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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED TO THE
REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE
LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE DINNER

First, I want to congratulate Mary Louise Smith on the exceptional job she has done at this Conference. Mary Louise has been spending more and more of her time talking to large groups. Then again, Bob Strauss, the Democratic National Chairman, has been spending more and more of his time talking to large groups . . . not audiences -- candidates for President!

Tonight, before I go any further, let me thank you all for your kindness, your enthusiasm and your continuing support. I can't tell you how good it feels to be among so many good, veto-proof friends.

The time you are spending in Washington is very important -- for me, for you, and for our country. The strength, the enthusiasm and the know-how you have shown is proof that creative, active and winning Republicans will never be an endangered species.

If what I hear is correct, many in this audience are new at meetings of this sort. You have spend your own money to come here. The new energy you are generating will be felt throughout the Republican Party. Your involvement and your dedication will grow -- and our nation will be the beneficiary.

Your program is impressive, and I want to commend Mrs. Smith and her co-workers for putting such important emphasis on the "nuts-and-bolts" which bind the party structure together.

And I am delighted that ten of your colleagues selected at random have joined us at the head table tonight -- because this symbolizes the new and broader base this party seeks.

Nearly a year ago, I appeared before a Republican meeting similar to this in Chicago. I said then that we must never again permit an elite guard serving a single purpose to exclude and ignore the regular party organization. I renew that pledge to you here tonight.

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Then, as now, I feel that working through and with the established party structure is the right way to go. New election law reforms--particularly those dealing with finances--validate the policy that I advocated last year.

They do not rule out committees and other volunteer groups working in cooperation with the party structure. But they do tend to favor the two-party system in which I have always profoundly believed.

As to my role in the Republican Party, you can be sure that whenever it is proper--and I stress that point--I intend to exert my efforts on behalf of good Republican candidates and the rebuilding of Republicanism to the fullest, consistent with my duties as President.

Obviously, the demands and duties of the Presidency impose certain limitations on my political activities. But I pledge to you now--that I will be in the middle of the 1976 campaign not only for the Presidency but on behalf of Republican candidates for the House as well as the Senate and for state governors and other elective offices across the country. I've been doing this for a good many years and I'm too old to change my good habits now.

Specifically, I want to work closely with Mary Louise Smith, with Guy Vander Jagt in House races, with Ted Stevens in Senate races, with Kit Bond in the governors' races and with our party chairmen and--how do we say it now--national committee-persons?--in each of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the Territories.

But you and I know one fundamental fact:

The greatest contribution I can make to the country and to the Republican Party will be to make solid progress in solving our national problems--particularly our domestic difficulties. And I intend to do just that.

As to my own plans, I can tell you tonight without equivocation that I fully intend to seek the nomination of the Republican Party as its candidate for President in 1976'

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There is nothing "iffy" about that statement I intend to seek the nomination. I intend to win. I intend to run for President. And I intend to win that, too!

O course, I will need your help and so will all other Republican candidates in 1975 and 1976. But before we get into 1976, we have ten more months of 1975. They are crucial.

I have laid before the Democratic-controlled Congress fully detailed programs to reverse the recession, to contain our recently raging inflation, and to start freeing us from the threat of oil blackmail.

Although the response was deadly slow at first, a sense of greater urgency may now be arriving on Capitol Hill -- and for that we can all be grateful. But I am going to keep the heat on -- at least at sixty-eight degrees.

Americans are demanding action. They are rightfully fearful that some people in Washington are so insulated that they don't know the desperation of being jobless or of living on an inadequate fixed income or pension that can't catch up with runaway prices.

We are beginning to get a grip on inflation, but unemployment is still too high. The problems which desperately need to be dealt with have been growing for some time. So I ask the Democrats in massive control of the Congress: Where are the tough, coordinated and comprehensive programs which our urgent and inter-related economic and energy problems demand? A piece here, a touch there, do not add up to an effective total program.

I say in all sincerity to my critics in the Congress and elsewhere: If you don't like my program, show me a better one.

Even on something so widely supported as a stimulative tax cut -- which ought to be something easy for the Congress to enact -- there has been the kind of delay that is inexcusable.

Extremely difficult choices must be made this year and in succeeding years by the Congress to limit the growth of Federal budgets and deficits. But the results from Capitol Hill are disappointing.

Unless members of the Congress have the political courage to cut back or cut out various well-intentioned programs, we will soon come to the point, by simple arithmetic, where half of this country's entire gross national product will be taken by our various levels of Government. Already, we are spending approximately one-third of our Gross National Product to support Government at all levels.

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This trend could destroy the fundamental free-enterprise character of this country and the economic incentives which have made us the leader of the industrialized democracies.

I believe that only a revitalized Republican leadership in all branches of government can change this course. The accumulated actions of some 38 years of Democratic-controlled Congress out of the last forty-two years will not be reversed by this Congress. And I don't intend to turn in my key to the White House until we have reversed this trend.

Now it could be argued that, because our national problems are so serious, we should not be wasting time on the problems of our party -- or any party.

Yet it is precisely because of our national problems that it is essential to look to our party and its revitalization everywhere.

I know what the polls show -- as you do -- and I say with all the conviction I can command:

The standing of our party has hit its lowest point, as far as I am concerned. It is going up from this point forward!

If we fail to rebuild effectively, the cost would not be measured by the fate of the Republican Party itself.

It would be measured by the deprivation of a basic right of all Americans -- a free choice in politics. It would be measured by the death of the effective two-party system so vital to this nation.

In far too many cities and counties and even some states, there is still virtual one-party rule. Voters can only ratify the decisions of the single surviving party. And in far too many of these same areas, corruption and abuse of power march hand-in-hand with one-party misrule.

The abiding virtues of a strong two-party system are three-fold: First, it provides continuing choice. Second, the system forces the maximum of accommodation and compromise, instead of promoting stalemates encouraged by splinter parties. Third, the system excludes the fanatic factions which cannot be accommodated but includes the broadest range of reasonable differences -- and thus holds both major parties closer to the mainstream of public opinion.

To make sure that Republicans are really on the rise, we must make some practical changes in our political ways -- not in principles, but in approach.

As a starter, we must discard the attitude of exclusiveness that has kept the Republican party's door closed too often while we give speeches about keeping it open.

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We must erect a tent that is big enough for all who care about this great country and believe in the Republican Party enough to work through it for common goals.

This tent must also be kept open to the growing number of independent voters who refuse to wear any party label, but who will support the strong candidates and good programs we present. These voters must be welcomed and won to our cause.

We must be prepared, then, to overcome the cynicism of voters by offering candidates of outstanding ability and rock-hard integrity. We must also build a party that works all the time. It must be more than a pre-election force that goes out of business after the ballots are counted.

And perhaps most important of all, we must demonstrate conclusively that, as a party, we care about people--that we care about people first, last, and always.

Over the past decade or so, the attitudes of the American people have changed about government in general and politics in particular.

Years of war, three major assassinations, official duplicity, and rapid and shocking changes in this Nation's social and political structure have combined with instant communications to erode old views and loyalties. People have begun to tune out political parties and politics as usual.

One measure of this is the dismal record of voting in last November's election. According to a national sampling by the Bureau of the Census, a bare twenty-one percent of persons eighteen to twenty years old bothered to go to the polls.

Fewer than half of the persons of voting age in this country in 1974 actually cast a ballot for or against any person or party. The actual figure was only forty-four point seven percent. The same sampling showed that more than one-third of the citizens eligible to vote had not even registered.

Yet, the figures I have cited provide us with a rough road map toward the route of fundamental party reform. If nearly eighty percent of the eighteen-to-twenty year olds did not vote last time, for example, then obviously they must be a priority target for our efforts.

And I know at first-hand that many of you here tonight enlisted volunteers from this very age group who proved to be among the best and most capable workers in campaigns in which you were involved. We need more, not less, of these young idealists who have the biggest stake in our Nation's future.

Our program for reform must recognize that chronic non-voters as well as voters just aren't buying the old idea that virtue and wisdom are the monopoly of one party or the other. By staying home last

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November, more than half the people in this country said, in effect-- a plague on both your parties. As a result, we are governed today by a majority of a minority.

Thus, the magnitude of our job must not be measured solely within our own party, but within the larger scope of the nation and its future.

Our first and most urgent task is to work together to restore the full trust of our fellow Americans in the on-going experiment of self-government.

Let last November mark not merely the low point of our party, but also the upturn of the basic trust and good will we must have for one another, for our system of politics and government, and above all, for the future of this great Republic.

Thank you.

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