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**OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

March 25, 1974

TO: Paul Miltich

FROM: Jack Marsh

For your information.



REMARKS OF VICE PRESIDENT GERALD R. FORD  
IN ACCEPTING  
THE AMERICAN LEGION'S  
DISTINGUISHED PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD FOR 1974  
CONGRESSIONAL BANQUET, WASHINGTON, D. C., MARCH 6, 1974



Thank you very, very much, National Commander General Bob Eaton, distinguished guest at the head table, members of the House of Representatives, fellow Legionnaires and guests.

Let me assure you that I am deeply honored and it's very difficult to express adequately my appreciation for this award. I am sure that whatever merit I have achieved in getting this award came from twenty-five years in the House, not in five months as Vice President.

But let me say, as a twenty-nine year veteran of American Legion membership of Post 2 the Furniture City Post in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I (I have a couple of friends over there) I have always been proud of my allegiance to and membership in The American Legion.

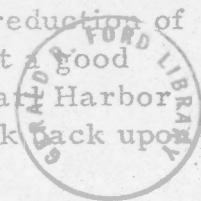
I have known firsthand, as all of you have, the wonderful things that The American Legion has done in the broadest terms civically and in a community way. Our activities, the length and the breadth of this country, have covered the spectrum in helping people, helping organizations, helping your fellowmen. And for those reasons, above almost anything else, each and every one of us should be very proud of our organization, The American Legion.

I was trying to recollect, as I sat at dinner tonight, the people who have preceded me in the receipt of this award. And, if my memory serves me correctly, they include such wonderful people as Senator Everett Dirksen; Speaker of the House, or former Speaker of the House John McCormack; the great Carl Vincent, a member of the House of Representatives for fifty years; Congressman Olin Teague, who was for many years the Chairman for the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and your last year's winner, Congressman George Mahon, Chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations.

This is a distinguished group of outstanding Americans who represent all of the best in the Congress in my time. They cut across the political spectrum. They were men who fought for what was right in their opinion, and their identity with the purposes and the programs of The American Legion was close, if not unanimous.

But this is the point that I would like to make. The American Legion recognized those men because they stood for the things that you have stood for, which include, for example, going back historically, going back to the days in the interim between 1920 and 1940, The American Legion was one of the few, if not the only organization, that had the courage and foresight to say that we were pursuing the wrong policies as far as national security was concerned. That was the period or the era when it was common practice and popular policy to slash the military, to scuttle our Navy, to not look far enough in advance to see that the Air Force or the aircraft had a future. It was the period when our manpower strength in the Army and the Navy was cut very substantially.

But The American Legion, despite the tendency in the popular support for reduction of our national security forces, stood strong, shoulder to shoulder, and fought a good fight, and when our problems arose in the late 1930's and culminated in Pearl Harbor The American Legion was proven right. And The American Legion can look back upon those two decades as a period, in many respects, of its greatest hour.



And then, of course, we have had other periods where The American Legion did things that weren't necessarily popular and stood for causes that weren't always agreed to by some of the cynics and skeptics.

In the 1950's, The American Legion was in the forefront and took the leadership in again saying, we can't ignore research and development, we can't afford to be shy in seeking funds for our missile systems and the like.. It wasn't the most popular position, but the Legion again did the right thing, despite the attitude of some of the cynics and some of the skeptics.

And now, in the 1970's, we've gone through a traumatic experience, with a long war in Southeast Asia, a ten or twelve year war, the longest in the history of the United States, finally culminating in a peace agreement. We, in that period of time, spent billions and billions of dollars for a cause that in the minds of many was a right one, and the achievement of what was done has helped us as we have moved ahead in the last twelve or fifteen months.

But as we fought that battle, we drew down stocks, we neglected research and development. We didn't proceed with some of the more advanced and sophisticated weapon systems that we needed to keep pace with one or more of our potential enemies. And now that the war in Vietnam is over, we must turn a new page and we must find the wherewithal, the money to make up for that period when we were spending.

And that new page in support for the military establishment is imprinted on the budget submitted by the President to the Congress of the United States. It's there in black and white, it's laid out effectively, appropriately, and now it's the responsibility of the Congress to step forward and to put its stamp of approval on a defense budget that will provide the necessary security for the United States and our allies.

I am optimistic. I know the Congress has a lot of good sense and a lot of fine people, and when the chips are down, the Congress will support a strong national security program, not identical perhaps, but in the context of what the President has recommended. Let me assure you that the people's names that I read off who have been the winners of this wonderful award in the past--Ev Dirksen, John McCormack, Carl Vincent, Tiger Teague and George Mahon--they don't have any hesitancy, and their record is clear of making certain that America is strong militarily, so that we can enjoy the wherewithal that has been the blessing of America.

So I say to each and every one of you, as you go back to your homes in each of the fifty states, that you think of the past winners--and the names I have mentioned should include Les Arends of Illinois, one of the stalwarts in the Congress for forty some years.

When you go back to your respective states and your homes and go back to your Post, don't sit there, don't sit complacently, stoically, and let these critics take over. Each and every one of you has your obligation to make certain that your fellow citizens, your associates in your Post, the people with whom you work, your neighbors,

understand the critical necessity of supporting a military program like that recommended by the President. If you do your job as missionaries in the hinterland, the Congress will respond and America will be safe as we negotiate and stand for peace.

Thank you very kindly.

