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THE NEED FOR GROWTH -- THE HUMAN EQUATION
ADDRESS OF VICE PRESIDENT NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER BEFORE THE
CLUB OF ROME, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
MONDAY, APRIL 12, 1976

(Eighth of a Series)

April 12, 1976

SUMMARY

"...The world's capacity to provide for humankind is not a matter of physical resources; it is a matter of human will, human ingenuity, human determination and human organization...

"It is my belief that the most meaningful thing America can do is to demonstrate that economic growth and the material well-being of individuals are not only compatible with but are essential to environmental health and human dignity. More growth is essential if all of the millions of Americans are to have the opportunity to improve their quality of life. Indeed, in our democratic society, growth is demanded.

"The major key to healthful growth is energy...More energy is needed -- both for growth and to enhance our environment... The United States has the resources within its borders to achieve energy self-reliance if it chooses to do so. This requires a major and immediate effort. But we can develop the nuclear capacity, the coal facilities and the off-shore continental oil and gas potentialities to meet our needs before the end of this century. Such self-reliance can be achieved without imperilling a wholesome environment for living. Indeed, such self-reliance is essential to assure and enhance the opportunities for employment and for improved living standards for all Americans.

"The net effect of the effort on the world scene would be to reduce America's claims on energy resources beyond its borders, and to augment America's strength as a bastion of economic and social, military and political strength with the significance that holds for human freedom in the world. For without that strength, the U.S. cannot meet the needs of its people at home nor its responsibilities throughout the world. In this way, we can help others achieve their similar aspirations and strength through growth.

"The people of the United States can set an example for the future, as they have in the past, that a free people with a work ethic and a concern that the benefits of production be available to all, can achieve unprecedented results...(But)... it is naive, indeed dangerous, to assert, as some do, that the industrialized nations of the world must support the underdeveloped nations of the globe through massive and long term foreign aid in goods and services and massive grants of capital. Such an institutionalized international dole would not only be unworkable, and impossible, but it would be counterproductive by failure to stimulate the local populace to actions on their own behalf.

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"In some of the Club of Rome studies there also is expressed the idea that some of the industrialized nations of the world -- and particularly the so-called more "mature" industrial nations -- should not press for growth but gradually ease into a more static status in which they would stress humanistic cultural contributions to mankind. This thought is also naive -- because to have a really significant impact on the life of the billions of people in the world, a nation must have significance in the trade and commerce of the world, as well as in the flow of capital, technology, and managerial skills.

"The loss to mankind can be disastrous if the nations that have sparked and carried forward the concepts of freedom and human dignity, and implemented them in law, in economic activity, in political life and social living, should fail to maintain their dynamism and growth. This has particular significance to the people of the United States.

"Here the influence of 'no-growth' thinking has already retarded some of the traditional dynamic thrust of the nation. It has taken various forms, such as over-protective measures regarding environmental matters; excessive consent mechanisms before proceeding with vital public works, industrial plants, energy-producing facilities and the like, instability and insecurity, especially as concerns public and private investment, due to shifting the "rules of the game" by constantly changing governmental policies and regulations, resulting in ever-increasing complexity of bureaucratic red tape.

"The world cannot gain by diminishing the vision, the confidence, the strength, the drive, and the capacity for leadership of the United States...The stakes involved in the Club of Rome debate are far greater than whether the productive capacities of the world can keep up with population. They involve whether people will be able to live with freedom and dignity or whether slavery in some disguised form will spread further to vast areas of this earth...

"And finally, underlying all of these matters that have been discussed, there is the basic problem of population growth versus the capacity of the world to support it. This was and remains a major concern of the Club of Rome. We know now that control of population growth relates to education, to improvement in the standard of living, to the enhancement of the status of women, to cultural changes, and to alteration of the mores and folkways of societies. Experience, therefore, would indicate that economic growth will assist and result in population control, rather than retard it.

"We can and we must add to the availability of resources, jobs, and income for people. We can and we must look not to dividing up a shrinking pie of goods and services, as envisaged by some of the Doomsday prophets, but to expanding the pie for all to share in increasing amounts. It can be done. I have every confidence that it will be done. I have total faith in the American people, utmost faith in the American future, and in the future of mankind."

FULL TEXT FOLLOWS

FOLLOWING IS FULL TEXT OF SPEECH:

Before beginning my remarks to the Club of Rome, I would like to take a minute or two for a very special privilege which has been extended to me in my capacity as Vice President of the United States.

We meet here this evening in the light -- I will not say shadow -- of the figure of Benjamin Franklin. This hall, with its fine statue of Franklin by James Earl Fraser, is the Benjamin Franklin National Memorial -- so authorized by action of the Congress of the United States and signed into law by the President. This hall thus joins the other national memorials entrusted to the stewardship of the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior.

However, in accordance with the wishes of the Franklin Institute, the Benjamin Franklin National Memorial is unique in that it shall be owned and operated by the Franklin Institute for the public's benefit and education. Will you all please stand.

To the only man who signed all four documents on which our United States was founded: the Declaration of Independence, the Treaty of Alliance with France, the Treaty of Peace with Britain, and the Constitution. To the man who called himself Printer but served his country as diplomat, inventor, philanthropist, philosopher, and scientist; to Dr. Franklin, whose versatility and character stand as inspiration for all nations: I hereby formally dedicate the Benjamin Franklin National Memorial.

I welcomed your invitation to participate in this forum because I believe the resolution of the debate over growth versus no-growth is crucial for the future of America -- and, indeed, for all mankind.

The Club of Rome has sparked a vigorous debate over growth, the availability of resources, the disparities of material well-being among peoples of the world, and the capacities of men and their institutions to deal intelligently with the future.

It has suggested limits to growth are essential to avoid future catastrophe. It has indicated that human conflicts can make a shambles of the world even before the alleged limits of physical resources are reached. It has put forth what it says must be done against what people are likely to do or can be persuaded to do to meet the critical world situation envisaged.

The sheer magnitude of the concepts and the authoritative ring of the postulates of the Club of Rome studies are at first impression apt to be overwhelming. Their awesome dimensions alone persuaded some, intimidated others and challenged thinking people.

This original challenge was a major service. It was timely. It was welcomed. These studies therefore, I suggest, should be considered as provocation -- not gospel. For like all studies and all computer projects, they are as valid as the assumptions upon which they are based and the nature and quality of the impact they ingest.

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The Club of Rome executive committee explicitly recognized this and considered its work but a first step toward coming to grips with the future state of the world. With respect to the future as it relates to the capability of men to provide for mankind, what can be done about it?

I deliberately pose the problem as one of men -- not of resources. Barring cataclysmic natural disasters, men can find the resources, provide the technology, and produce the material goods to meet human need. There is no real shortage of material resources. They can be developed. They can be managed. Indeed the shortage of raw materials is not due to a basic scarcity but to the limited amounts currently available for cheap and easy exploitation.

With work, with ingenuity and more expenditure of money and effort, most raw material shortages can be overcome and where the product is seriously limited, substitutes can be provided. But it takes not only intelligence and know-how to accomplish this result. It takes initiative and incentive.

There are nations of the world with limited material resources that have achieved phenomenal standards of living, which provide freedom of choice and high levels of culture for their inhabitants. There are nations of the world richly endowed with resources that have achieved even more spectacular results. But there are nations of the world amply supplied with resources that have yet to develop -- or have actually retrogressed in their contribution to human needs. And there are, of course, nations of the world lacking in resources, that neither have developed a dynamic for improvement nor scaled their claims and their ambitions accordingly.

What I am saying is that the world's capacity to provide for humankind is not a matter of physical resources. It is a matter of human will, human ingenuity, human determination and human organization.

On this score, certainly, there are serious difficulties -- and the human condition in parts of this globe troubles our hearts, disturbs our conscience and calls forth compassion. But it must never be forgotten that far more people today in more parts of the world -- both in numbers and percentages -- live in greater health and comfort than ever before in history. This has been possible because of technology, economic growth and development of resources.

It has become possible because the basic concept that people count -- not just an hereditary oligarchy or a privileged few -- has spread and continues to spread throughout the world. It has been possible because the science and art of production and management are being shared across the face of the earth. It is possible also because of the interchanges of people, for several decades now, through missionary effort, education, business, cultural interchange, travel and transportation.

Certainly there are problems -- difficult problems, but there has been enormous progress. And I for one believe there is great promise for the future. How can this promise be realized?

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Obviously the dimensions of the question extend far beyond a single speech or any individual effort even to define -- much less to provide -- comprehensive answers. But the longest flight always begins at takeoff and the time for takeoff is here and now.

For Americans the Bicentennial offers an added inducement to review the situation, consider what should be done here at home and by America in the world. It is my belief that the most meaningful thing America can do is to demonstrate that economic growth and the material well-being of individuals are not only compatible with but are essential to environmental health and human dignity.

More growth is essential if all of the millions of Americans are to have the opportunity to improve their quality of life. Indeed, in our democratic society, growth is demanded. The major key to healthful growth is energy. Energy is essential to the processing of raw materials, the production of food, and the provision of the other necessities and amenities for living.

Here in the United States, primarily through expansion of nuclear and coal facilities and through energy saving actions, the energy needs for the next several decades can be met with reduced dependence and ultimate elimination of the need for foreign petroleum imports. The technologies exist and the environmental impacts are known and controllable.

More energy is needed -- both for growth and to enhance our environment -- by cleaning up the air, purifying our waters, cutting down on noise and providing a wholesome milieu for both urban and rural living.

It should never be forgotten that the principal objective of environmental action should be man. He is the most precious and crucial species. It should also never be forgotten that civilization exists only through environmental control.

The United States has the resources within its borders to achieve energy self-reliance if it chooses to do so. This requires a major and immediate effort.

But we can develop the nuclear capacity, the coal facilities and the off-shore continental oil and gas potentialities to meet our needs before the end of this century. Such self-reliance can be achieved without imperilling a wholesome environment for living. Indeed, such self-reliance is essential to assure and enhance the opportunities for employment and for improved living standards for all Americans.

The net effect of the effort on the world scene would be to reduce America's claims on energy resources beyond its borders, and to augment America's strength as a bastion of economic and social, military and political strength -- with the significance that holds for human freedom in the world. For without that strength, the United States cannot meet the needs of its people at home nor its responsibilities throughout the world. In this way, we can help others achieve their similar aspirations and strength through growth.

What about the institutional arrangements to make this growth possible? The Club of Rome appropriately has raised questions about the capability of present institutions within nations and in the world to deal effectively with these matters.

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Here in the United States, one must express concern that the Congress has not moved to deal with the energy problem at the scope and level of action required, perhaps because the American people do not seem to be aware of the potentially devastating crisis that could cripple us without warning through another oil boycott or interdiction of our sea supply lines.

But we do have the institutional basis and a time-tested and experience-proven means of achieving major results. I refer to our unique American enterprise system.

Here government can establish the framework of law and general policy within which the private sector of the economy will have the incentive, can use its ingenuity, initiative and drive to accomplish results. It will take governmental action to set the framework for these efforts to produce environmentally compatible growth.

The prescription for action here in the United States will differ from that for other nations in its particulars. Unless peoples in other parts of the world, industrialized or not industrialized, are motivated to work and produce to meet their own needs and participate in world trade, it is obvious the world's problems will not be met.

The people of the United States can set an example for the future, as they have in the past, that a free people with a work ethic and a concern that the benefits of production be available to all, can achieve unprecedented results.

It is clear that the state-dominated collective regimes cannot provide that example, for they have not proven as effective in producing the wherewithal or providing the compassion for human needs as has our American enterprise system.

It is naive, indeed dangerous, to assert, as some do, that the industrialized nations of the world must support the underdeveloped nations of the globe through massive and long term foreign aid in goods and services and massive grants of capital. Such an institutionalized international dole would not only be unworkable, and impossible, but it would be counterproductive by failure to stimulate the local populace to actions on their own behalf.

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Western Europe and the British Isles would never have made their enormous contributions to the world in art, literature, music, science and technology, nor to the concept of human individuality and dignity throughout the globe, without their industrial productive power and their effectiveness in world trade and commerce. This lesson should not be lost. There should be no assumption that the values represented and the advancement in the condition of mankind that resulted, will continue automatically.

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The loss to mankind can be disastrous if the nations that have sparked and carried forward the concepts of freedom and human dignity, and implemented them in law, in economic activity, in political life and social living, should fail to maintain their dynamism and growth. This has particular significance to the people of the United States.

Here the influence of "no-growth" thinking has already retarded some of the traditional dynamic thrust of the nation. It has taken various forms, such as: over-protective measures regarding environmental matters; excessive consent mechanisms before proceeding with vital public works, industrial plants, energy-producing facilities and the like; instability and insecurity, especially as concerns public and private investment, due to shifting the "rules of the game" by constantly changing governmental policies and regulations, resulting in ever-increasing complexity of bureaucratic red tape.

This thinking has been influenced by the overemphasis on services and consumer-oriented production, to the detriment of capital investment necessary to maintain, modernize and expand the nation's productive plant and to expand job opportunities. The world cannot gain by diminishing the vision, the confidence, the strength, the drive, and the capacity for leadership of the United States.

We, as a people, cannot play our full part on this planet unless we retain our dynamism and strength. Our history establishes our national commitment to the freedom and dignity of all people. What we face now is a practical problem of how to contribute effectively in the future to the quality of life for all people. That process starts at home.

The stakes involved in the Club of Rome debate are far greater than whether the productive capacities of the world can keep up with population. They involve whether people will be able to live with freedom and dignity or whether slavery in some disguised form will spread further to vast areas of this earth.

I return, therefore, to the proposition that one of the greatest contributions America can make, toward meeting the problems of the future in the world, is to develop its own capacities and strengths, to emphasize its concern for human freedom and to lend this strength, concern and cooperation to international efforts to improve the condition of mankind. The development of international structures to carry forward the needed cooperative efforts to meet human needs will most surely take care, thought and ingenuity.

One of the first tests -- now before us -- is whether there can be agreement on the utilization and implementation of the life-giving elements of the oceans and other great water resources and on mineral extraction from the ocean floors. Similar international arrangements must be made for the development of the potential resources in outer space and in the Arctic and Antarctic.

The world has yet to develop adequate structures whereby the state-controlled economies and the freer economies can devise methods of relating to each other that will preserve the benefits, strength and vitality of free societies. Beginnings have been made but much more solid thought and consideration need to be directed to this area.

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And finally, underlying all of these matters that have been discussed, there is the basic problem of population growth versus the capacity of the world to support it. This was and remains a major concern of the Club of Rome. We know now that control of population growth relates to education, to improvement in the standard of living, to the enhancement of the status of women, to cultural changes, and to alteration of the mores and folkways of societies. Experience, therefore, would indicate that economic growth will assist and result in population control, rather than retard it.

Actually, the partial application of the products of the growth and development of the industrialized nations has resulted in the health measures that have reduced mortality rates so dramatically in the underdeveloped world. Without the export of that knowledge, technology, products and services, the population problem would not exist in the proportions of today.

The Club of Rome has rendered a great service in provoking the debate. It can render great service now and in the future in its search for viable solutions. I would, however, urge that in this pursuit, the Club of Rome consider mankind not as a vague generality, but as an assemblage of persons -- each a personality entitled to human dignity and individual freedom.

We can and we must add to the availability of resources, jobs, and income for people. We can and we must look not to dividing up a shrinking pie of goods and services, as envisaged by some of the Doomsday prophets, but to expanding the pie for all to share in increasing amounts. It can be done. I have every confidence that it will be done. I have total faith in the American people, utmost faith in the American future and in the future of mankind.

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