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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE
LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE DINNER

WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL

9:20 P.M. EDT

Mary Louise, distinguished members of the Cabinet, my good friends from the House of Representatives and the Senate, all of our wonderful Republicans -- 2751 of you:

I thank you for the wonderful welcome. I do want to thank you, Mary Louise, and Dick as well, for the superb job that has been done by the National Committee in making this tremendous evening and this wonderful conference possible. I think we all owe to her and to Dick a great debt of gratitude.

You know, we have had a very good day today. I haven't followed by the minute what you have been doing, but I must say that we had one of the finest, nicest, best swearing-ins of a Cabinet officer today with the swearing in of Bill Coleman as the Secretary of Transportation.

To come from that wonderful occasion at the White House to a meeting of this kind tonight really gives me a rejuvenation, and extra faith, that we are the party that can do the best job in leading this Nation.

I couldn't help but notice that Mary Louise has been spending more and more of her time talking to large groups like this. Then again, her counterpart -- Bob Strauss, the Democratic National Chairman -- has been spending more and more of his time talking to large groups -- not audiences, but candidates for President. (Laughter)

Tonight, before I go any further, let me thank you all for your wonderful kindness, your enthusiasm and your continuing support. May I say with deep regret, unfortunately, that Betty couldn't be here tonight. She wanted to be here; she is here in spirit, but she has got one of these very uncomfortable pinched nerves in her neck, and every once in a while, when she wants to do the things she wants to do most, it always acts up.

So, she is here in spirit. She asked me to say hello to you and thank you for your wonderful support.

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You know, I can't say how good it feels to be among so many good veto-proof friends. (Laughter) The time you are spending in Washington is very important for me, for you, but most importantly, for our country. The strength, the enthusiasm, the know-how that you have, that you have shown here by your participation in this conference, is proof that creative, active, winning Republicans will never be an endangered species.

If what I hear from Mary Louise and others is correct -- and I assume it is -- many in this audience are new at meetings of this sort. I was delighted to have an opportunity to have dinner with some of those who -- either lucky or unlucky -- have the prerogative of sitting at the head table, and I congratulate you and thank you for having spent your own money to come here. (Laughter)

The new energy you are generating will obviously be felt very distinctly throughout the Republican Party. Your involvement and your dedication, I hope, from the inspiration of this meeting, will grow and the net result is that our Nation -- that is the important thing -- will be the beneficiary.

I have read about, heard about, your program. It is extremely impressive. You have had the broadest spectrum -- or will have before you are through -- of individuals and philosophies within our party. I wish to commend Mary Louise and her co-workers for putting such an important emphasis on the nuts and bolts which bind our party structure together.

I couldn't help but repeat at this time the delight that I had that ten of your colleagues selected at random have joined us at the head table. In all honesty, I think this symbolizes a new and broader base that our party seeks.

Nearly a year ago I had the honor and privilege to appear before a Republican meeting similar to this in Chicago. I said then that we must never again permit an elite guard serving a single purpose to exclude and ignore the Republican Party organization. I renew that pledge to you here tonight.

As you know, I feel that working through and with the established party structure is the right way to go. New election reforms, particularly those dealing with finances, validate the policy that I advocated a year ago.

They do not rule out committees and other voluntary organizations or groups working in cooperation with the party structure, but they do tend to favor the two-party system, in which I have always profoundly believed.

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As to my role in the Republican Party, you can be sure that whenever it is proper -- and I stress that point -- I intend to exert my efforts on behalf of good Republican candidates and the rebuilding of Republicanism to the fullest, consistent with my duties as President of the United States.

I think it is quite obvious the demands and the duties of the Presidency can impose certain limitations on my political activities. I pledge to you now that I will be in the middle of the 1976 campaign, not only for the Presidency, but on behalf of Republican candidates for the House as well as the Senate.

I want to add that my efforts will include candidates for the Governorships and other elective offices across the United States.

I think many of you in this audience know that I have been doing this for a great many years, and I am too old to change good habits now.

Specifically, I want to work closely with Mary Louise, Guy Vander Jagt in the House races; Ted Stevens in the Senate races; with Kit Bond in the Gubernatorial races; and with our party chairman -- how do we say it now, national committee persons (Laughter) -- in each of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and our wonderful territories around the world.

But you and I know one fundamental fact: The greatest consideration that I can make to the country and to the Republican Party will be to make solid progress in solving our national problems, particularly our domestic problems, but equally important our international problems. I intend to do just that.

As to my own plans, I can tell you tonight, without equivocation, that I fully intend to seek the nomination of the Republican Party as a candidate for President in 1976.

I think any of you who know me reasonably well know that I am not a very subtle person. Therefore, there is nothing iffy about that statement. I intend to seek the nomination. I intend to win. I intend to run for President, and I intend to win that also.

Of course -- and this is most important -- I will need your help. So will all other Republican candidates in 1975 and 1976.

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But before we get into 1976, we have ten more months of 1975. As I look at the spectrum, they are very, very crucial. I have laid before the Democratic controlled Congress fully detailed programs to reverse the recession, to contain our recently raging inflation and to start freeing us from the threat of oil blackmail.

Although the response at first was deadly slow, a sense of greater urgency may now be arriving on Capitol Hill, and for that we can all be very grateful.

Let me say without any equivocation that I am going to keep the heat on, at least to 68 degrees.
(Laughter)

Americans are today demanding action. They are rightfully fearful that some people in Washington are so insulated that they don't know the desperation of being jobless or of living on an inadequate income or pensions that can't catch up with runaway inflation.

Fortunately, we are beginning to get a grip on inflation, but unemployment is far too high. The problems which desperately need to be dealt with have been growing for some time.

So, I asked my Democratic friends who are in massive control of the Congress, "Where are the tough, coordinated, comprehensive programs which our urgent and interrelated economic and energy problems demand?"

A piece here, a little touch there, they don't add up to an effective total program. They are totally inadequate. So, I say in all sincerity to my critics in the Congress and elsewhere, "If you don't like my program, show me a better one."

Even on something so widely supported as a stimulative tax cut, which by all standards ought to be something easy for the Congress to enact, there has been the kind of delay that is totally inexcusable.

Extremely difficult choices must be made this year and in succeeding years by the Congress to limit the growth of Federal budgets and Federal deficits. The results, so far, from Capitol Hill are very disappointing. Unless Members of Congress have the political courage to cut back or cut out various well-intentioned programs, we will soon come to a point -- by simple arithmetic -- where half, just half, of this country's entire Gross National Product will be taken by our various levels of government.

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Already -- and this is hard to believe -- we are spending approximately one-third of our Gross National Product to support government at all levels. It is my judgment that this trend could destroy the fundamental free enterprise character of this country and the economic incentives which have made us the leader of the industrialized democracies.

I believe that only a revitalized Republican leadership in all branches of government can change this distressing course.

The accumulated actions of some 38 years of Democratic-controlled Congress out of the last 42 years will not be reversed by this Congress. I don't intend to turn in my key to the White House until we have reversed this trend.

It can be argued by some that because our national problems are so serious we should not be wasting time on the problems of our party -- or any other party -- yet it is precisely because of our national problems that it is essential to look to our party and its revitalization everywhere.

I know what the polls show as well as you. I say with all the conviction that I can command: The standing of your party has hit its lowest point, as far as I am concerned, and it is going upward from this point at this gathering.

Let's be honest about it. If we fail to rebuild effectively the cost would not be measured by the faith of the Republican Party itself. It would be measured, more importantly, by the deprivation of a basic right of all Americans, a free choice in politics. It would be measured by the death of the effective two-party system, which is so vital to our Nation.

In far too many cities and counties, and even some states, there is still virtually one-party rule. Voters can only ratify the decisions of the single surviving party, and in far too many of the same areas corruption and abuse march hand in hand with one-party misrule.

The abiding virtues of a strong two-party system are threefold. First, it provides a continuing choice. Second, the system forces the maximum of accommodation and compromise instead of promoting stalemates encouraged by splintered parties. Third, the system excludes the fanatic factions which cannot be accommodated but includes the broadest range of reasonable differences and thus holds both major parties closer to the mainstream of public opinion in this great country.

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To make sure that Republicans are really on the rise, we must make some practical changes in our political ways; not in principles, but in approaches. As a starter, we must discard the attitude of exclusiveness that has kept the Republican Party's door closed too often.

With your indulgence, may I make a final comment on that sentence, We must discard the attitude of exclusiveness that has kept the Republican Party's door closed too often while we give speeches about keeping it open.

It seems to me we must erect a tent that is big enough for all who care about this great country and believe in the Republican Party enough to work through it for common goals. This tent, as I see it, must also be kept open to the growing number of independent voters who refuse to wear any party label, but who will support strong and good programs that we as a party can have and will present.

These voters must be welcomed and won to our cause. We must be prepared then to overcome the cynicism of voters by offering candidates of outstanding ability and rock-hard integrity. We must also build a party that works all the time. It must be more than a pre-election force that goes out of business after the votes are counted on election day. Perhaps, most important of all, we must demonstrate conclusively that as a party we care about people, that we care about people first, last and always, and always will.

Over the past decade or so, the attitudes of the American people have changed about government in general and politics in particular. Years of war, three major assassinations, official duplicity and rapid and shocking changes in this Nation's social and political structure have combined with instant communications to erode old views and old loyalties.

People have begun to tune out political parties and politics as usual. One tragic measure of this is the dismal record of voting in last November's election. According to a national sampling by the Bureau of the Census, a bare 21 percent of the persons 18 to 20 years old bothered to go to the polls.

It is a sad commentary. Fewer than half of the persons of the voting age in this country in 1974 actually cast a ballot -- for or against -- any person or political party. The actual figure was only 44 percent.

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The sampling showed that more than one-third of the citizens eligible to vote had not even registered. It is unbelievable. When you compare our record with that of almost any other country in the world, we have done very badly. Yet, the figures I have cited provide us with a rough roadmap toward the route of fundamental party reform.

If nearly 80 percent of the 18 to 20 year olds did not vote the last time, then obviously they should be a priority target for our party and our candidates in the next election.

I happen to think with the right candidates and the right programs, the right ideology, that is a most fertile field.

I know at first hand that many of you here tonight enlisted volunteers from this very large age group, who proved to be among the best and the most capable workers that you had in the campaigns in which all of you were involved. It is my judgment that we need more, not less, of these young idealists who have the biggest stake in our Nation's future. Let's bring them in.

Our Republican Party program for reform must recognize that chronic nonvoters, as well as voters, just aren't buying the old idea that virtue and wisdom are the monopoly of one political party or the other.

As a matter of fact, by staying home last November, more than half of the people in this country said, in effect, "A plague on both your parties."

As a result -- and this is the true tragedy of this situation today -- as a result, we are governed today by a majority of the minority. Thus, the magnitude of our job -- yours and mine and millions like us -- must not be measured solely within our own party, but within the larger scope of what is good for the Nation in its long-range future.

Our first and most urgent task is to work together to restore the full trust of your fellow Americans in the ongoing experiment of self-government. Let last November mark not merely the low point of our party, but also the upturn of the basic trust and good will we must have for another, for our system of politics and government and, above all, for the future of this great Republic.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 9:52 P.M. EDT)