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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
23RD ANNUAL NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST

WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL

9:11 A.M. EST

Mr. Vice President, my good friends from the Congress, my associates in the Executive Branch and our fellow workers in government from the various states and local communities, ladies and gentlemen:

Al Quie is a very hard man to follow, whether in political debate, and especially at a prayer session. There are very few people I know who demonstrate better the truth that to be a leader one must first be a servant, and Al is indeed a diligent servant of God and of his fellow men.

Yes, I have been fortunate to know, during a few years in Washington, many, many others who have the same strength, the same feeling, and it has been a great experience for me.

The platform on which we are standing this morning -- standing in the need of a prayer, as the old spiritual goes -- is broad enough and strong enough to hold politicians of all elements of all parties, men and women of many different convictions, both religious and political convictions. The beauty of Joseph's coat is its many colors, and the beauty of these prayer breakfasts is the many faiths they bring together. We are joined in the profound realization that none of us can go it alone and that we do not need to go it alone if we seek the help of God and of our fellowship.

While I have been coming to these annual gatherings for a good many years, I must admit that this one takes on a little different meaning. In the past, I have found the opportunity for reflection and for rededication and, on occasion, to pray for our country and its leaders, for my friends and my loved ones, for the courage to do what is right and forgiveness for my own shortcomings and trespasses.

But, since we last met, I have discovered another aspect of the power of prayer. I have learned how important it is to have people pray for me. It is often said that the Presidency is the loneliest job in the world. Yes, and in a certain sense, I suppose it is. Yet, in all honesty, I cannot say that I have suffered from loneliness these past six months.

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The reason, I am certain, has been that everywhere I go, among old friends or among strangers, people call out from the crowd or will say quietly to me "We're praying for you," or "You are in our prayers," and I read the same sentiments in my mail. Of course, there are some that are not so inspiring, but the great ground swell of good will that comes from the true spirit of America has been a wonderful source of strength to me as it was, I am sure, to other Presidents before me. Believe me, having counted the votes and knowing that you have them is a great satisfaction, but the satisfaction of knowing that uncounted numbers of good people are praying for you is infinitely more rewarding.

Prayer is a very, very personal thing, at least for me. Yet, to me, as many of my predecessors, it is a terribly important source of strength and confidence.

Now, I am able to truly appreciate that statement attributed to Abraham Lincoln, who confessed, and I quote: "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I have nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seem insufficient for that day."

President John F. Kennedy spoke to one of these prayer breakfasts a few months before his tragic death. Many of you will remember his moving conclusion, and let me share it with you: "This morning we pray together, this evening apart, but each morning and each evening, let us remember the advice of my fellow Bostonian, the Reverend Phillip Brooks: 'Do not pray for easy lives, pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers, pray for powers equal to your tasks.'"

On the day that I suddenly became President of the United States, after all the guests had gone, I walked through some of the empty rooms on the first floor of the White House and stopped by that marble mantle in the dining room to read the words carved in it -- words that were a prayer of the first President who ever occupied the White House: "I pray to heaven to bestow the best of blessings on this house and all that shall hereafter inhabit it."

John Adams wrote, "May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof."

I am grateful to President Adams for leaving that message and to all who have said amen to it for nearly two centuries.

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My own prayer is for God's continued blessing and God's continued guidance for our country and all its people whose servants we in government strive to be.

It had been my intention to suggest we have a prayer together at this point, but Harold Hughes will follow. Let me just say, I hope, at some time during this day, each in your own way, if you think it appropriate, will pause to ask God's blessing upon our Nation, our leaders in the Executive, the Legislative, leaders in all forms of government throughout this country and, yes, to all our people, and when you have finished, I think we can say that we should thank our Father for listening, in Jesus' name, amen.

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(AT 9:20 A.M. EST)