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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE  
CONGRESSIONAL SUMMER INTERNS

THE EAST ROOM

5:50 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: It is nice to see so many fine people. I feel really at home, not because I happen to be living here now (Laughter) but I feel at home because for better than 15 years of my 25 plus years service in the House of Representatives, I had a closer and very warm relationship with interns, not only in my office, but interns that served the Members of the House, as well as the Senate.

I enjoyed that relationship, I benefitted from it, and I know this group is just as qualified, just as dedicated, just as interested as those that I knew in the past, and I congratulate you for being here.

Let me just tell you a little of the history of the intern program. You know you have 700 or 800 here. I can remember the days when if there was one intern in an office, there was apprehension and eyebrows were lifted. They wondered, wasn't this effort, wasn't this program going to destroy the Congress and all that went with it. (Laughter)

I can go back and show you records where my office was one of the first, if not the first, that worked on the program and helped to expand it, and I am darn proud that we now have 800 or 900 young people every year who come down here and make a substantial contribution to the legislative process and go back to your respective colleges, your communities, and explain to the American people that the Government does work, can work, and will be helpful in solving some of the problems that we have.

I know it is awfully hot in here, but it is a little colder than if we had had it out on the lawn. (Laughter) Let me assure you that this Administration, and I particularly, welcome all of you here, and I am delighted with the atmosphere that I have found in going from one university or college to another over the last year.

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The warmth of the reception, I assure you, was not always agreeing, but at least I approached those from the student bodies of Notre Dame, Tulane, et cetera, with an open mind and they did, as far as I was concerned. The net result was we had a dialogue and this is what we need and this is how we can work together in the solution of some of the problems that have to be solved.

As you work with your committees or you work with the Member of the House or Senate, or you work with those that you are involved with, I can assure you -- whether they are Democrats or Republicans -- they want your views, and I hope and trust they just don't put you in the job of licking stamps. (Laughter)

I used to have some staff members who would look at these interns that would come into the office and they would be suspicious of them. Finally we got my staff people to understand that the young people who came down here really were interested in making the Government work, and finding out so they could go back and do a better job at home.

I think throughout the Congress, and elsewhere in Washington, we have been able to establish a new attitude and a new view, so I think most of you -- and I hope all of you -- have an opportunity to make a contribution.

Let me just talk a little bit about how you can help us. I don't mean me personally, but I mean us as a country. We do have some problems, and we have some differences in this Government. We have differences politically. We have differences maybe philosophically. We have differences between the Executive and Legislative Branches, but that does not mean that we can't solve some of these problems or make some headway in those solutions.

I spent a couple of hours last night with some of my good friends on both sides of the political aisle, on both sides of Capitol Hill, trying to find how we could take some views I have and how we can take some views they have to try and get an energy program.

Doesn't it frustrate you up there to see that there is not any real meaningful progress in trying to conserve on the one hand and stimulate production on the other?

I think it ought to frustrate you, as it does me, that we can't move ahead with greater alacrity and more --

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INTERN: Stop vetoing. (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: You know I am very glad -- I think a young lady raised that question. Let me tell you, a veto is a constructive method for a President under the Constitution to get good results.

Let me tell you why. Our Founding Fathers decided that a system of checks and balances had a lot of merit, and that is why they provided, under the Constitution, we would have a Judicial Branch, an Executive Branch and a Legislative Branch.

They did not want any branch or any segment of our society running the whole country freehanded, and so they provided in this delicately balanced Constitution that we have the right of the Congress to pass legislation, and they also gave in that Constitution the authority of the President to veto legislation to give the Congress time to reassess, to see whether they did the job right or wrong.

If you take a look at the veto record this year, in each case where there has been a veto, the Congress has had an opportunity to reconsider and to see if there was not some way that they could end up writing better legislation, and they did.

The net result is that no part of the Government has a totally free hand to decide exactly what ought to be done. At least it requires more than two-thirds for a branch of the Government to make a single decision.

This is one of those very important ingredients that our forefathers were smart enough to include in the Constitution, that they wanted checks and balances so that no person, no segment of our society, no branch of the Government could run the Government without any control from the minority.

I think that is something we have to protect. One year I may -- or a President may -- want something done, and the Congress will check him. On the other hand, you will find that on other occasions the Congress may want to do something that is not necessarily the right thing, and the Constitution gives the President the right to have a slowdown until there has been adequate reconsideration.

So, when you get right down to it, a veto is a constructive effort on the part of a President, and legislative action with more than two-thirds can be a way in which the Congress can exercise its authority to prevent a President from doing something that is not right either.

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So, you know this balance really has proven over almost 200 years to be a darn good tool for the benefit of all of us.

I do want to thank you for coming here. I do appreciate what you have contributed during this summer that you have been here and the time that you will be here in the future.

I used to have the privilege of talking to the interns in the House chamber when I was minority leader, and the Speaker and I used to participate in that experience.

I hope that the Speaker and the minority leader will do the same this year, if they have not already done it. They can give you an insight that is important, and I am sure that the Vice President and the majority and minority leaders in the Senate will do the same.

I happen to think -- whether I agree with everything the Congress does -- that the Congress is a good institution. I happen to believe President tries to do what is right and that the batting average of a President is pretty good, too.

The main thing we have to achieve in this country is an understanding that working together -- and I think despite what you read and what you hear we are working together -- and where we disagree, as Sam Rayburn used to say, "We disagree without being disagreeable," and that is a pretty good criteria for all of us as we try to, in the best way we can, seek some answers to these nagging problems that we have, whether they are at home or abroad.

Good luck, God bless you, and don't forget this, that we are trying to build a better America so when you come down here and run this Government, whether in the Congress or in the Supreme Court or in the White House, you will do a better job than we have done, and I think you will.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 6:08 P.M. EDT)