

SPEECH BY REP. GERALD R. FORD, JR.

RESERVE OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION CONVENTION AT

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

July 27, 1949

Mr. Hanna, Governor Williams, General Vaughn, distinguished guests, and fellow members of the Reserve Officers' Association, as the Representative in Congress from this district in Michigan I welcome you to our great community on behalf of the citizens of the City of Grand Rapids. We are delighted to have you with us as our guests. We know your visit will be enjoyable. Further, I am certain the work of the delegates on the business agenda will be successful. In passing, let me compliment and congratulate Major Hanna, his working staff and the members of the Grand Rapids R.O.A. chapter for their unselfish and untiring efforts in preparing for this convention. They deserve our most enthusiastic commendation.

Grand Rapids, your host, is well known throughout this country and even worldwide as the Convention Crossroads of America, the Gateway to the Playground of America, and as the Furniture Capital of the World. We are rightfully proud of these titles that have been bestowed upon us, and our citizens will do their utmost to live up to our reputation.

My good and able friend Frank Whitwam, Manager of the Convention Bureau, will effectively and graciously meet the convention's every need, just as he and his staff have done for



countless other gatherings here in the past years. We have, as the Convention Crossroads of America, a reputation to maintain of cordiality and service, and I trust, when you leave, there will be a true desire to return.

Michigan is rightfully proud of its vast recreational resources. With all due deference to those who come from other regions where nature's blessings are abundant, we Michiganders believe our recreational assets, both in the lower and upper peninsulas, are unsurpassed. Grand Rapids is the Gateway to this vast playground area. After the serious business of this convention has been properly laid aside, please extend your stay by a trip to the multitude of surrounding lakes, or Lake Michigan, where the inducements for complete and utter relaxation are overwhelming.

As a long-time resident of Grand Rapids, and consequently one endowed with the belief that this city has an untouched worldwide reputation in the field of fine furniture, I must mention that we hold the title of the Furniture Capital of the World. In one of your off moments please visit the Furniture Museum and the various furniture exhibits by our manufacturers.

I would be unjust to those in Grand Rapids who are active in the Reserve training program, to pass along without commenting on what our reserves here have done in the past and



what they are doing now. This portion of Michigan is literally a reservists' paradise. The Naval Reserve Unit in our new Armory has a long-standing tradition of being one of the finest outfits in the country. In 1927 and again in 1928 the unit was awarded the top honors nationally for surface divisions. The same degree of excellency prevails today.

The National Guard unit, part of the 126th Infantry, has always done a magnificent job both in peacetime and in war. The achievements, individually and as a unit, are indelibly written in the annals of history.

The Reserve units in the Grand Rapids area for the Air Force and Army are equally potent and effective. The details are better known to many of our distinguished guests so I will simply comment by reiterating that the Grand Rapids area is a reservists' home, therefore, it is most appropriate that the R.O.A. should hold its annual convention in such a community.

Seldom does a politician speak to such a large gathering in an atmosphere where he should have so many friends. To date, in my limited career in Congress I have already seen the difficulties in trying to please all points of view on any or all issues. It just cannot be done, so when a Representative makes a public appearance he is inevitably faced with those



who are for or against. Consequently, the atmosphere, at least ⁱⁿ among certain ^{instances} parties, can be anything but sweetness.

This occasion should be somewhat different from my point of view, for my voting record to date is in accord with what should be the attitude of most of those in the audience. I was one of the Members of the House who as a matter of record voted for the first military pay raise bill during this session of Congress. This should cause no brickbats from those on active duty in the military service. Furthermore, this military pay raise bill was on the recommended legislative action list submitted by the R.O.A. to the 81st Congress, so my point of view on that legislation should cause no ill feeling between my fellow R.O.A.'ers and myself.

I am able at this time to report good news along another line. The job is not fully completed but no hitches or road blocks should develop before Congress adjourns. Most of you are acquainted with the fact that the 80th Congress enacted Public Law 810, better known as the Reserve Retirement Act. This legislation was long overdue as the needed incentive for the building up of our Reserve components of the armed services.

As is the case with most new legislation, it takes time to work out and solve administrative difficulties. Public Law 810 was no exception. First, the Comptroller General interpreted



the law to hold that June 29, 1948 was the operative date for the beginning of "a year of satisfactory service" for retirement purposes. It is doubted by many that this was Congress's intention, but right or wrong that was the controlling legal interpretation.

As a result, however, all branches of the Armed services found themselves totally unprepared to supply the necessary correspondence courses and other material to Reservists on time so the requisite 50 points could be earned during the first year of the law's operation. The records show--and I am not criticizing the Army, Navy, or Air services--that those Reservists who depended on correspondence courses and the like, rather than on regular drill periods, could not possible earn the essential points the first year.

Early during this session of the 81st Congress this situation was called to my attention and as a result I introduced H.R. 3039, which changed the starting date for Public Law 810 to July 1, 1949. Subsequently, Senator Johnson of South Carolina introduced an identical bill in the Senate. The legislative wheels moved slowly but I am pleased to report that the House of Representatives on July 18th approved a bill identical to H.R. 3039. Progress is now apparent in the Senate and I am confident that before we adjourn this greatly-needed legislation



will be on the statute books. The enactment of this law will re-invigorate the Reserve program, which had suffered a severe blow after such high hopes had been raised by the action of the 80th Congress.

After the last war I became a member of the R.O.N.S. (Reserve Officers' Naval Service). We had a limited group that met regularly to discuss naval problems in a strictly one-service atmosphere. At the same time the local chapter of the R.O.A. was accomplishing its mission in much the same climate. In view of the military unification act of 1947 this appeared to be a paradoxical situation, even on the local level. Apparently, the same was evident to the national officials in both R.O.A. and R.O.N.S., for in 1948 the two became unified with one common objective or mission, namely, the over-all national security of the United States by means of an adequate military establishment.

The delicate problem of unifying the R.O.N.S. and R.O.A. on the national and local levels was no less complicated, in a smaller way, than the difficulties confronting those in the various branches of the regular military establishment. However, the job was done by the reserve officers and as a result, our military forces are strongly bulwarked by a vast and cohesive force of civilian reservists who know and understand military problems because of past experiences in World War II. I respectfully



submit that the singleness of purpose now existent within the R.O.A. should be an example to the regulars in the national military establishment.

Let me review briefly my own reaction to the unification problem and because of recent personal experiences perhaps I can clarify a point or two. In December, 1945, while still on active duty with the Navy, I heard the first news about unification. My question was, "Why?" The reaction was natural, for I had seen all branches of the service operate most effectively in the Pacific War. In practically all instances the military successes against the Japanese resulted from teamwork of the finest sort. I wondered why the plan, which had such phenomenal success against a wily opponent with all the geographical benefits on his side, was to be junked.

Upon my retirement to civilian life early in 1946, my thinking on the question of unification undoubtedly followed that of many reservists. The law enacted in July, 1947 appeared to have considerable merit, particularly under the able leadership of the late Secretary of Defense James Forrestal. The news of the Key West agreement further strengthened my belief in the new set-up. The assignment of missions to each branch of the service at the Key West meeting of the joint chiefs of staff was a blue point for our future national security. It is my under-



standing that this has now been supplemented by the subsequent Newport agreement.

From all indications there are still some unsettled problems within the national military establishment, although one or two have been decided in recent weeks. At this time, before such a distinguished and well-informed group of experts, I make no comment on the raging controversy over the cancellation of the Navy's super carrier. Reference is only made to point out the new question which has arisen, namely, what is to be the function under present law or proposed law, of the joint chiefs of staff and the Secretary of National Defense.

Certainly all here are, or should be, familiar with the Tydings Bill in the Senate and the modified bill on the same subject which recently passed the House. At the moment the issue is being thrashed out in conference.

I am no seer so will not predict the outcome but, as is inevitable, I assume a compromise will result incorporating the necessary procurement and fiscal reforms but denying in part the requested revisions in the chief of staff set-up.

Perhaps during the course of this convention, the delegates will consider the advisability of approving or disapproving some of the principles of the Tydings



Bill. Because there are many sound thinking people on both sides of this issue, I recommend caution and deliberate thinking. Do not get swept off your feet by generalized and superficial statements which allege that over one billion dollars can be saved by the adoption of the Tydings Bill intact. The House Committee on Armed Services and the House itself have gone on record for the proposed procurement budgeting and fiscal reforms. The field of dispute is thereby restricted.

Chairman Vinson, chairman of the House Committee, according to reports, is "from Missouri" and consequently wants to know the need for further concentration of authority in our military set-up. Many well informed citizens, both the military and civilians, ask in good faith, why must we go beyond the Unification Act of 1947 plus the bill recently approved by the House. I only ask that each of you give this important question your best attention and judgment. Your opinions both in the various branches of the service and in the R.O.A. can and will be helpful to Congress. We as citizens of this great nation should not compromise on the issue whether or



not the United States should have the best in military strength within the limitations of our economy. The differences of opinion as to the method and means by which that pinnacle can be reached will be resolved by the wisdom of those in Congress on the legislative level, by our able military leaders who have the know how and experience acquired on the field of battle and by the American citizens whose fundamental good sense somehow invariably clears the mist and straightens the course. This is a tried and true method under a republic and in conformity with our democratic ideals.

In closing let me repeat again, Grand Rapids and Western Michigan welcomes you and hopes that you have a most successful convention.

