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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
NATIONAL EXPLORER PRESIDENT'S CONGRESS

THE SOUTH LAWN

2:47 P.M. EDT

Mr. Reneker, members of the National Executive Board, President Wright, Explorers:

Let me say it is a very great privilege, a very high honor to have the opportunity of joining you at this historic house in this wonderful site, and I welcome each and every one of you to the White House.

You know, it is good to have all you Explorers here because the more I travel, the more I read, the more I listen, I am absolutely convinced our country -- yours and mine -- needs your youthful vision, your enthusiasm, and obviously your idealism.

As we read history, as we look at the present, America has always been a Nation with the promise of a better tomorrow, regardless of our present difficulties, either at home or abroad.

As I look at this group -- 2,000 out of 500,000 Explorers -- you obviously represent the hope of tomorrow.

A few years ago, when I was the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, I had the distinct honor and great privilege of serving as Chairman of your annual Congress here in the Nation's Capital. And as I recall, that particular get-together had the same flavor, the same atmosphere as a national political convention. And I must say that participation by me in that gathering convinced me beyond any doubt whatsoever that young people ought to participate, not stand on the sidelines and be critical.

I know very well that a good many young people -- and Mrs. Ford and I have four children, now from the age of 25 to 17 -- that young people, for a period of time, were very disillusioned, very concerned, and felt that their country had let them down, or that our system wasn't working. And therefore, they had a tendency to stand back and not get into the ball game, so to speak.

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(OVER)

I didn't agree with that point of view then because then, as now, we need the maximum effort, participation, dedication of young people, such as yourselves. Don't stand on the sidelines. Be a part of this great government, whether it is at the local, the state or the Federal level.

I don't like to repeat speeches, and I won't, except to tell you one story that I told a group of young people yesterday who I met out here in the Rose Garden.

In the summer of 1931 I came from my home of Grand Rapids, Michigan, with some 50 or 60 young people who were just graduating from high school, and we came to the Nation's capital and we toured the great capital that we have here.

We went to the Capitol, the White House and all of the other tremendous buildings and activities that go on in your capital. I have a picture taken with 50 or 60 of us standing in front of the Capitol, and I can recall very vividly sitting in the Chamber of the House of Representatives in 1931 watching the activities of the House of Representatives at that time.

I must have been tremendously impressed. I must have had the seed planted that resulted in my active participation in the political arena. And, after serving 25-plus years in the Congress of the United States, I am glad that I had that inspiration from one trip to Washington, D.C.

What I am saying to all 2000 of you is, you have seen the magnificent beauty and the wonderful things here in your capital. I hope that every one of the 2000 of you go away from here with the feeling that your government is meaningful, whether it is the Executive Branch, headed by the President, or the Legislative Branch, headed by the Congress, or the Judicial Branch, headed by the Supreme Court.

All of you, each and every one of you, can make a significant contribution. The inspiration that I hope you have gotten during your visit will mean that in a few years -- and I hope not too many -- you will be back here running this country, doing a better job than we are doing.

I know that the Explorers have as two of their main functions a career-oriented program and a leadership-directed program. It is my understanding by the time you complete this Congress you will have heard from people representing all sectors of our life -- business, government officials, journalists, athletes, educators, lawyers, labor leaders, and many, many others.

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The truth is that there are opportunities in every segment of our society for you and for those that you know. To make a strong country, we have to have people in all sectors and all segments of our society.

You know, there is a saying, if I remember it correctly, in the Bible that says, "The beauty of Joseph's coat is its many colors." The strength of America today is its diversity.

For all of you to be here from all of our various states means that a cross-section of America is represented by 2000 of our finest young people, who in the process of visiting the Nation's capital will be exposed to opportunities for your future careers.

As you move into that career, one that not only makes sense to you, but money for you, you will find new opportunities and new challenges confronting you.

With the war over and the draft ended, your duty now is to enlist in the campaigns being currently waged against our domestic and international problems. One thing that I have found in my experience in government, which goes back to January of 1949, is that our government needs new ideas.

Those new ideas can come from any one or all of you. We need new concepts that can be made available to us, whether we are in the Executive Branch or in the Legislative Branch.

We need new approaches. We can't use the same old concepts day after day after day.

You have ideas of your own, and that is why you are here. You have inspiration and you have the dedication, and that is why you have joined others who were here.

It is my judgment that ideas are the engines that make our free enterprise system go, and let us hear from you the ideas that you have put together in your own mind with the benefit of others.

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I would like to make one observation, and I am not critical of anybody -- people believe it. But it is something that worries me. I sat in the House of Representatives for 25 years and I used to see program after program presented to the House that meant a bigger government, that mean more control over people and over cities and over states.

I used to get very worried as I saw this proliferation of government, and I thought to myself on many occasions that I wish that people would think in this way -- and let me paraphrase it, if I might: Just remember that a government big enough to give us everything we want is a government big enough to take from us everything we have.

As Explorers, each and every one of you in your local community are also leaders. Leaders in America, particularly among the young, are the greatest resource that this Nation has.

You obviously represent the spirit; you obviously represent the will of America's future. And although I am certain you have heard it said before, may I, with your indulgence, say it again. You -- and I mean exactly that, you -- can make this country whatever you want it to be.

At this time, I want to personally welcome to the White House two other Presidents, Mary Wright, who has done a magnificent job as Explorer President for the past year, and of course, your new President, Larry Carpenter.

Let me say, without being critical of Larry, that Mary is a lot more attractive than he is. But I will say in defense of Larry, he looks pretty good and pretty strong to me.

Congratulations.

END

(AT 2:54 P.M. EDT)