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Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Fort Lauderdale, Florida)

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED
AT THE SHRINE HALL
Sarasota Shrine Hall
Sarasota, Florida

It's a great pleasure to join you this afternoon in Sarasota, to meet many of you personally, and to sample some very good barbeque.

I'm always fascinated by barbeque, because every time it's offered, the ingredients are a little different. I know some political campaigns that have that same approach.

But as President, I have to use a political recipe that's consistent. I don't have the luxury of dealing with each of the 50 States one at a time, telling each of them what they may want to hear.

My job is to determine the best recipe for the whole country -- to decide what's in the best interest of the United States -- and that is the course I have followed for the past 19 months.

To do that job most effectively, and to the extent my other responsibilities will permit, it's important for me to get to know the people of every State, to learn of their concerns and aspirations firsthand, and to let them know where I stand.

As you know, I'm entering every one of the Presidential primaries this year. I want the people of every State to take a close look at my record, and at my goals for America's future. I want them to know that I share with them a deep and active faith in the ability of this country and its people to do great things in the years ahead. I want the American people to know that I believe in them, that I trust their judgment, and that as long as I'm President, I intend to be candid and frank and forthright with them and make this system work the way it should.

I happen to think it's an advantage, rather than a handicap, for a person to have some experience in his chosen field, and I think on-the-job experience is the very best kind.

I've been in public service for 27 years -- as a member of the Congress, for almost nine years as Republican leader of the House of Representatives, as Vice President, and for the last 19 months as your President.

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Those 19 months began with our country facing some of the most pressing and serious problems in its history.

Runaway inflation and the ominous beginnings of a recession threatened our economic strength and stability.

International tensions threatened the peace in many areas of the world.

A crisis of confidence in our own government and in the basic institutions of our society threatened to develop into a crisis of the spirit for the American people.

With the understanding of the American people, with your prayers and your support and your help, I set about to do what I could to meet those challenges, to put America at peace with itself and with all the world.

The past 19 months have seen many of these efforts succeed, and with your help, we'll do even better in the future. I am certain there are brighter days ahead for the United States of America.

Our national economy is growing stronger and more prosperous every day. Unemployment is going down. Consumer confidence is going up.

The Department of Commerce announced just two days ago that the index of leading economic indicators rose by 2.2 percent in January -- the largest gain in six months.

That index showed improvements in the length of the average work week, the job layoff rate, wholesale prices, vendor performance, stock market prices, contracts and orders, net business formations, new orders and building permits.

This shows that almost every segment of our economy is rebounding in a strong, dynamic, encouraging way. We're on the road to a new prosperity in America, and we're not going to be sidetracked now.

The rate of inflation has been cut almost in half from what it was a year ago. Real earnings for the average American have increased significantly. We have recovered 96 percent of the jobs lost to the recession -- nearly two million, one hundred thousand since last March and 800,000 in January alone. We have cut in half the annual growth of the Federal budget this year. If we can keep the pressure on and hold the spending down, we can balance the budget in three years, cut your taxes, and give you a lot more economic recovery of your own.

The fact that we've turned the economy around is a credit to the American people who did not panic, and to the American free enterprise system which responded to one of its greatest challenges. The forecasts of doom and gloom were wrong once again because the false prophets among us once again underestimated the courage and the determination and the ingenuity of the American people. I have never underestimated the American people, and I never will.

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We have recovered our economic strength without starting a new round of double-digit inflation, and without resorting to unsound, inflationary remedies for our present-day problems.

Through the commonsense steps I initiated -- tax cuts for individuals, tax incentives for business expansion and job production, and extended income cushions for those Americans out of work -- we worked our way out of the worst recession in 30 years.

I've always believed that the harder you work, the luckier you get. Hard work and hard decisions have made the difference in this recovery, and we're lucky we didn't listen to those who would try to spend their way out of recession instead of working their way out.

In fact, I've vetoed 46 Bills since becoming President, and without endangering or weakening our economic recovery, those vetoes have saved the American taxpayer 13 billion dollars.

One of those vetoed Bills, which some of you were particularly interested in, was the so-called "Common Situs" Picketing Bill.

A healthy and thriving construction industry is vitally important to any real, long-term economic stability -- whether here in Sarasota or in the Nation as a whole.

The Common Situs Bill as presented to me might well have threatened that stability. Even in Latin, Common Situs spelled trouble, and trouble we don't need.

Something else that may spell trouble -- unless the Congress acts promptly -- is the problem of deficit spending in the Social Security system.

This year, Social Security will pay out three billion dollars more than it takes in. Next year, unless corrective action is taken, the deficit will be three and a half billion dollars -- and it will get worse instead of better in the future.

In my State of the Union Message in January, and in St. Petersburg two weeks ago, I pledged to ensure the integrity and the solvency of the Social Security system. In my budget for Fiscal Year 1977, I am recommending that the full cost of living increase in Social Security benefits be paid during the coming year.

The Social Security system must be kept secure for this generation and future generations of Americans.

When we think of those future generations, we must think of what kind of country we will leave to them. In our own time, America has had its share of problems, and we aren't afraid to admit them. But I think it's high time people stopped running down America.

I'm proud of America. I'm proud to be an American. I think it's time we remembered that we are the most richly blessed Nation in the history of the world. We have special gifts and special resources and special responsibilities greater than any other nation on Earth.

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We are a great Nation, and we will continue to be a great Nation in the future. It is that future whose course will be charted, at least in part, by the elections of 1976.

The American people will make crucial and far-reaching decisions this year. You must decide what role you want government to play in your own life and in the life of the Nation.

You must decide what qualities and characteristics of leadership you will expect in your public officials.

You must decide what course you want our national economy to follow in the years ahead -- a firm, steady course of growth and stability, or a course of drastic turns, costly experiments, and increasing governmental control.

It is the strength and the genius of the American political system that you can make those decisions for yourselves.

Election Day is a celebration of freedom. I hope you will join in that celebration, and give me your support on March 9th, November 2nd, and the four challenging years ahead.

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