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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
OLYMPIC DELEGATION

DISTINGUISHED ATHLETES AND GUESTS
MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION ON OLYMPIC SPORTS
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

I AM PROUD TO WELCOME YOU, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS AND
MEMBERS OF THE 1976 UNITED STATES OLYMPIC TEAM, TO THE
WHITE HOUSE.

LESS THAN A MONTH AGO, IN PLATTSBURGH,
I CONGRATULATED YOU ON MAKING THE OLYMPIC TEAM.
I WISHED YOU GOOD LUCK BEFORE YOU LEFT FOR MONTREAL.

NOW I AM HAPPY TO WELCOME YOU BACK AND TO CONGRATULATE YOU ONCE AGAIN — THIS TIME FOR HAVING DONE A MAGNIFICENT JOB.

-Ib-

I HOPE YOU ATHLETES HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO REST UP IN THE LAST FEW DAYS. LET ME SAY YOU WERE NOT ALONE IN YOUR FEATS OF STRENGTH AND STAMINA.
MILLIONS OF AMERICANS ARE NOW RECOVERING FROM MARATHON SESSIONS WITH THEIR TV SETS.

HERE AT HOME WE WATCHED YOU AND YOUR TEAMMATES RACK UP 94 MEDALS, A TRULY OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE.

YOU WON GOLD, SILVER OR BRONZE -- SOME OF YOU SET RECORDS -- BUT ALL GAVE YOUR UTMOST EFFORT, AND ON BEHALF OF ALL AMERICANS I WANT TO SAY WE ARE VERY, VERY PROUD OF YOU.
YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS ARE ALL THE MORE IMPRESSIVE FOR THE FACT THAT YOU WERE UP AGAINST SOME ATHLETES WHOSE TRAINING IS SUBSIDIZED IN VARIOUS WAYS BY THEIR GOVERNMENTS.

IN THIS COUNTRY, IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN UP TO THOSE WITH TALENT TO MAKE THEIR OWN WAY IN TRAINING AND PREPARING FOR THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF COMPETITION.
OUR BELIEF IN THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE ATHLETE, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AMATEUR TRADITION, HAS HELD US BACK FROM ALL-OUT GOVERNMENT SUPPORT. WE DO NOT WANT FEDERALLY FINANCED "MUSCLE FACTORIES."

AS ONE OF YOUR TEAMMATES SAID SO WELL --

"I WOULDN'T TRADE MY PERSONAL FREEDOM FOR ALL THE RECORDS IN THE WORLD."

AT THE SAME TIME, I BELIEVE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAN DO MORE TO HELP ATHLETICALLY TALENTED YOUNG AMERICANS ACHIEVE THEIR VERY BEST AT THE OLYMPICS.
EARLIER THIS YEAR I PROPOSED LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE FUNDING FOR PERMANENT WINTER SPORTS FACILITIES AT LAKE PLACID, TO BE USED FOR THE 1980 WINTER OLYMPICS, AND THEREAFTER TO TRAIN FUTURE AMERICAN CHAMPIONS.

WE CAN DO MORE THAN THAT, HOWEVER. IN THE LONG RUN, THEREFORE I AM ASKING THE CONGRESS TO EXTEND THE LIFE OF MY COMMISSION ON OLYMPIC SPORTS UNTIL JANUARY OF NEXT YEAR.
IN THAT TIME I ASK THE COMMISSION NOT ONLY TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF SPORTS ORGANIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES, BUT ALSO TO RECOMMEND AN EFFECTIVE MECHANISM FOR FUNDING THE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF OUR OLYMPIC ATHLETES.

OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE FOUND CREATIVE IDEAS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT FUNDING. I AM CONFIDENT WE WILL FIND WAYS IN WHICH AMERICAN ATHLETES CAN BE PROVIDED THE MEANS FOR OLYMPIC TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT, WHILE PRESERVING THEIR AMATEUR STANDING.
THIS YEAR'S OLYMPIC GAMES HAD THEIR SHARE OF
CONTROVERSY. INTERNATIONAL POLITICS SOMETIMES THREATENED
TO OVERSHADOW ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENT.

IN THE LAST WEEK OR TWO WE HAVE EVEN HEARD SOME
PEOPLE CALLING FOR THE OLYMPIC FLAME TO BE EXTINGUISHED
PERMANENTLY. I STRONGLY DISAGREE.

I AM CONFIDENT THAT THE OLYMPIC GAMES CAN BE
FREED FROM WORLD POLITICS IN THE FUTURE, REVIVING THE
SPIRIT OF SACRED ARMISTICE WHICH PREVAILED AT THE ORIGINAL
GAMES MANY HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO.
I am confident that in the long run the larger view will prevail -- that a great athletic performance is a personal achievement before it is a national achievement. Whatever their nationality, all athletes are working against the same physical and mental constraints of the human body -- of gravity and of time.

And the challenges all athletes face in common are more important than the boundaries which divide them.
THAT IS THE TRUE SPIRIT OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES. IT IS IN THAT SPIRIT THAT I PLEDGE OUR EFFORTS TO ENSURE THAT IN THE 1980 OLYMPICS, WHICH WE WILL BE HOSTING AT LAKE PLACID, POLITICS WILL BE KEPT OUT OF THE ARENA. WE WILL WELCOME EVERY TEAM RECOGNIZED BY THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE.

ATTEMPTS TO USE THE OLYMPIC GAMES FOR INTERNATIONAL POWER POLITICS WILL ULTIMATELY BACKFIRE. OUR FRIEND JESSE OWENS, HERE WITH US TODAY, PROVED THAT.
IN 1936 WHEN ADOLF HITLER WAS TRYING TO TURN
THE GAMES INTO A SPECTACLE THAT WOULD GLORIFY THE RACIST
DOGMAS OF HIS NAZI STATE, THERE WAS A STRONG MOVEMENT IN
THIS COUNTRY AGAINST OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE GAMES.

AS IT TURNED OUT, U.S. PARTICIPATION IN THOSE OLYMPICS
PROVIDED A SHARP REBUKE OF HITLER'S RACIST RUBBISH.
FIVE BLACK AMERICAN ATHLETES WON EIGHT GOLD MEDALS IN TRACK
AND FIELD.
ONE AMERICAN ATHLETE IN PARTICULAR PROVED THAT EXCELLENCE KNOWS NO RACIAL OR POLITICAL LIMITS. THAT MAN IS JESSE OWENS.

I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU ABOUT HIS PHENOMENAL ATHLETIC CAREER.

HE SET HIS FIRST TRACK RECORD IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL.

I WAS A STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN WHEN JESSE OWENS WAS A STUDENT AT OHIO STATE.
I saw Jesse at a Big Ten Track Meet in Ann Arbor, on a single day in May, break three world records and tie a fourth.

His performance that day in the running broad jump -- 26 feet, 8-1/4 inches -- was not equalled for 25 years.

It was a triumph I'll never forget.

In the 1936 Olympics, Jesse Owens won no less than four gold medals -- running in the 100 meters, the 200 meters, the 400 meter relay and the broad jump.
HE PERSONALLY ACHIEVED WHAT NO STATESMAN, JOURNALIST OR GENERAL ACHIEVED AT THAT TIME -- HE FORCED ADOLF HITLER TO LEAVE THE STADIUM, RATHER THAN ACKNOWLEDGE THE SUPERB VICTORIES OF A BLACK AMERICAN.

FIFTEEN YEARS LATER, REVISITING THAT SAME STADIUM, JESSE OWENS RECEIVED A STANDING OVATION WHEN HE URGED HIS AUDIENCE TO "STAND FAST WITH US FOR FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY." GIANTS LIKE JESSE OWENS SHOW US WHY POLITICS WILL NEVER DEFEAT THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT.
Jesse Owens' character and achievements have continued to inspire Americans as they did the world. In 1936, he brought his own talents into the service of others.

As a speaker, an author and a coach, he has inspired many young men and women to achieve their very best for themselves and for America.
AS AN AMERICAN WHO ROSE FROM POVERTY TO A POSITION
OF LEADERSHIP, HE HAS MOTIVATED OTHERS TO MAKE THE MOST
OF WHAT AMERICA HAS TO OFFER.

JESSE OWENS IS A MODEST MAN. HE MAY WONDER WHY
I AM SINGING HIS PRAISES TODAY. I COULD NEVER, NEVER
SAY THAT.

JESSE, WOULD YOU PLEASE COME UP AND JOIN ME FOR A MOMENT?

THIS AFTERNOON, JESSE, IT IS MY GREAT PRIVILEGE TO PRESENT
YOU WITH THE MEDAL OF FREEDOM -- THE HIGHEST CIVILIAN
HONOR YOUR COUNTRY CAN BESTOW.

I PRESENT YOU WITH THIS MEDAL ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE
OF THE UNITED STATES.
FOR THEM - AND IN PARTICULAR FOR ATHLETES LIKE THOSE
HERE TODAY -- YOUR CHARACTER AND YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS WILL
ALWAYS BE A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION.

THE CITATION READS AS FOLLOWS: "TO JESSE OWENS:

ATHLETE AND HUMANITARIAN, SPEAKER AND AUTHOR.

A MASTER OF THE SPIRIT AS WELL AS THE MECHANICS OF SPORT,
HE IS A WINNER WHO KNOWS THAT WINNING IS NOT EVERYTHING.
HE HAS SHARED WITH OTHERS HIS COURAGE AND HIS DEDICATION
TO THE HIGHEST IDEALS OF SPORTSMANSHIP.
HIS ACHIEVEMENTS HAVE SHOWN US ALL THE PROMISE OF AMERICA,

AND HIS FAITH IN AMERICA HAS INSPIRED COUNTLESS OTHERS

TO DO THEIR BEST FOR THEMSELVES AND FOR THEIR COUNTRY.