

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION  
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS CONFERENCE

THE EAST ROOM

4:00 P.M. EDT

It is nice to see you all and it is very, very nice to have you in the White House and in the East Room.

I think it is particularly appropriate that we meet here in the East Room to chat for a few minutes about some of our Nation's problems. As I think most of you know, the East Room is very, very rich in history in our national capital.

This famous room is full of happy, as well as sad, moments in the lives of residents of this house and in this Nation's past.

You might be interested to know that the first First Lady in this house was Abigail Adams -- who wrote her family of hanging laundry in this room and the problems of the new Federal City. Mrs. Adams sent news to her family of the large and small problems that she faced as First Lady -- the same kind of news, I might add, that you in this room share with your readers back home.

I have some very fond memories of the non-metropolitan weekly and daily newspapers in the 5th District of Michigan, which was, of course, the district that I had the honor and privilege of representing for over 25 years. During the various Congressional campaigns that I had -- 13 in all -- I advertised very, very heavily, with good results, (Laughter) which I think is a tribute to the impact that all of you in your respective communities has on the people that you represent.

I know, first-hand, that the weekly newspaper or the daily newspaper in a suburban area is the best means of communication, and I have been in many homes in rural areas, as well as in small towns, where the paper that came on Thursday or Friday was still good reading material on the following Wednesday. (Laughter)

In recent years, the growth in the number of suburban newspapers, I think, reflects the importance of this brand of personal journalism in an age of mass communications -- you are in the business, and fortunately, the business of local communications. It is my judgment, as I expressed a moment ago, that you fill a very, important need for your readers -- the need to know about the problems of the local community.

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Although we must recognize -- and we do -- that the world has grown small and interdependent in many, many ways, the fact remains that the news around the corner and down the street is still mighty important to people all over this great country.

We live in a very mobile society, and to many of us, we have been pulled away from our communities. We have been pulled away from the roots of our early youth. Yet, your newspapers put us in touch with our new communities and give us links to our hometowns.

I think it is very fortunate that you are a part of the dialogue that keeps self-government going -- healthy, strong and very critical in these days.

Naturally, I admire your work, but I add very quickly that I need your help. A meaningful discussion of national problems cannot take place only on network television or in large metropolitan newspapers, because these forums do not provide sufficient opportunity for audience response and direct participation.

One of the reasons, in my judgment, it is important for me and members of this Administration to travel around our country and to meet in Washington with groups like this one is to listen, as well as to talk about, the Nation's problems.

Perhaps my Congressional background convinced me of the value of face-to-face contact, but there is no substitute for the discussions of ideas in person with community leaders such as yourselves.

The best briefing paper in the world cannot explain problems as well as someone who deals with those problems on a very daily and direct basis. Governors or mayors or publishers -- you are all equally important.

Government officials, I have learned, whether it was in the Congress or in the House, need more talk back from the people that they serve, and that is particularly true of those of us in Washington in the political atmosphere in which we live.

This town can be just as parochial as a town of 250 people, and in some respects it is even more so.

One of our ways at the White House of getting talk back is the briefing sessions that you have participated in, but another is for you to send your comments, your editorials, to Ron Nessen of our Press Office. We need to hear from you, and we need to hear from the readers that all of you serve.

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We also need your help in describing the problems and the solutions that seem to be the best answer to the problems that we have, but the economic and energy debate underway now must not become simply an exchange of rhetoric, whether it is in the printed media, the electronic media or just plain talk among people.

The debate, as I see it, must produce action. In January, for example, this Administration outlined a comprehensive program to deal with some very harsh realities facing our Nation, both economically and in energy. We made some hard, stern choices in drawing up the Administration plan.

I can tell you from personal experience, countless hours working in these two major fields -- and we finally culminated all of these hours of many, many people in a program or a plan -- the kind of choices that some politicians would rather talk about than make.

You deal with deadlines in your business, and I can recall vividly going to many smaller communities in my district on a Wednesday to talk with people in those communities, and I always stopped by the local weekly to chat with the editor. I soon learned that Wednesday was not the time to do it.

If I wanted to lose points rather than make them, I did it on a Saturday or on a Monday.

As I said, you deal with deadlines, and if those deadlines aren't met, then you can't serve your readers on time. It is my judgment that the Congress must respond to some very real national deadlines.

I asked, for example, for action by April 1 on the rebate of 1974 income taxes for individuals as well as for business. There has been much discussion on who should receive the tax rebates -- a discussion based too often on purely political considerations. I don't think we can look at this rebate on a political basis. We have to look on how a rebate will affect all Americans.

It is sometimes fashionable to talk as if what is good for the American economy is not good for the American people. This tendency to treat the economy as an abstract idea divorced from the lives of the citizens leads to some unfortunate piecemeal proposals.

When the economy is sound, it means the people of this Nation are able to live comfortably without fear of inflation and with jobs.

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To meet the proposed April 1 deadline on the tax cut, which is a program to stimulate the economy to provide jobs, the Senate must act before it recesses March 21, and the House of Representatives before its March 26 Easter recess.

The tax cut is only a part of the program that this Administration -- that I proposed in January, and there has been more response from Capitol Hill on this proposal than on many others.

But as necessary as the tax cut is for the reasons that I have given, it is only a very small piece of the total action that must be taken and taken quickly.

It is my judgment that the Congress must act on other parts of this total package, especially in the field of energy. In the State of the Union address, I called for action in 90 days on a more comprehensive tax program. The first response by the Congress to this plea unfortunately was to negate any action by the President to impose levies on imported oil, and those levies were imposed for the purpose of trying to remove our Nation's vulnerability and to stimulate action by the Congress, but the reaction of the Congress was to attempt to suspend Presidential authority for 90 days.

I think many of you know that I vetoed that bill, but I did, in the spirit of compromise, delay the imposition of the added import levies until May 1 to give more time for the Congress to act in committees, on the floor of the House and the Senate and in the final action in a conference.

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It is my very serious judgment that the Nation's current economic and energy situation is so critical that the deadline for action cannot be pushed back indefinitely.

As you well know, the time comes when there is a final deadline; we in America are approaching that point. Every day of delay by the Congress makes the United States more and more vulnerable to decisions by the foreign oil cartels.

There is national agreement on the need for action and the ultimate result, and there is within the spirit of the American people a willingness to accept the hard choices required to regain economic stability and achieve energy independence.

In many ways, the President and the American people now wait for the Congress to catch up with us.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, and I quote, "In skating over thin ice, our safety is our speed." (Laughter) Well, despite the weather outside, the spring thaw is coming and the Congress must pick up its speed.

Thank you for coming today. I am deeply grateful that you are here and I close with a traditional and heartfelt saying -- "Let us hear from you." And I must add, I am sure I will. (Laughter)

Thank you very much.

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(AT 4:15 P.M. EDT)