand by our commitments and we will live up to our responsibilities, in our formal alliances, in our friendships, and in our improving relations with potential adversaries.

On this, Americans are united and strong. Under my term of leadership, I hope we will become more united. I am certain America will remain strong.

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A strong defense is the surest way to peace. Strength makes detente attainable. Weakness invites war as my generation, my generation knows from four very bitter experiences.

Just as America's will for peace is second to none, so will America's strength be second to none.

We cannot rely on the forbearance of others to protect this Nation. The power and diversity of the Armed Forces, active guard and reserve, the resolve of our fellow citizens, the flexibility in our command to navigate international waters that remain troubled, are all essential to our security.

I shall continue to insist on civilian control of our superb military establishment. The Constitution plainly requires the President to be Commander-in-Chief and I will be.

Our job will not be easy. In promising continuity, I cannot promise simplicity. The problems and challenges of the world remain complex and difficult. But we have set out on a path of reason, of fairness, and we will continue on it.

As guideposts on that path, I offer the following:

To our allies of a generation in the Atlantic community and Japan, I pledge continuity in the loyal collaboration on our many mutual endeavors.

To our friends and allies in this hemisphere, I pledge continuity in the deepening dialogue to define renewed relationships of equality and justice.

To our allies and friends in Asia, I pledge a continuity in our support for their security, independence, and economic development. In Indochina, we are determined to see the observance of the Paris Agreement on Vietnam and the cease-fire and negotiated settlement in Laos. We hope to see an early compromise settlement in Cambodia.

To the Soviet Union, I pledge continuity in our commitment to the course of the past three years. To our two peoples, and to all mankind, we owe a continued effort to live, and where possible to work together in peace; for in a thermo-nuclear age there can be no alternative to a positive and peaceful relationship between our nations.

To the People's Republic of China, whose legendary hospitality I enjoyed, I pledge continuity in our commitment to the principles of the Shanghai Communique. The new relationship built on those principles has demonstrated that it serves serious and objective mutual interests and has become an enduring future of the world scene.

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To the nations in the Middle East, I pledge continuity in our vigorous efforts to advance the progress which has brought hopes of peace to that region after 25 years as a hotbed of war. We shall carry out our promise to promote continuing negotiations among all parties for a complete, just and lasting settlement.

To all nations, I pledge continuity in seeking a common global goal, a stable international structure of trade and finance which reflects the interdependence of all peoples.

To the entire international community -- to the United Nations, to the world's non-aligned nations, and to all others -- I pledge continuity in our dedication to the humane goals which throughout our history have been so much of America's contribution to mankind.

So long as the peoples of the world have confidence in our purposes and faith in our word, the age-old vision of peace on earth grows brighter.

I pledge myself unreservedly to that goal. I say to you in words that cannot be improved upon: Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.

As Vice President, at the request of the President, I addressed myself to the individual rights of Americans in the area of privacy. There will be no illegal tappings, eavesdropping, buggings, or break-ins by my Administration. There will be hot pursuit of tough laws to prevent illegal invasion of privacy in both Government and private activities.

On the higher plane of public morality, there is no need for me to preach tonight. We have thousands of far better preachers and millions of sacred scriptures to guide us on the path of personal right-living and exemplary official conduct. If we can make effective and earlier use of moral and ethical wisdom of the centuries in today's complex society, we will prevent more crime and more corruption than all the policemen and prosecutors governments can ever deter. If I may say so, this is a job that must begin at home, not in Washington.

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I once told you that I am not a saint, and I hope never to see the day that I cannot admit having made a mistake, so I will close with another confession.

Frequently, along the tortuous road of recent months from this chamber to the President's House, I protested that I was my own man. Now I realize that I was wrong.

I am your man, for it was your carefully weighed confirmation that changed my occupation.

The truth is I am the people's man, for you acted in their name, and I accepted and began my new and solemn trust with a promise to serve all the people and do the best that I can for America.

When I say all the people, I mean exactly that.

To the limits of my strength and ability, I will be the President of black, brown, red and white Americans, of old and young, of women's liberationists and male chauvinists (Laughter) and all the rest of us in between, of the poor and the rich, of native sons and new refugees, of those who work at lathes or at desks or in mines or in the fields, or of Christians, Jews, Moslems, Buddhists and Atheists, if there really are any Atheists after what we have all been through.

Fellow Americans, one final word:

I want to be a good President.

I need your help.

We all need God's sure guidance.

With it, nothing can stop the United States of America.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 9:38 P.M. EDT)