

The original documents are located in Box D30, folder “Junior Chamber of Commerce, Grand Rapids, MI, October 8, 1970” of the Ford Congressional Papers: Press Secretary and Speech File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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AN ADDRESS BY REP. GERALD R. FORD, R-MICH.
REPUBLICAN LEADER, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BEFORE THE GRAND RAPIDS JUNIOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
AT THE PANTLIND HOTEL, GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN
6:15 P.M. THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1970

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY

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The same goes for a community. Let one group start telling everyone else how bad business is and what a sorry, deplorable economic climate they have and, sure enough, it is bound to get that way.

And the same goes for a country. Get some of the "leaders" moaning about how terrible things are economically...get them to singing the blues and telling about the "recession" we're in...and pretty soon you'll have most people believing it. And then the country will really be in trouble.

There is a term for that kind of talk...this viewing with alarm. It is called crisis-mongering--and there is a lot of it, far too much of it, going on right now.

Certain politicians and others in America are engaging in a vicious indictment of American society despite mountains of evidence that this indictment is a false one.

We have problems. Of course we have problems. But the way to solve them is not through crisis-mongering or running down America. America must approach its national problems in a spirit of affirmation.

The crisis-mongers remind me of the student who walked into the classroom determined that he was going to fail the examination. Sure enough. He flunked. With that kind of mental set, how could it be otherwise?

Don't get me wrong. I am not preaching the philosophy of Pollyanna. I am not urging that we shut our eyes to our problems and behave like a flock of ostriches.

We have problems. We have tremendous problems. But we won't solve them by running our country down.

America's balance sheet is good. Whatever our problems, this is still the

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best place in the world in which to live. We don't build barriers and fences to keep people from leaving the United States. Instead, millions of people from less fortunate countries are clamoring to get in. America must be doing something right, despite what the critics say.

Now, as we approach the end of 1970 and pass through the gateway of the new decade, is a good time to take stock--to take note not only of our shortcomings but also our strengths and accomplishments. Let's talk a little bit about what's right with America.

First and foremost, we continue to enjoy the basic freedoms of speech, press, religion, assembly and petition. If we don't like the way things are going, we are free to say so. The importance of this precious right is underscored by the fact that two-thirds of the people on this earth do not enjoy that privilege.

Year after year, more Americans are at work, earning more, producing more and building more than ever before. Our continuing economic growth provides a standard of living that is the envy of the world. We are better fed, better clothed and better housed than any other people in all history.

Let's look at just a few examples of the progress that our great country has made in the past half century--since 1920.

In 1920, life expectancy in the United States was 54 years; now it is more than 70.

Fifty years ago the Gross National Product was \$89 billion; today it is more than \$900 billion and within this decade it will climb to a trillion dollars.

Fifty years ago there was no regularly scheduled radio broadcasting anywhere.

In 1920 there were 311,266 young people graduated from high schools in the United States. This year the number--in a population that has merely doubled--was 10 times greater.

Institutions of higher education in this country conferred 53,516 degrees in 1920; this year they conferred more than one million.

In 1920 six per cent of our population was illiterate; today illiteracy has almost disappeared in America.

In addition to almost eliminating illiteracy, we have a larger proportion of college graduates among our people than any other country in the world. The percentage of college graduates in our population is twice as great as any other nation.

Our flight to the moon is, of course, a glittering achievement. But it is truly more significant that we have conquered polio and are continuing to make

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great medical advances.

The moon landing aside, America should continue to lead the world in education and science in the Seventies.

Today, about 40 per cent of our high school graduates go on to institutions of higher learning. Our young people comprise the brightest, best informed and most concerned generation in American history.

Despite the tiny vocal radical minority who wave Vietcong flags or hold college deans hostage in their offices, the fact remains that our young people are America's greatest asset.

I have cited examples of progress in education and other fields. These examples serve to remind us how much has changed--how much improvement there has been in health, wealth, education, communication, social consciousness and every other aspect of life in America. And we must never let ourselves forget the basic truth--that this progress has made our country the greatest nation on earth.

Yet we continue today to hear cries of doom. Is this a modern-day phenomenon? No, there have always been doomsdayers in this land as well as in others. And, as in the past, the vast majority of Americans will keep on working and building and helping the United States to go on to new greatness.

Today we hear a constant clamor about the economy, about unemployment.

What the viewers with alarm do not tell you is that our unemployment rate today is less than it was in the four years preceding escalation of the Vietnam War, beginning in February 1965.

They do not tell you that there are 79 million Americans working--1.5 million more than a year ago.

They do not tell you that the prime interest rate is coming down, that the present rate of 7.5 per cent is only half a per cent above the level when the present Administration came into office, that the recent reduction in the prime rate signals reduced inflationary pressure on our economy and is a firm step toward stability in the money market and the economy.

They do not tell you that, nationally, housing starts are almost back to normal, up in August to a figure higher than in the previous six months of this year.

They do not tell you that the average income of the individual American is nearly twice that of any other country in the world, that the personal income of all Americans in August was up again and higher than the average monthly level for this year.

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They do not tell you that unemployment is a full 25 per cent less than it was in 1961.

They do not tell you that the typical American family can buy nearly twice as much with its annual income now as it could in 1950.

They do not tell you that after making full allowance for higher taxes and inflation, the average real income of Americans is higher this year than ever before.

They do not tell you that the rise in consumer prices in August was the smallest in 20 months.

They do not tell you that the rise in consumer prices in June, July and August was at an annual rate of 3.5 per cent, the lowest three-month rate since the fall of 1967.

I personally have no doubt about the strength and potential of the U.S. economy.

The economy has been going through a trial by fire--the fire of inflation. We are fighting an inflation that has been pushing prices upward for more than four years. And we are trying to bring about the rare combination of stable growth and high unemployment.

I say we are winning the fight against inflation. We are winning it because our present fiscal and monetary policies are the proper policies for this point in time. We are winning it because the U.S. economy is the strongest and soundest that the world has ever known.

What else are the doomsdayers wailing about? About how the Vietnam War is tearing this country apart. These are the same people who are saying that we should tell the slackers who have run off to Canada that all is forgiven.

The United States has had draft-dodgers before and we have survived. More than 300,000 draftees refused to report for service in World War I. That was more than 10 per cent of the total who were actually inducted. We lived through that ugly chapter in our history and went on to become a greater nation.

What else are the doomsdayers pointing to? Racism? There is no question we must root out racial discrimination wherever we find it. But we can also be proud of the progress this country has made in remedying the wrongs of the past. We can be proud of the fact that in recent years gains in real income, education and standard of living have been proportionately greater for blacks than for whites. The proportion of Negroes earning middle incomes has more than doubled since 1950, and the proportion of black students in colleges has increased more than 50 per cent.

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There is a relatively new issue that is the center of intense interest among our people today: the steady destruction of our environment. Here, more than in any other problem area, there is a need for a spirit of affirmation. We can eliminate pollution and restore our environment and we must. The same American ingenuity that helped to create our environmental problems can lead the way to overcoming them.

No issue is of greater moment in 1970 than the Vietnam War and the prospects for peace in Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the world. The problems involved in foreign policy are most complex, most difficult. But in recognizing the difficulties let us not disregard achievement.

We have completely reversed the direction of the U.S. role in the Vietnam War. We will end our front-line combat role in Vietnam by next May. By that time we will have cut our troop strength in Vietnam by roughly a half--from 549,500 in January 1969 to 284,000 by the end of April. American combat deaths are down this year to less than one-third the number two years ago. And the full cost of the war by next June will be roughly one-half its annual rate when the present Administration took office.

We are making the transition from confrontation to negotiation. We are, hopefully, paving the way for an era of uninterrupted peace.

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We are making progress on many fronts. Of course it is not enough. But impatience will not produce results. Only affirmation--that extra measure of spirit and positivism--will.

Last January Richard Nixon delivered a State of the Union Message in which he spoke of an America that has abolished hunger, where every family is provided the means to obtain a minimum income, where enormous progress has been made in providing better housing, faster transportation, improved health and superior education, where inflation has been checked and the war against crime has been won, an America that

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has made great strides in cleaning up its air and water and opening up its parks, and most important of all an America at peace with all the nations of the world.

We have a long way to travel to realize that dream but we have already gone a considerable distance.

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They feel that way because this is still the America of the proud past, with the unique capacity to make itself into the America of the proud future which the President envisions.

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