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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
PRESIDENT FORD COMMITTEE RECEPTION

THE WACO CIVIC CENTER

5:34 P.M. CDT

First, I want to thank Senator John Tower for the wonderful job that he has done as the chairman of the President Ford Committee for the great State of Texas. John, you have done as fine a job there as you have done as United States Senator for the State of Texas.

Then I would like to express my deepest appreciation to these four fine people from your Congressional district who are running to support me in this forthcoming election on May 1. I thank each and every one of you and obviously I wish you the very best.

I had a wonderful experience here in Baylor -- or in Waco just in the last hour or two. I went over to Baylor University. They made an ex-Wolverine a Baylor Bear. (Laughter) You know, you didn't treat us very well up there in Ann Arbor last fall. (Laughter)

But, it was a great game, and we are going to have -- the game ended in a tie, I guess, that was about as thrilling a ball game as we had. So, I want to thank all of you from Baylor and all of you from Waco for the hospitality and the friendliness and the very warm welcome that I have received.

Now, let me take just a few minutes. I have had the privilege and pleasure to shake hands with a good many of you and wish you well and thank you for coming here. Within the next 48 hours, probably less, some very major decisions will be made here in the State of Texas, and those decisions, at least as far as the Republican Party is concerned, can be major decisions as to the future of this country.

I am honored and privileged to be here in Waco and to present myself to you and to talk affirmatively about some of the things that we have done that I think have been constructive in the 20 months that I have had an opportunity to be your President.

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Let me refresh your memory, if you will -- boy, I can remember it -- back in August of 1974. There was a great apprehension in this country following a very tragic and unfortunate situation. People were lacking in confidence in their Government in many respects. Around the world, our allies were apprehensive about future U.S. leadership.

Our adversaries on a global basis were uncertain as to what they should do or what they could do and at home we were faced, as all of you know, with roaring inflation at a rate of 12 to 14 percent, and we were right on the brink of the worst economic recession in 40 years.

Then, almost instantaneously, we had unemployment soaring and employment plummeting. It took the best advice I could get and the strongest action that I could undertake to set this country on the right course domestically. I think when you look at what has happened and transpired, with inflation down from over 12 percent to less than 3 percent for the first three months of this year, a 75 percent reduction in the rate of inflation, and where you see employment going up and unemployment going down, I think this Administration can claim some credit and deserves a chance to give this great country the same kind of policies in the years ahead for the next four years.

Now let me take just a minute, if I might, to talk about where I think we are as a country with our military capability and our foreign policy. There has been some criticism and fortunately in this country we can disagree without being disagreeable. We can have sharp differences. I can have one judgment, somebody else can have the other.

But, when you are talking about national defense policy, if I could take a minute or two to give you some credentials that I think are important, that I happen to have, in the 25 years that I served in the Congress, 14 of those years I was on what we call the Defense Subcommittee on Appropriations, which was a committee that from January to June or July spent five hours a day, five days a week interviewing, interrogating, investigating Secretaries of Defense, chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, admirals and generals.

They used to come and go like Greyhound buses before the committees. In a period of 14 years, I had some experience in U.S. defense policy, U.S. defense programs, the procurement of weapons systems, what we were doing at home and what we were doing abroad.

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Let me say that in my judgment, with that experience and with the advice and counsel of the Secretary of Defense and the current Joint Chiefs of Staff, the budget that I submitted to the Congress this year -- a 14 percent increase over last year -- the biggest defense budget in the history of the United States, we will keep, if Congress goes along, our unsurpassed capability militarily to meet the challenge, to deter aggression, to protect our security and maintain the peace. That is the kind of a defense capability we have and we are going to keep.

Let me say, you have to judge a policy on the basis of whether it is successful or not. We were looking over the record the other day. I am the first President seeking election or re-election in the last 20 years who can go to the American people and say your policies have been so successful the United States is at peace, confirm the policies that we have undertaken.

Isn't that the aim and objective -- peace and the maintenance of our precious freedom which we have today and we are going to keep tomorrow and every day in the future.

Let me make a commitment to you. Since I became President, this has been our firm commitment with the American people: I would never promise anything that we can't deliver and we will deliver everything that we promise.

I believe we have been the most effective President in challenging the Congress, which is controlled two to one by the liberal elements of the other political party. I vetoed 48 bills and 39 of them have been sustained. That is not a bad batting average in any league, and with the sustaining of those 39 bills, or those vetoes, we have saved the taxpayers of this country \$13 billion. That is action. That is success.

Another criteria by which you can judge the qualification of a President I think is whether he can act decisively and again act successfully. Just about a year ago you may recall the MAYAGUEZ incident, where some international bandits from Cambodia seized an American merchant vessel.

This country after proper warning, after seeking to get diplomatic success, I decided that the only way we could handle the matter was by affirmative, decisive, direct action, and we got the MAYAGUEZ back, period.

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One final observation, if I might. As we look back for the first two centuries of this great country, in the first 100 years of American history our forefathers fought to get independence and then they struggled hard to give us the kind of a Government which is unmatched anywhere in the history of mankind.

Maybe it is not perfect, but if you compare it with any other kind of Government that has ever existed, I think we are darned proud of it.

The second century of American history gave us through our individual initiative and through the free enterprise system the opportunity to make America the most dynamic industrial nation in the history of the world.

But now it seems to me, as we enter our third century, we have to make sure that the rights of the individual--that means you and you and you and everybody else--must be protected, that the rights of the individual should be freer in this third century than in any other period or time in our history.

That is what we want. That is what I will dedicate myself to for the next four years with your help and assistance.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 5:45 P.M. CDT)