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FEBRUARY 13, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY  
(New York, New York)

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
SALUTE TO THE VICE PRESIDENT DINNER

THE WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL

9:47 P.M. EST

Thank you very, very much, Nelson. I will respond with my deepest appreciation and wonderful gratitude with some comments just in a few moments, but let me thank Gus and Brook and all of you who have come here tonight. I am just so pleased and, of course, honored.

I think it is wonderful to have Jack Javits, Jim Buckley, Malcolm Wilson and all of the other public officials who are here paying tribute to Nelson, as I am, because we all think he was not only a great Governor, but I think he is a great Vice President.

You know, there is a somewhat trite slogan that says, "Ford has a better idea." (Laughter) Well, I am here tonight to tell you that one of the best ideas this Ford ever had was nominating Nelson Rockefeller to be Vice President of the United States.

All of you know, as well as I, if not better than I, that Nelson Rockefeller has been a distinguished public servant, a sensitive and compassionate humanitarian, a superbly able Governor and now he has embarked on even a new and greater challenge, the second highest office in this great land of ours.

Mr. Vice President, I hope to share for a very, very long time your counsel, your confidence and your wonderful company. I will add with a personal footnote, I know Happy will look forward to that with you as well.

In all honesty, or fairness, Mr. Vice President I must admit that in your career you have also had a few less memorable moments. In the 1960s the Vice President was a very strong supporter of John Lindsay, and John became a Democrat. (Laughter) He was a very strong supporter of Ogden Reid, and Brownie became a Democrat. (Laughter) Now the only thing that bothers me, he is a very strong supporter of me. (Laughter)

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Frankly, though, Nelson, I don't think I could do that to the Democrats. That is all they need right now -- is one more candidate for President. (Laughter)

Tonight we pay tribute to a man of unlimited talent, outstanding accomplishments and boundless enthusiasm. When Nelson tackles a project, he gives it everything he has got.

Now, using a little wrestling jargon, I have never known him to apply a half-Nelson to anything. (Laughter)

Therefore, I am designating the Vice President to be the Vice Chairman of my Domestic Council, with the responsibility of overseeing its vitally important work. He will assist me in carrying out my responsibilities for the domestic policy formulation with a broad conceptual framework.

I want the Domestic Council to undertake, if I might list them, the following responsibilities: First, assessing national needs and identifying alternative ways of meeting them. Second, providing rapid response to Presidential needs for policy advice. Third, coordinating the establishment of national priorities for the allocation of available resources. Fourth, maintaining a continuous policy of review of our ongoing programs. As we look down the road, proposing reforms as we need them.

Now, because of the complexity in the inter-relationship of domestic policy and programs, I believe the broadest perspectives must be utilized in Domestic Council deliberations. That is why I personally, with the deepest conviction and support, have asked the Vice President to serve as Vice Chairman of the Council and to personally and vigorously oversee its work.

It will, as I am sure many of you know now, and I hope all of you will see later, provide for the full coordination of the work of this Council with the responsible people for my Economic Policy Board and the Energy Resources Council.

They will work in the closest relationship with one another, and may I add that at the present I am announcing my intention to appoint Jim Cannon as Executive Director of the Domestic Council and Assistant to the President for domestic affairs.

Dick Dunham will be Deputy Director of the Domestic Council, and they, of course, will work closely with the Vice President in the operations of the Domestic Council and most closely with myself.

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If I might for a few moments tonight -- perhaps longer than you might like, but I am speaking most seriously in the special area of foreign policy -- I am not the first President to have this Vice President's wise counsel.

Nelson visited Latin America on the eve of World War II. He perceived the danger of anti-American propaganda and penetration the Axis powers of governments and economies in some nations in this hemisphere.

Nelson voiced, at that time, timely concern to President Roosevelt in 1940, over a year before Pearl Harbor. In designating Nelson to coordinate inter-American affairs, President Roosevelt was not thinking about Rockefeller the Republican, he was thinking about Rockefeller the American.

Nelson improved relations with Latin America during the darkest days of World War II. In 1945, President Roosevelt appointed him Assistant Secretary of State for American Republic Affairs. Nelson contributed much to the concept of mutual security that led to the Rio Pact, to NATO and to enlightened international cooperation.

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Now, during World War II, I had the good fortune to serve aboard a Navy aircraft carrier. I began to see at that time the islands of the Pacific and America's links with the world in a much broader perspective than I did as a young man in Michigan.

When I took my oath as a Member of Congress in January 1949, Arthur Vandenberg was senior Senator from Michigan and the Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Relations. The Senator at that time was concerned over the future of bi-partisanship in foreign policy. He preferred to call it at that time "non-partisanship."

Although more seriously ill than those of us who were his friends knew, Senator Vandenberg saw his job as unfinished unless the Republican Congress at that time and President Truman could fashion a decent peace to prevent World War III.

While working for world peace with President Truman and Secretary of State Byrnes, the Senator flatly refused to make any speeches on a partisan basis because it would tend to destroy a united American policy.

In 1950 Senator Vandenberg emphasized the need, as he put it, under our indispensable two-party system to unite our official voice at the water's edge so that America speaks with maximum authority against those who would divide and conquer us in the free world.

Senator Vandenberg said -- and again I quote -- "It does not involve the remotest surrender of free debate in determining our position. On the contrary, frank cooperation and free debate are indispensable to ultimate unity."

When one party controls the Congress, as did the Republican 80th Congress, and the other party controls the White House, as President Truman's party did, there must be cooperation or, as Senator Vandenberg said, and I quote, "America would be devoid of any foreign policy at all."

In February 1951, Senator Vandenberg differed with Senator Wherry -- as I am sure Jack Javits would recall -- who was then a very powerful Nebraskan Republican, whose resolution at the time, the major business of the Senate, would have tied the hands of President Truman in foreign policy.

The President was seeking to add American Army divisions to an intragated (laughter) -- I told my wife, Betty, that I knew this speech backwards, and I am proving it (laughter) -- to an integrated North Atlantic military force commanded by General Eisenhower. While respecting Senator Wherry's sincerity, Senator Vandenberg was convinced the restrictive resolution would undermine the President's Constitutional authority, as President of the United States.

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So, it was in February of 1951 that Senator Vandenberg said of President Truman -- and I quote -- "He is the only President we shall have and this is the only Congress we shall have during the next critical two years; the quicker we reach a working relationship so that we can have a united policy, the safer our country will be."

Today, I find myself in President Truman's job. I look to the new Congress and to the critical years ahead and I have to deal with the economic crisis in the United States and other industrialized democracies. I am, of course, concerned with the problems of recession and inflation, unemployment and energy shortages. I would be even more concerned if we were to have a 94th Congress burying its head in the domestic sands like an ostrich while expensive oil flows into America and expensive dollars flow out.

As I was working on my remarks for tonight, I asked myself this question: What has changed since the days of Arthur Vandenberg. Yes, during the later years of my service in the Congress, severe strains developed between the Legislative and Executive Branches over Southeast Asian policies of two administrations, one Democrat and one Republican.

Yes, indeed, America has experienced a series of shocks, domestic and foreign, dating back to the assassination of President Kennedy. We have new preoccupations, we have new perceptions, new priorities and, hopefully, some new directions. Nevertheless, we need non-partisanship in foreign affairs today more than we have ever needed it in the history of this earth. We need more, not less, credibility in continuity; we need more, not less, in the honest motives and high patriotic concerns of one another.

That is not to say that I wish the Congress would keep out of foreign affairs and that I want to run everything beyond the water's edge in my own way without legislative interference. Under the Constitution, the Congress has a fundamental responsibility in the shaping of all broad matters of public policy, both foreign and domestic. Nobody knows that better than I do.

But while the Congress, together with the President, makes foreign policy, only the Executive can execute it.

History is quite interesting. For the first 11 years of our national independence, we experimented with a government by legislative committee: The Continental Congress, under the Articles of Confederation. There was a President of the Congress, but no President of the country. It is a wonder, as a matter of fact, that General Washington was able to win the war.

Once our national independence was recognized. Washington and the other Founding Fathers wasted no time in writing a new Constitution in which they set aside their fears of a tyrannical king, or a too-powerful prime minister, and vested the executive authority or power in a President of the United States of America.

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The new Constitution gave the Chief Executive command of the Armed Forces raised by the Congress and the power to negotiate treaties and to receive and appoint Ambassadors with the advice and consent of the Senate.

Clearly, the Constitution contemplates a political partnership beyond the water's edge, and it clearly does not contemplate the day-to-day conducts of foreign policy any more than the day-to-day conducts of military operations by many, many different voices in the deliberative Legislative Branch.

Our system has served us so well. Without reviewing all 200 years of our history and the frequent debates between our great political parties. I can say from my own perspective -- and that of many of you -- that the record of American foreign policy since the end of World War II has been overall a most remarkable success.

When World War II was ended, the world waited to see what the United States would do--whether our power and our moral commitment would continue to be engaged worldwide or whether we would retreat again into the isolationism that contributed to the world conflict in the first place.

With the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine and the formation of our first peacetime alliances, we provided an essential bulwark of security, stability and economic progress for the world.

In the 1970s we built on this wonderful foundation with imagination and startling success. We ended America's ten-year military involvement in Vietnam. We ended it with honor and brought home our prisoners of war. We ended the crisis in Berlin. We achieved unprecedented agreements in strategic arms control with the Soviet Union. We fashioned a new relationship with China. We ended a war in the Middle East, and have been instrumental in moving the parties to the conflict toward a stable and lasting peace.

We began a new dialogue with Latin America. We launched an international effort to meet the challenge of a global food crisis. We have taken up the role of leadership to promote international cooperation in the field of energy.

I think this is a remarkable achievement for America. It is evidence of what the United States can accomplish when it shows the will and the determination to persevere and a demonstration of the historic reality that there is no alternative to American leadership.

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Our diplomacy is still the best hope of the world in finding solutions to age-old conflicts. We respect the trust which countries place in us on both sides in so many regional disputes, but we have not been involved in the world simply out of altruism--though we need not apologize for that--but because the kind of world America lives in directly affects the kind of lives Americans live at home.

Today, more than ever, peace and prosperity at home and abroad are completely indivisible. Never before has the state of this Nation depended more on the state of the world.

In a world of continuing complexity, America's role in promoting peace is indispensable. In the conflicts in the Middle East, including Cyprus, our mediation efforts have been indispensable. In a world of proliferating nuclear weapons, our actions in limiting strategic arms and to promote essential new safeguards against their further spread are indispensable.

There has never been a greater need for purposeful American policy and leadership, and I say as strongly as I can, this cannot be achieved without unity at home.

Our Secretary of State is today in the Middle East engaged in a quest for a peaceful settlement of one of the most serious political deadlocks in the world, a conflict which has posed for 25 years great dangers of international confrontation and crisis.

The American people are united in wishing him godspeed and great success in this extraordinary undertaking. The Secretary carries with him the hopes and the prayers of a Nation for a just and lasting peace.

In this very difficult time, the American people expect responsible conduct from individual Members of Congress and from Congress as a whole, as well as from the President.

In Cyprus, the United States has long sought to mediate between two valued allies in order to secure the independence of territorial integrity of that strategic land.

A new negotiation scheduled to bring together the Foreign Ministers of Greece and Turkey in a meeting with Secretary Kissinger in Brussels this week broke down because of Congressional insistence that military assistance to Turkey be terminated.

This action, I am convinced, is a self-inflicting wound. It will seriously impair our relations with a valued ally and achieve no benefit whatsoever.

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I think it is perfectly obvious it will adversely affect Western security generally and with serious consequences to the strategic situation in the Middle East, and most tragically of all, it does nothing to improve the lot of those Cypriots in whose name this congressional action was supposedly taken.

But this issue is greater than the immediate example in the Eastern Mediterranean. The issue is really what kind of an ally are we when we punish our friends more severely than our enemies? What kind of statesman are we when we so poorly perceive our own interests?

This question is being asked tonight by nations who look to us for leadership. I can give no good answer.

In the final days of the last Congress in the 1974 Trade Reform Act--it was passed -- that Act was designed to strengthen the basis of our economic ties with our allies, our adversaries and our developing countries in the interest of worldwide progress and stability. These are national goals of which there is very little disagreement. Yet these goals were jeopardized in the last Congress by an unfortunate amendment which withheld generalized tariff preferences from all OPEC nations or members, whether or not they participated in last winter's oil embargo.

This indiscriminate and hasty act damaged our relations with Ecuador, Venezuela, Nigeria and Indonesia, despite the fact that they refused to participate in the embargo against the United States.

Another amendment to that Act led the Soviet Union to repudiate its 1972 Economic Accord with us, including its agreement to settle its World War II lend-lease debt. The United States had agreed in 1972, as a result of the marked improvement in our over-all relationship, to grant the Soviet Union non-discriminatory trade rights.

The breakdown of this foreign policy agreement unfortunately could cause tragic consequences, exactly contrary to the intent of Congress.

The issue is not the goals of foreign policy. The Executive and Legislative branches share the same hope for America. What is at issue is the process of executing our foreign policy, not its objectives. But as men of good will, we must solve the problem of our respective roles. It would be a national tragedy if conflict between the Congress and the Chief Executive jeopardized the achievements of the 1970's and prevented further progress toward our common goals.

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As I said in my State of the Union Message, I doubt that restrictive amendments are an adequate tool for shaping the conduct of foreign policy. An attitude frozen in a statute, however noble, cannot shape events.

In a world of 150 nations and fast-moving change, diplomacy is a process, not execution of a rigid blueprint. The door of the White House, as I have stated, is open to the Congress, to new members as well as old. I do not expect 535 reincarnations of Senator Vandenberg. Yet, I do appeal for an open-minded spirit of enlightened national concern to transcend any partisan or internal party politics that now threaten to bring our successful foreign policy to a standstill.

I challenge the Senate and the House to give me the same consideration that Senator Vandenberg sought and got for President Truman. Can't we consult and act rather than pontificate and poke?

I refuse to believe that we have passed the point of no return in discarding our tradition of non-partisanship in foreign policy.

Further, I refuse to believe that it will become easier to negotiate with foreign adversaries and allies than with the Congress of the United States.

I seek a coalition of confidence with the new Congress and there is no area in which this is more critical than in the national response to the crisis of energy.

Last winter's oil embargo generated widespread agreement that a comprehensive energy policy is needed. For years we have analyzed and debated the options. Delay will only compound the problem. We must begin now. Our oil and gas supplies will continue to dissipate and imports will grow unless we take immediate steps to reduce consumption and develop new supplies.

Congressional action is imperative if the United States is to maintain its international leadership. We cannot expect other nations to tighten their belts if we are unprepared to do the same ourselves. We cannot appear unwilling to take the unpleasant, unnecessary steps to cure our energy and economic problems when other nations are trying to face up to their own difficulties. Oil consuming nations must unite. The surplus of Arab dollars, as we all know, is creating a crisis in Western Europe and concerted action is essential.

The Administration has offered the first comprehensive integrated solution to our energy problems ever assembled.

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If we do not act now on the short-term goals, there will be unacceptable costs to the United States, both domestically and internationally.

You may wonder why I am calling for non-partisanship in foreign affairs at a Republican Party dinner. Why didn't I make this speech before a Democratic Party dinner? Well, for one thing, I haven't been invited to any Democratic Lincoln-Day dinners. For another, the tribute to Nelson Rockefeller is more than a partisan tribute, just as his confirmation as Vice President by an overwhelming majority of the last Democratic Congress was more than a partisan confirmation. And his own early career of public service is a good example of the non-partisan tradition that goes back to the war years of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

But most of all, I use this Republican forum for this appeal because I am proud, as you can be proud, of our Party's contribution, both in the Congress and in the White House, in and out of power through 30 years of constructive continuity in American foreign policy .

I renew my offer to consult with the Members of the Congress on the further orderly phase-out of our military assistance in Southeast Asia on a basis which honors our repeated promises to allies that we will help to supply those willing to fight for their own freedom.

I do not see how we can rename or compromise that principle. I do not intend to do so.

And I am also willing, as was President Truman, to bring the responsible leaders of the Democratic Majority of the Congress in on the foreign policy take-offs as well as landings, particularly the crash landings.

I have already done so and will continue to expand these two-way consultations.

Let me repeat what Senator Vandenberg told his Republican friends about President Truman and the Republican 80th Congress:

"He is the only President we shall have and this is the only Congress we shall have during the next critical two years; the quicker we reach a working relationship so that we can have a united policy, the safer our country will be."

Yesterday I stood at the Lincoln Memorial. I saw at the far end of the Mall the great white dome of the Capitol, my home for almost 25 years. I was reminded of the difficulties President James Polk encountered from a young freshman Congressman from Illinois, who denounced the United States involvement in the Mexican War as having been unnecessarily and unconstitutionally begun by the President without Congressional consent.

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And I remembered also how that defeated one-termer, when he returned to Washington as President of a rapidly disintegrating nation, took emergency measures which were similarly denounced on Capitol Hill as unconstitutional and dictatorial. When the Congress attempted to run the war by committee, President Lincoln told them bluntly that the Ship of State can have only one helmsman.

And he said in his first annual message to the Congress -- and I quote -- "In a storm at sea, no one on board can wish the ship to sink, and yet, not infrequently, all go down together because too many will direct and no single mind will be allowed to control."

As once again we honor Abraham Lincoln as the greatest President of our party that was given to the Republic, let us rededicate ourselves to the broader vision of the national good, which he brought from the Capitol to the White House. Let us continue as Americans to seek his noble goals of a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Thank you very much.

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AT 10:28 P.M. (EST)