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## THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT A DINNER HONORING THE RECONVENING  
OF THE FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

## INDEPENDENCE MALL

9:44 PM EDT

Governor Shapp, let me say at the outset, I am deeply grateful for your overly generous and very kind remarks. I accept the invitation for July 4, 1976.

Mayor Rizzo, distinguished Governors, my beloved and wonderful former colleagues in the United States Senate and House of Representatives, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: It is a great privilege and a very high honor to have the opportunity of participating in this function tonight.

Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, was the cradle of American liberty. Love and Liberty are two pretty good words with which to start a nation.

I learned in school a good many years ago that the first shots of the American revolution were fired at Concord, and the last at Yorktown. But it was in Philadelphia that 56 patriots from 12 of the original 13 colonies convened two centuries ago to protest the military coercion of Massachusetts and the united economic action against the mother country. I am sure that the history books will show, in addition, that both George Washington and John Adams slept here. (Laughter)

"The Congress," John Adams wrote home to his wife Abigail, "is tedious beyond expression. This assembly is like no other that ever existed. Every man is a great man, an orator, a critic, a statesman; and therefore every man upon every question must show his oratory, his criticism, and his political abilities."

"The consequence of this," Adams concluded wearily, "is that business is drawn and spun out to an immeasurable length."

Speaking as a former Congressman, I can assure you that more than once in the last 25 years -- especially after a long, long debate in the House of Representatives -- I have found myself saying pretty much the same to my wife, Betty.

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Only the names have changed -- that and the fact that John Adams never had to fix his own breakfast.  
(Laughter)

Yes, there was plenty of pessimism in the land in 1774 when that First Continental Congress gathered in the City Tavern over there some place. And the problems they faced were enough to drive the bravest patriots to a tavern.

Individually and collectively, the 15 colonies were divided by class, by tradition, by religion, by ethnic origins, and by economic interests. And as for a central structure of government, they had to make that up as they went along.

On the opening day of the First Continental Congress when the countdown to our independence began, Patrick Henry struck, I think, an appropriate and common chord. In his opening address, he declared, and I quote: "The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers and New Englanders are no more. I am a Virginian, but I am an American."

This is a unique insight into the attitude of the Congress. Their determination of all for one and one for all. The punitive acts that were directed at Massachusetts and the closing of Boston Harbor would have diverted trade and commerce to other ports -- to New York, to Philadelphia, to Baltimore and to Norfolk. Yet unselfishly, even in that day, all the colonies knew that any such benefits would be only temporary -- the cause of Boston was the cause of them all.

America needs that sense of unity today. The cause of the South is the cause of the North; the cause of the West is the cause of the East. We are today, as our forefathers were, bound together in the great American experiment -- the greatest experiment in the history of man governing himself.

Yet the American Revolution remains a lesson as to what a few, a very few dedicated people can do. Today we number 50 states and span a continent. We reach northward to the Pacific and Alaska, and west to the Islands of Hawaii. Our people number more than 211 million.

Two hundred years ago our population in those 13 sparsely populated colonies were 2-1/2 million. Historians estimate that of that number only one-third, one-third out of 2-1/2 million, provided the strength and the fiber and the dedication of the Revolution. We can call them the patriots. Another third felt very deeply their allegiance to the Crown. Some served in the King's army, some fled to England, Canada or other British Colonies -- they were the Loyalists. The other one-third sat on the fence. I guess today we would call them mugwumps. But history fortunately has long forgotten the timid.

Last December, the Congress created a Federal American Revolutionary Bicentennial to coordinate and facilitate Bicentennial activities. The new Administration is now hard at work on a nonpartisan basis, with the Bicentennial organizations in each of the 50 States, the territories, the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Already some 1300 cities, towns, villages, counties, some Indian tribes, embracing more than a third of our total population, have met the qualifications for the official "Bicentennial Communities" designation. Our new director of the Bicentennial, John Warner, tells me that the list is growing phenomenally, month by month. Thousands of programs, thousands of events are crowding the Bicentennial calendar.

It is interesting to note that a growing number of foreign governments are planning to participate in our Bicentennial. I think this is welcome news because there is no nation which is not a great part of our American heritage; the blood of all peoples flows in our veins; whatever we are or have been able to accomplish, we owe in large measure to our richly diverse heritage from around the world.

If I remember my Bible correctly, I think this quote is appropriate: "The beauty of Joseph's coat is its many colors."

But may I offer my own idea on how best to commemorate the Bicentennial. Let us all, during the coming months, study carefully the character, study the qualities of the men who founded this Nation. Let us try to grasp the stuff that was inside of each of them and all of them collectively. And then, let us release, if we can, the same spirit within ourselves. We have the same capacity for unity, discipline and sacrifice. Let us show the world that the character and quality of the American people has not changed in 200 years.

What we are really doing, as we celebrate our Nation's 200th birthday, is actually laying the cornerstone of America's third century. And every citizen of this great Nation should have his or her name inscribed on that imaginary stone so that all who come after us can say, as we say of the 56 who labored here for us, "They gave of themselves, they cared."

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I am especially glad to note that we are launching the celebration of our Bicentennial right here in the great City of Philadelphia. Here, the first of my two predecessors as Presidents labored as members of the First Continental Congress. I am glad that this period of national rededication, which will extend to July 4, 1976, begins on this almost forgotten date, when the colonial delegates wrestled with their common problems of skyrocketing prices, shrinking purchasing power, shortages, hoarding, and financial speculation.

It was interesting to me to find, in reading the document which recorded what was said here, that the men and women of 1774 were inflation fighters before they took up arms against the British redcoats. Actually, they met voluntarily to wage economic warfare for their future freedom and prosperity, even before the Liberty Bell tolled the birth of a new nation.

The spirit of 1774 was a sudden quickening of American unity in the face of common calamity, of confidence of patriotism and determination of the people themselves, and a mutual willingness to take risks and to make sacrifices for the good of all.

In my judgment, there are two very important things to remember about our American Revolution. It was not a revolution to tear down what the colonists had, but to preserve the freedoms, to preserve the rights of free Englishmen and to expand the material prosperity that they already enjoyed for generations on this bountiful continent. It was not a revolution to make life better for themselves, but to make sure that these blessings would continue for their children and their children's children.

The men who gathered here 200 years ago put it in these words, and I quote, "It is a duty," they wrote in this fabulous document, "which we owe to God, our country, ourselves and posterity, to maintain, defend and preserve those civil and religious rights and liberties, for which many of our fathers fought, bled and died, and to hand them down to future generations."

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What beautiful words -- words which they made into deeds.

In short, the inflation fighters of 1774 were not much different from the inflation fighters of 1974 who started a series of conferences in Washington yesterday. Then as now there are no easy answers. Then as now they had to depend heavily on popular understanding and public support. For example, John Rutledge of South Carolina might have given the very same speech at the opening of the White House Conference yesterday that he gave precisely in this point 200 years ago. And with your indulgence, let me quote from John Rutledge in Philadelphia 200 years ago:

"We have no legal authority; and obedience to our determination will only follow the reasonableness, the apparent utility and necessity of the measures we adopt. We have no coercive or legislative authority. Our constituents are bound only in honor to observe our determination."

What are some of these determinations? I have been browsing through this journal of the First Continental Congress and I must say to my former colleagues in the Congress, it reads a lot easier than the Congressional Record when I was a contributor to that document. But except for the elegant language and the more eloquent age, it deals with the very real problems that are amazingly contemporary. And let me now ask you to listen to this:

"Resolved, that all manufactures of this country be sold at reasonable prices, so that no undue advantage be taken of a future scarcity of goods."

I continue the quote from this document:

"Such as are vendors of goods or merchandise will not take advantage of the scarcity of goods that may be occasioned by this association, but will sell the same at the rates we have been respectively accustomed to for the last 12 months past."

And then follows some good advice, and I quote again:

"And if any vendor of goods or merchandise shall sell some goods on higher terms, no person ought to, nor will any of us deal with any such person, or his or her factor or agent."

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I hope you noticed the last phrase in that last quote, and I say this to our liberated women: Please note, "His or her factor or agent." (Laughter)

We have heard an awful lot, a lot of talk about our Founding Fathers. Let's not forget our Founding Mothers. Obviously they didn't.

But these resolutions continued, and again I quote:

"That a committee be chosen in every county, city and town, by those who are qualified to vote for the representatives of the state legislature, whose business it shall be to attentively observe the conduct of all persons touching this association."

It goes on, and again I quote:

"We will, in our several stations, encourage frugality, economy, and industry, and promote agriculture, the arts, and the manufactures of this country, and will discountenance and discourage every species of extravagance and dissipation."

These are the conclusions of the First Continental Congress. These were chosen at random, but they convey the sense of urgency and unity which existed here, right here, two centuries ago.

I happen to believe there is the same sense of urgency and unity in America today. I have encountered it in Washington and throughout our country. I know it is the reason for this distinguished gathering here tonight in the shadow of Independence Hall.

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You who are Governors, Senators, Representatives, mayors and other public officials elected by the people have told me individually and collectively that you share this sense of urgency, this sense of unity. So I have come here tonight to ask your help, and the help of some 211 million Americans, not only in celebrating what is right about America, but in correcting what is wrong about America.

The tyranny of the British Parliament and Crown in 1774 animated our ancestors. The tyranny of double-digit inflation is our common enemy in 1974. I think everybody in this wonderful audience tonight knows as well as I do that inflation is the cruelest kind of taxation without representation.

I have decided that the first priority for us as a Nation, domestically, is an all-out war against inflation. Like the patriots who met here some 200 years ago, we may seem to be moving cautiously and too deliberately. But I hope no one will underestimate the generalship or fighting ability of all Americans today the same way they did in 1774. I warn you, as wise old Ben Franklin did, that if we do not all hang together, we certainly will all hang separately. But we will not hang separately, nor will we fall divided. We are going after, one and all, Democrats and Republicans, we are going after what I term public enemy number one, inflation, in 1974, and we will lick it by July 4, 1976.

I think we must recognize, to be honest, that we will have our Valley Forges, our summer soldiers and sunshine patriots. But we are the descendants and heirs, spiritually if not geneologically, of the patriots who assembled here 200 years ago tonight.

I told my wife, Betty, that I knew this speech backwards (laughter), and I think that is the way I am doing it. (Laughter)

And we may truly say, as Joseph Warren of Massachusetts wrote in the Suffolk Resolves, delivered to the First Continental Congress by Paul Revere and again I quote, "On the fortitude, on the wisdom and on the exertions of this important day, is suspended the faith of this new world, and of unborn millions."

We must not let them down.

With your help, we will win. We will win our battle against inflation.

What better way can we begin our third century of independence as a Nation, of liberty under God and brotherly love for all.

Thank you very much.