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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
PRESIDENT FORD COMMITTEE
VOLUNTEER RECEPTION

BAYFRONT CENTER

12:04 P.M. EST

Thank you very much, Bill, and Lou Frey, and Skip Bafalis and all of the others who have done so much. But before I say a few other words, I want to wish you a very, very Happy Valentine's Day.

I met a young lady over here who is 97 years old and I hope she has many, many more Happy Valentines..

As I look at this tremendous group here, I cannot help but be unbelievably encouraged. You are the phone callers, you are the door knockers, you are the people that do all the hard work, and there is no way I can express my appreciation any better than to try to do the best job I can as President of the United States.

You won't believe it, but the first Presidential campaign where I was a worker like you was back in 1940 when I was trying to help elect Wendell Willkie. (Laughter) And I have helped every other Republican candidate for the Presidency since then, and I appreciate what you are doing for me on this occasion.

Let me take about five minutes to say a very few words about the problems we have had and what we are trying to do to solve them. I spoke over in Williams Park and talked about some of the particular problems that affect our older Americans. I will talk a bit about that, but I want to look at the picture a little broader here, if I might, because we are all one country. And the young people, as well as middle aged people and older people all have the same great love, the same dedication, the same desire that they can say--every one of us can say-- that we are proud to be an American and proud of America.

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If you will go back about 18 months, this country was having serious problems and all of us have prayed a good many times that the problems we have had for the last 18 months could be solved, and I think our prayers are being answered.

I honestly believe that the American people today have a restoration of faith in the system and in the people, and that is vitally important.

Number two, 18 months ago we were faced with the worst inflation this country had had in one hundred years, over 12 percent, and we were just on the brink of an economic recession which was the worst one since the Great Depression in the 1930's.

At the same time, many of our allies on a worldwide basis were apprehensive and concerned whether the United States, having gone through a traumatic period, was going to have the same resolve, have the same strength that was needed as we faced our challenges to achieve and maintain peace.

But because our system of Government worked, because there was enough resolution and strength in the American people, we are now on the brink of, I think, great success.

First, inflation is still too high, but it is half of what it was 18 months ago and it is going to get lower and lower.

Last January, February and March, the unemployment was going up, the number of people with jobs was going down, but we have turned it around by solid common sense practical approaches to the problem and just last week we got the biggest drop in one month of unemployment for 16 years and we added 800 (800,000) more people gainfully employed in one month. And since March of last year we have increased employment by 2 million 100 thousand -- that is progress.

But we have got to do better and we will do better, and wherever we find a problem domestically, I can assure you that we are going to meet it head on, we are going to be practical, we are not going to fool you with any quick fixes. That does not work and it destroys confidence in Government. We are going to be honest, frank, candid, and we will make this system work the way it should.

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Now, let me talk for just a minute about our national security. Bill and Lou and Skip, who I served with in the Congress, know of not only my experience in dealing with the Department of Defense, but my dedication that the United States of America shall be second to none in national security.

The budget that I sent up in January for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines was \$112.7 billion. It gives us the capability of maintaining the peace through strength, and that is what we want.

It will, and the fact that we are strong has reassured our allies whether they are in Western Europe or in the Pacific. It also has given us the strength that makes constructive headway in the resolution of those terribly difficult and controvertial problems in the Middle East.

Just last year, when it looked like the Middle East might blow up again with the consequences of an oil embargo and possibly a much larger war, we were able--because the Israelis have confidence in us and the Egyptians have confidence in us--they got together and made a step forward in trying to resolve those serious, terrible problems in the Middle East.

But, they knew we were strong, they knew we could be helpful, and we were the coalescing force that brought those two countries together.

Now, we have some adversaries around the world. We are making headway, slowly, in trying to open up relations on a broader basis with 800 million people on the mainland of Asia, with the People's Republic.

It is important to deal strongly, fairly, with them but the problem that is raised by many, concerns our relations with the Soviet Union. Let me just be very frank and honest. My reputation in Congress and otherwise has been of a tough Yankee trader.

Those Yankee traders did pretty well back a good many years ago, and we are going to be strong, we are going to be able to deal from strength, and I think what we do will be in the best interests of the United States.

Now, let me just talk about a question that has been raised by some people. At the present time, our Government is spending 1 terally billions of dollars to make sure that we have enough nuclear capability to deter war and to protect our national security.

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The Soviet Union is spending as much, if not more. If we can put a cap on the arms race, I think that is in the best interest of this country. We are going to make sure and positive that it is a fair agreement, and your President is going to be a tough Yankee trader when he sits down, if he does, in trying to negotiate any such agreement.

You have any total, complete commitment that what I do, whether we get an agreement or don't, it will be in the best interest of the United States.

Now, we are going to keep our powder dry. We are not going to be trigger happy. I think we can negotiate from strength. We can build our alliances from strength. We can do the things that are necessary to make everybody assured in this country that we are safe.

If we keep our heads, keep our powder dry, keep cool, we cannot only do what is right for America at home, but we can maintain peace through strength throughout the world.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 12:15 P.M. EST)