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ADDRESS BY SECRETARY OF COMMERCE ROGERS C. B. MORTON  
PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BEFORE THE PROTESTANT FOUNDATION  
OF GREATER CHICAGO ANNUAL DINNER, PALMER HOUSE, CHICAGO,  
ILLINOIS, 6:30 P.M. THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1975

It's a great pleasure to be here this evening, and to join this very distinguished gathering in its support of the Protestant Foundation of Greater Chicago.

One of the suggestions for my address was that I present a challenge to the leaders of American business. The thrust would be to challenge you "to provide leadership in restoring to our country the high value standards, ethics, morality and spiritual commitment upon which the Nation was founded."

Now, that is clearly a worthy theme, to the tune of which a master organist could pull out all the stops at once and pound out some thundering chords. But frankly, considering what you are here for tonight--and what you have been doing so well for so many years--I'd be a little embarrassed to preach you that kind of sermonette.

So, I'd like to approach the same kind of thoughts from a slightly different angle--not as your friendly pastor, but simply as a fellow American; as one who has spent many years in business; and as a member pro tem of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government.

I don't think there's any question but that America was founded upon the highest moral, ethical and spiritual standards. The imminent approach of our 200th birthday bombards us with daily reminders of that fact.

But, as Professor Paul Samuelson has pointed out,

America was also conceived in the search for a better economic life. For every family that arrived here seeking religious freedom and relief from despotism, a hundred settlers came in search of jobs.

I'm always reminded, in that context, of the journalist who traveled to the furthest boondocks of India immediately after independence--to learn how the natives felt about the departure of the British. To his amazement, most of them were unaware that the British had ever been there. Their political awareness began and ended with an empty stomach.

I have to agree with Professor Samuelson that political and religious freedom are irretrievably bound up with economic freedom. The American free enterprise system, our free economy, is the foundation stone without which all our other vaunted freedoms would be--at best--academic.

If there is a genuine flaw in the American business system, it is that it may have succeeded too well. Grinding out a Gross National Product in 13 figures, to provide the highest standard of living for the greatest number of people in the world's history, the U.S. economic system has made the miraculous appear mundane.

The prevailing attitude, therefore, too easily becomes: "Ho hum, what have you done for us lately?" Expectations, based upon performance to date, have grown so voraciously that there is no possible way to fulfill them all for any reasonable future term.

Faced with this fact, there is a growing tendency to turn against business and the free enterprise system itself. We hear calls to break up the big corporations; to nationalize this or that industry; to allocate credit by government fiat; and to adopt some form of the central economic planning that has hardly distinguished itself in any country that has tried it.

I suppose that normally we could attribute that kind of clamor to what I call the "economic illiteracy" of a great many citizens, some of their elected representatives, and many of the informational and educational

media. The kind of illiteracy that leads to an amazing paradox: everyone is in favor of more and better jobs, higher real incomes, and a steadily improving standard of living for all. Yet, most of the people who cheer for all these good things feel that American business is making too high a rate of profit.

So you have to wonder. It's kind of like wanting more and more eggs all the time--but trying to wring the neck of every hen you can get your hands on.

"Normally," as I said, we might attribute these alarming trends to a simple lack of economic understanding. But when illegal campaign contributions, bribery of foreign officials, and the like enter into the equation, there is no point in trying to blame it on misunderstanding or a lack of understanding.

Similarly, the public hears business complaining about "stifling government regulation"--and I will agree that there is entirely too much of that. But when the President makes specific proposals to get the dead hand of government off of various businesses, and to let the forces of free competition prevail, suddenly the "regulatees" appear not to want to be deregulated after all.

It boils down to what Preston Robert Risch, of the Loews Corporation, recently told the Executives' Club here in Chicago. "Leaders in almost every field, including business," he said, "have fallen into a habit. It has become something of a reflex--of thinking of public opinion as something to be molded and manipulated for their own purposes. They do not tell the truth; they tell a carefully varnished version of the truth, designed to produce a predetermined result."

I don't say--nor believe--that anyone in this room is guilty of any of the things I've been talking about. But I will say this: anything a firm or company does to diminish the confidence of the public in American business as an institution--is a disservice to the company itself, to all business and industry, and to the Nation.

I don't believe there's any question but that our economy is going to need somewhere between four and five trillion dollars in new investment over the next ten years in order to grow at a reasonable and stable rate. That level of investment can only come from a decent rate of profit--and from the savings of millions of people who have the confidence to invest in American business.

If profit is allowed to become a dirty word--or worse, if confidence and trust in the business community are permitted to erode to the point of no return--there simply will not be enough capital formation to provide some 15 million new jobs we're going to need over the next decade. And if that happens, bewailing the economic illiteracy of the American people is not going to be of much help to a failing economy.

I've addressed myself so far to business--first, because you are influential business leaders with an earnest concern about ethics and morality; and second, because it "goes with the territory" if you happen to be the Secretary of Commerce.

But I also recognize that any crisis of confidence we may be going through applies with equal force to government, the professions, the media, labor unions--indeed, to any institution large enough to have gathered power to itself.

Perhaps it is as Walter Lippmann saw it back in 1913, when he wrote: "Business and political leaders don't mean badly; the trouble with them is that most of the time they don't mean anything."

Well, I think our 200th birthday is as good a time as any--in fact, the best time--to start meaning something, to stand for something. And what we've got to stand for, as we look to our third century, is what we stood for back at the very beginning: Duty.

And that means all of us: business, government, media, labor, citizens, Republicans, Democrats, just plain Americans.

"I know my rights!" How often have we heard that declaration?

Yet rights are only the other side of a coin called "obligations"--and the simple word for obligation is "duty."

But how often do we hear someone assert: "I know my duty"?

If we take the ratio of the first to the second, it would appear to be much easier to demand one's rights than to insist upon one's duty. But there are no one-sided coins. There are no rights without concurrent duties.

Vital new rights have been written into law: the rights of minorities, of women, of workers and of consumers--and it is right that these things have been achieved through the struggles of the great civil rights movement.

But where is the civil duties movement? Where is that groundswell demanding equal opportunity for everyone to carry out his or her inalienable responsibilities?

I don't see it. I don't notice the crowds marching in the streets, flags and banners flying proudly. I don't hear the singing and the shouting and the slogans ringing out.

Call for a civil duties march and the streets will be deserted.

Sing a civil duties song--and you'll be drowned out by the clamor for more rights.

With good and ample reason, we cherish our Bill of Rights. But where is our Bill of Duties?

It is recorded that the soldiers at Valley Forge left their bloodstained footprints in the snow. No one had to read them the Orders of the Day about their duty; they lived by it. And many died for it.

The Stars and Stripes does not fly over the Land of

the Free because people were preoccupied with enjoying their rights. It flies there because brave men and women were doing their duty!

The first Americans had a vision. It was their vision--and their sense of duty--that shaped America for 200 years.

It was that vision and that sense of duty that brought us safely through wars and recessions and depressions. It was that vision and sense of duty that moved a people and a Nation to greatness.

Now we ourselves--and others in the world--are questioning whether we have the stamina, the plain old guts, to continue building upon the greatness we have known.

I for one am confident that we can do it, that we can go on to build a Second America even greater than the first--morally, ethically and economically.

But the world in which we have to go forward is far more complex today than it was in 1776; every nation depends upon the others as Spaceship Earth speeds through the void.

Things are no longer simple, with clear blacks and whites. We live in a world with few if any absolutes. The great multinational corporations were perhaps the first to recognize the concept of an economy as being a global concept. In the last analysis, I am convinced the record will show that the multinationals bring benefits not only to their home countries, but also to the other lands in which they conduct their operations. They are the lead pioneers of the one world that I feel we will ultimately have to become.

Yet today we face a dilemma in the fact that practices of which we heartily disapprove are not only legal in other countries, but are a long-established way of life and of doing business.

That is only one of the many gray areas--like the oceans and population control and the distribution of resources--that abound in a world which is tugging in many different directions, despite the obvious fact that we are all growing more and more dependent upon each other.

Until that happy day when all of these issues shall have been resolved by international accord, our surest guide must be our individual conscience, our duty to ourselves and our country, and our duty to all mankind.

That sense of duty, I know, is what impels all of you here to give so freely of yourselves and of your efforts in behalf of the Protestant Foundation of Greater Chicago.

I am proud to have been here to be a part of what you are doing.

Thank you.