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JANUARY 18, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT AN  
AFL-CIO DINNER

WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL

7:36 P.M. EST

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Bob and George Meany, Hubert Humphery and Phil Burton and my former colleagues in the Congress, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a very great privilege and high honor, and I am delighted to join with the officers of 17 international unions representing 3.5 million workers, with the leaders of industry, the distinguished individuals in our society as a whole, and others gathered here tonight to pay tribute to Bob Georgine.

I think this is most encouraging. It is somewhat symbolic, the fact that Justice, Labor, industry and Government are joined together here tonight, so the American people are coming together to take charge of their own fate.

Bob, obviously, is taking on a very great challenge, and I wish you the very best, Bob, as President of the Building and Construction Trade Department of the AFL-CIO.

Construction workers, we all know, are among those Americans feeling the heaviest impact of inflation, recession, and the energy crisis.

Bob, you have a very awesome responsibility, and I wish you the very, very best and offer to you, Bob, maximum cooperation that our Government can give you in your new responsibility.

I particularly want to thank President George Meany for his ever-continuing statesmanship, energy, and his vision that he has demonstrated in helping develop solutions to our national difficulties. I always commend George for his forthright and constructive involvement.

George and Bob and the other problem solvers of the labor movement know how to negotiate around a table, in the great spirit and in the great tradition of American labor.

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As we, as Americans, move to solve the common problem facing all of us, let us not get hung up on the differences over details of the programs that are before the Congress. The problem, in my judgment, is far too pressing and too many Americans are out of work.

I say let's join together in starting the process, maintaining forward momentum and in getting Congressional committees to meet and get down to the specific cases that whatever the differences are, they can be resolved.

To put it another way, let's start the train in the right direction and reconcile concerns over the fares and the speed and even over the rebates on tickets, but let's get started.

Tonight I would like to issue a very special invitation to George Meany, Bob Georgine and all of the other great leaders of American labor. The White House door is open to you and your associates. I need your help, but more importantly, the country needs your help, and I say to the construction and building trades tonight, let us construct, let us build, rather than debate and denounce.

I ask you tonight, and I ask each and every one of you tonight, to join with me in pressing for action to get our economy moving again to open new construction and new jobs across America.

I ask you to put your tremendous forces, your efforts, behind the drive for an American energy independence, and I call on you to volunteer, as you have so often in the past, as labor has done it repetitively, to work in every community to install energy-saving home insulation with the materials that the Federal Government will make available to the poor people in our society.

Obviously, I congratulate Bob Georgine, a young fellow. It is a great opportunity, and there is no question that he will make it and do extremely well, and those of us who know of his background and know of his capabilities are convinced beyond any question of a doubt that he will perform in the great, great tradition of the outstanding labor leaders of our country in the past.

Bob, I congratulate you and wish you the very best.

Let me conclude with this observation. I understand somewhat, incidentally, that Bob plays gin rummy. I won't say how well, but let me put it this way: Bob Georgine has done for gin rummy what the Titanic did for ocean travel. (Laughter)

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So, Bob, to help you with this problem, I would like to give you a little gift, a copy of Cohen's complete book of gin rummy. I am told it should do wonders for your game, and the next time you play George Meany and Lane Kirkland, you will be able to lose more convincingly. (Laughter)

But whether you win or lose, Bob, you and the other leaders of the American labor movement and all Americans are going to be winners in our struggle--and I mean in the broadest sense, our struggle--over the real problems that face our Nation, for when America wins, American labor wins, and all Americans are in our problems together, and together we will forge for the benefit of all a new direction for all of our great country.

I am honored to attend your testimonial, Bob, and may I make this presentation and wish you well as you compete with those old pros.

END (AT 7:47 P.M. EST)