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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT

AT A

DINNER IN HONOR OF SENATOR GEORGE AIKEN

PATRICK GYMNASIUM  
UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

9:31 P.M. EDT

I was warned when I came up here that it would be difficult to say anything about George Aiken, but trying to follow him in Vermont is unbelievable.

George and Lola, Senator Stafford, Helen, Dick Mallary, distinguished candidates and office holders; ladies and gentlemen:

It is wonderful to be here, it is a tremendous privilege and pleasure, and let me express three special words of gratitude and appreciation.

Number one, last night I spent an hour or so with Betty at the hospital, and I was telling her that I was coming up to Vermont and we were talking about the wonderful expressions of sympathy and best wishes she had gotten, some 20,000, from all over the country, and she indicated that there had been some warm and very friendly letters from Vermont and New England.

Let me say to all of you on behalf of those who have wished her well and who have included her in their prayers, I, for her, as well as for myself, am very, very thankful.

Number two, I thank the Springfield High School band for doing two things. Number one, you did play the Michigan Victory Song, which is nice to hear, particularly when we do well, but it is something I remember with great fondness; and number two, I am a great exponent of Scott Joplin's ragtime, and some of you who heard it I am sure would appreciate it, as I did. Thank you very, very much.

About 35 years ago I was at Yale Law School, and I tried to learn to ski, and I spent a good bit of my time in New England, Vermont, particularly in the old equipment and the old roads and the rope tows and some of the old Harold Burke techniques which I have been trying to forget for the last several years.

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But all of you who were there at the time who were then skiing, I thank you for your hospitality as well as your warm welcome tonight. It is wonderful to be here in Burlington.

Before I begin, I want you to know that I am not exactly a stranger here, not only from the skiing a few years ago, but I have been in Vermont, and I was here on this precise campus. As a matter of fact, I was here on a very similar function nine years ago almost to the day, October 2, 1965.

Now, I know that you Vermonters have a great reputation for being honest, for being direct, but I never knew just how honest and direct you were until that visit.

On that occasion, I gave a little talk and then I was taken to a reception in another part of the town. At the reception a very sweet, very nice grandmother came up to me and put her gloved hand in mine and said, "I heard you gave a speech here tonight," and trying to be a little modest I said, "Oh, that was nothing." She said, "That's just what I heard." (Laughter)

So, with that thought of that sweet grandmother that was so kind rather fresh in my mind, I want you to know I am standing here tonight with all the confidence and self-assurance of the man who sells life insurance to Evel Knievel. (Laughter)

But it is a real pleasure to be here. I have had many wonderful times in Vermont and I have thoroughly enjoyed my association with your Members of the Congress that I have known so well.

I do have fond memories of skiing up here a long time ago, and as you know, I pledged an open and honest Administration when I was sworn in, and I have tried to apply that honesty to all aspects of my life.

So, I was in a little bit of trouble when Bob Stafford asked me if I was much of a skier. I said, "Well, let's just say I can ski for hours on end," and you know which end I am talking about.

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I am particularly pleased, and I say this very sincerely, to have an opportunity to participate in George Aiken Day. There is an old expression -- at least we out in Michigan knew, and I think it is pretty widely known in the country: "Let George do it." For more than 40 years, the citizens of Vermont have let George do their bidding in the State House, in the Governor's Mansion, and in the United States Senate.

I say to each and every one of you now, you have been fortunate to have such an outstanding public servant represent you in any and every public office. I congratulate you.

I think you can best summarize it by saying that George was a public servant for all seasons. He has the enviable ability to cut through the chaff and get to the very heart of any and every matter. We who served with him in the Congress, even though I was on the other end of the Capitol, know that he was noted for his strong independence of mind.

Some have criticized him for that characteristic. Frankly, I praise him for it, and all of you should too.

George has given the nation the benefit of his down-to-earth wisdom, his leadership, and his guidance in many, many areas. You in Vermont know those areas infinitely better than I-- education, electric power development, betterment of rural America, and more importantly today, foreign relations.

This very different, this wide spectrum of legislative expertise and activity, I think they only suggest the breadth and the depth and the greatness of this man.

Those who served with him a part of the time of this exemplary tenure in the Congress, we are in debt for 34 years of Senatorial service to America as well as to Vermont. I think it is very safe to say, and it ought to be said, that he, George Aiken, is in no one's debt.

I understand it is unbelievable that in George's last campaign six years ago he spent a grand total of \$17.04 for his reelection. Can you imagine anyone spending that much for a political campaign in this day and age?

I think George Aiken is the only man that I know who could go to a super market today to buy five pounds of sugar with a dollar bill and come back with some change. (Laughter)

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George, with your understanding and forgiveness, I don't think those of us who know her can forget Lola Aiken's service to Vermont in her own right. You know as well as I, and probably better, her great and long service on George's staff, and then his wife who has given her life in dedicated service to the State of Vermont, to your senior Senator, and I think it might be said that whatever Lola wants, Lola gets.

Driving from the airport, George and Lola were in the car with me, and I said to her -- which Betty had asked me to indicate to her -- how grateful my Betty was for the thoughtful card and note and the kind message that Betty received from Lola Aiken. It was this expression which is typical of her which has made her so popular in Washington, and I think so popular here in Vermont.

And to you, as well as George, Lola, I express heartfelt gratitude not only for Vermont and Washington, but for the nation as a whole, and it is my privilege and honor to be here on this occasion.

But you know, as it has been since the days of Ethan Allen, the Green Mountain State continues to produce outstanding leaders. I have known quite a few in my 25 years in the House and the few months since.

Bob Stafford came to the House after I had been there a few years. He was a former Governor. He came with a great reputation as an individual who had served so well. And I can only say that it is wonderful to see him rise with deserved recognition in the United States Senate.

Bob, it is nice to be here with you and Ellen tonight.

Dick Mallary came a couple of years ago and he, like Bob, has a wonderful reputation for superb service in your State legislature. A former Speaker, a man who is an expert in fiscal and financial affairs, he was instantly recognized in the House of Representatives for this experience, his integrity, and his skill. It is a pleasure for me to see that he is your candidate for the United States Senate.

Dick, I look forward to your extending and expanding the contributions that you have made in the past to the future on behalf of not only Vermont but to the country as a whole. Good luck. It is wonderful to see you coming down the path.

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I have to be frank. I hate to see good people like Bob Stafford leave the House and good people like Dick Mallary leave the House because my heart really was in the House of Representatives. It was my home for nearly or over 25 years.

And with the departure of Dick Mallary, I just hope and trust that Jim Jeffords will follow on and be in the great imagine, in the great pattern of people like Charlie Humphrey, Bob Stafford, Win Prouty, Dick Mallary. These are the kind of people that you have sent in the past, and the kind that I hope you will send in the future, and Jim Jeffords is in that mold. Jim, good luck to you.

Mr. Chairman, it was wonderful that you recognized Jeannette Prouty, a dear friend of Betty's and myself. It is just nice to see you, Jennette.

We have had some other fine people appear on the program. I was delighted to see that there was a Kennedy that I could endorse.

I know that he will be a first-class Governor when you elect him on November 5.

Let me, if I might, speak about a problem that I think transcends the borders of Vermont, a problem that is of great importance to people whether they are from the State of Washington or Vermont or Michigan or Florida.

I would like to say a word or two about one of my very chief concerns: the preservation of a two-party system in our country. In the wake of Watergate, the national polls tend to indicate that the number of independent voters is growing, and I understand that.

There is great disillusionment, for good and sufficient reasons. The number of party voters, both Republican and Democrat, is shrinking rapidly, tragically. Unfortunately, we in the Republican Party are not doing as well as our Democratic friends.

I am deeply concerned about this, not for the sake of our party or the Democratic Party, but in all sincerity for the fate of the country, for I am convinced that the future of America is very directly tied to the good aspects of politics in this country, and I use it in the proper context, the politics that have made America grow from 13 struggling colonies almost 200 years ago with some three million people primarily on the borders of the Atlantic Ocean to a Nation today with some 213 million people with 48 States within the Continental limits, plus Alaska and Hawaii.

I am convinced that politics in the best sense can and will be in the future the salvation of our system, and the politics of America is bound up in the two-party system.

I think most of us know that a two-party system, the one we have had in America, has contributed stability, opportunity, and freedom. These things do not just sort of happen. They do not happen automatically. These very treasured elements -- stability, opportunity and freedom -- they are the outgrowth of a political continuity and stability that followed in the development of the two-party system in America.

It seems to me as I have looked back over history that this approach that has been so strong in the development of self government, it offers diverse people and segments of our population a choice, a choice without chaos.

I think historically a two-party system has worked well in America. It was not envisaged by our founding fathers. There is nothing in the Constitution that says we should have two political parties and no others. As a matter of fact, we went through somewhat of an evolutionary process and finally fell into the pattern of a two-party system.

But as we look back over the last century, the evolution of a two-party system in this country has been the foundation of political balance and strength. This is not just a personal view of my own. It is a lesson that we have learned and relearned, not only in America but in other countries.

As we look around the globe, we find that in those countries where there are many, many political parties, and some countries do have many, there is instability, there is chaos, there is a lack of direction, whether it is in foreign policy or domestic policy, or if we look at those countries where there is a one-party system -- you are familiar with the facts of the extermination of freedom. So what I am saying is that the alternatives to a two-party system, many, many parties with chaos, or one political party with a loss of freedom, that is not what we want in America.

Well, you could look in some of these areas of the globe today, not a few but many, where you have a mass of small regional or class-oriented splinter groups, and none of those groups are strong enough or imaginative enough to give leadership to the country.

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And you can look in the other direction and see where those countries that have a dictatorial, dogmatic kind of government, the people do not really have a chance. What worries me about the extremes on either side, one party or many parties, is there is always the possibility of a man on horseback or a demagogue on a pedestal, and politically the result is too often the same.

What we need in America is two strong political parties; free, vital, broad enough to encompass people from all segments of our society, from all economic portions of our society. This wide spectrum of political diversity can serve as the twin pillars of democracy.

I happen to think this spectrum that we represent is broad enough to have many, many people in the State of Vermont who have a similar political philosophy to those of us in Michigan who belong to the Republican Party, but at the same time, in your State as well as in ours, there is a sufficiently broad spectrum in the public to appeal to those that want to be Democrats.

This competition between two major political parties is healthy. I have often said, and I believe very deeply, that competition in business is good for business and good for the consumer. Competition in the political arena is good for the candidates, but more importantly, it is good for the voters.

And we need the two-party system to develop, to maintain and to stimulate that future in our political structure.

President Eisenhower once outlined what our vision should be as members of one great political party, and he, of course, embraced the Republican Party. Ike said, "We see our party not as an end in itself, but as a magnificent means, a means through which countless thousands of devoted citizens can cooperate in the conquering of problems that beset free men everywhere." I think Ike expressed it about as well as anybody that I know.

Now, at the moment, you are as familiar as I am with the biggest problem that I think our country faces domestically. It is besetting free men everywhere throughout the globe, and I speak very candidly of inflation.

We have inflation here that is serious, double-digit inflation we do not like, we are not going to tolerate, but it is not just in the United States. And this concern is one of my prime interests in solving, as it is yours.

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In the two months that I have been privileged to be your President, I probably spent as much, if not more, time in listening to people who had ideas, listening to groups that had suggestions, trying to sort out the many, many things that came to us in the Nation's Capital from people all over the United States.

I am sure in the many, many communications that we have gotten and suggestions we have received, Vermont contributed its share. Tomorrow, before a Joint Session of the Congress, I will outline a comprehensive plan to deal with inflation, and I will recommend a two-pronged attack or a two-pronged undertaking.

First, I will call for strong, broad, and firm legislative action by the Congress in a number of areas, but it will require a responsive action by the Congress with the President if we are going to meet this challenge.

In addition, I will call upon the American people, 213 million of you, to join with me and the Congress in an effort to move ahead to accomplish success, to win the battle over inflation and at the same time to maintain a growing economy, and I know that I can call upon the fine legislators like George Aiken, Bob Stafford, Dick Mallery, who worked with me and with their colleagues in the Senate, and the House.

We must win this battle, our public enemy number one, if we are going to save the political fabric of this country and the political fabric of countries that believe in freedom around the world.

Yes, I am going to ask every citizen to enlist, every citizen in this country to participate, to make a sacrifice and I am going to call upon the Federal Government to sacrifice and State and local units of government to tighten their belts and others to cooperate ~~in~~ winning the struggle against our public enemy number one.

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I am particularly mindful of the unemployed and the retired people living on already small and fixed incomes, and we have to have a program that is designed to protect those who are least fortunate, and there will be a program aimed to be compassionate and helpful.

But it will be a fair program, as I said the other day to some news commentator. I do receive a lot of advice in this area and I must reveal one thing. I am not going to ask for -- and I got this advice from George and Bob and Dick. They said, "Don't ask for any increase in the Federal gasoline tax."

So let me give you a preview. Let me give you one sneak preview. I am not going to ask for any increase in the gasoline tax and any speculation to the contrary is untrue.

Now if I might close with just one final comment. I, as all of you, particularly your Governmental officials, have great faith in our system. I know there are skeptics and pessimists who from time to time wonder whether our system can survive in the competitive world that we face. But every time I listen to a pessimist, I cannot help but recall what Winston Churchill once said when he was asked to comment about a free society, and as I recall -- and I am paraphrasing a bit -- Winston Churchill said, "Democracy is the worst form of government except it is better than any other that has ever been tried."

I believe in that and so do you.

Then they tell the story -- and I was in Philadelphia a few weeks ago -- that Continental Congress that met for the purpose of writing our Constitution, or I should say our Constitutional Convention -- they had representatives from 12 of the 13 states. Some 55 of them. They worked long and hard from May until September. When they finished their labors -- and there were compromises between the big States and the small States, between the big cities and the rural communities -- they finally fashioned probably the greatest document in the history of mankind for the governing of people. !

And after they had all signed and left that hall, the last one to leave was Benjamin Franklin. He strolled down those steps and as he got to the cobblestone street, he was asked this question by a bystander:

"Mr. Franklin, what have you given us -- a monarchy or a republic?"

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And according to the story, Benjamin Franklin said, "We have given you a republic if you can keep it."

I do not have to talk to Vermonters about keeping the Republic. You have done it for 200 years.

But what I am saying is we have done it for 200 years, but we must do it today by sacrifice and vision and wisdom for the next 200 years. And George Aiken represents the kind of leadership that has built and constructed the future for those of us who will carry on.

Thank you very kindly.

END

(AT 10:02 P.M. EDT)