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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE EXECUTIVES

THE STATE FLOOR

5:15 P.M. EDT

Chairman Brann, President Rumbaugh, members of the Chamber around the country:

First let me welcome you to the White House. It is more comfortable inside than outside with the kind of weather we are having. We only have it in Washington, but you never have it in your communities, I am sure. (Laughter)

But it is nice to see you all and, despite the fact you have been sitting here getting the answers to the questions from Frank and Paul MacAvoy and Jim Lynn, I think it is better for me just to make a few observations and comments and then we can retire to the State Dining Room for a few minutes.

First, I want to thank you very emphatically for the help and assistance so many of you have given us in the 12 White House Conferences that have been held around the United States, ten of which I have had the honor and privilege to attend to participate in what we try to describe as the listening and learning process.

We feel that those Conferences are vitally important to give to a broad cross-section of your various communities the policies and programs that are in effect in the Federal Government or those that we propose, and at the same time get a feeling, a sense from all of you and the many others that participate, the views from people at the grass roots.

This listening and learning process, from our points of view, is very helpful to me and to my associates and I trust that the 12 have been equally beneficial as far as you are concerned.

We have some very serious problems. We are deeply concerned about the economy, energy and deregulation as far as the Federal Government is concerned. I just spent about an hour and a half, as I recall, with a number of Mayors from various parts of the United States. They have a problem precipitated by the financial difficulties of the City of New York. These are serious and it involves a wide variety of recommendations from them and from others as to what the solutions might be.

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It also involves a very serious potential change if certain actions were taken in the political fabric, not on a partisan basis, but on a structural basis, of the Federal Government, the State Governments and Municipal Governments. This is a very broad and serious problem. It is, of course, complicated by the immediate financial problems facing the City of New York.

But if I might, I would like to urge all of you to the extent that you can, to help Frank Zarb and the Executive Branch of the Government get some movement in the Congress on really an effective, short-range, as well as long-haul, energy program. We cannot continue to be held at the mercy of decision-making by the foreign oil producers. They are meeting right now as to whether they are going to increase the price of roughly 40 percent of the oil that we buy as a Nation. We have no control over it and this is something that the United States must do to escape that kind of potential strangle-hold that they have on our economy and on 214 million Americans.

We have to conserve our energy. We have to produce more domestic sources of energy. And we hope and trust that the Congress will move affirmatively on a program that will conserve energy at home and produce more energy from domestic sources.

The economy--I believe that the record is clear by now that we have moved out of a recession and we are on the way to better economic times. The announcement last Friday of the lowest monthly increase in the cost of living, .2 percent is very encouraging. If you annualize that, and I don't think you can in good conscience, that is an annual increase of 2.4 percent. But on a more realistic basis, from December of last year through the reported month that I just mentioned, the cost of living has gone up at the rate of about 5 percent, slightly under it, and compared to a year ago, it is substantially less.

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We are not satisfied with 4.8 percent on an annualized basis in the increased cost of living but, comparatively speaking, it is far better than a year ago. We are going to continue the total effort on our part to make even more headway and better progress.

The help that you can give us as far as the economy is concerned, energy is concerned, we appreciate and we know it will be effective.

In the area of deregulation -- and I use it in the broadest sense -- it involves regulatory agencies which are an independent part of our Federal Government, they must respond.

On the other hand, the Executive Branch per se has to do its share of trying to lift the onerous burden that they have imposed on individuals, on communities, on society as a whole.

I wish Jim Lynn was here, because he got a figure of 5,200 forms that are filled out by people, and organizations, businesses, imposed by the Federal Government. I have never seen them all piled up but I am sure they would make one darned big pile. (Laughter) I was going to remind Jim again -- I have done it several times -- that a year from now we better have less than 5,200 forms.

Just one personal observation, back in the late 1920s, my father had the timidity to begin a small paint and varnish manufacturing company. It never grew to any sizeable proportions, although it kept us alive as a family. He used to go out and sell the paint and collect the bills. He never could have run that very small company if he had had to fill out all the government forms that small businesses have to fill out today.

So, even though it was a hard row for him to hoe, at least he was able to manufacture and sell it and collect the bills. Today the onerous burden placed on comparable business organizations would preclude a person that size, a business of that magnitude, carrying on. You would have to hire two bookkeepers and a lawyer and I can't tell you how many other things.

So what we have got to do is solve the energy problem, solve the problem of our economy and, in this third century that we are all looking forward to, the third century of our great country, is to free us as individuals from the octopus kind of society that has tended to develop -- mass government, mass education, mass industry, mass labor.

We have to make certain that 214 million people have a restoration of their privacy and their independence. I think we can do it. With your help it can be done a lot easier.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 5:27 P.M. EDT)