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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
NATIONAL RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION
YOUTH GROUP

2:25 P.M. EDT

Let me just say I am delighted that all of you are here, and I congratulate you on achieving the success that you have in making it possible for you to be here. I wish my daughter, Susan, could have been here today. She just graduated from high school about a week ago. I know she would have thoroughly enjoyed talking with all of you, meeting you. She is out in Yosemite taking a course in photography. (Laughter.)

I think you might be interested in what her senior class did for their school prom. They held it right here in the White House while my wife and I were in Europe. (Laughter.) I am sure the arrangements for that were very coincidental.

Now, holding a prom in the White House might sound like a pretty super idea, but it did create one problem. The headmaster or principal of the school told me he got a call from a very, very concerned parent of one of the young ladies. This parent called and said in a very serious manner that they had made it a practice never to allow their daughter to attend a party in anyone's home when the parents were away. (Laughter.)

But in this case they were going to make an exception. So after the prom we got a call from Susan and she said the White House was still in tact and everybody had had a good time and we, of course, were delighted.

All of you come from areas where rural electrification is a very important part of your society. For about 40 years the REA has played a very vital role in bringing about the electrification of rural America. When the REAs first began -- I don't recall the precise statistic, but there was a very great lack of electrical power in our rural areas, and because of the REA we have gone from a minimum of electrical energy in our rural areas to a situation today where I think we have electrical energy available for people in almost every area of this country. And the REA can claim the major credit for this tremendous effort.

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Now, I want to ask this question, and all of you know the answer. Where do we get electrical energy? You get it from the sources such as coal, oil, natural gas, nuclear power. And I ask this question: How can this country grow and prosper and give the kinds of opportunities to all of you that you deserve if we don't have energy?

Now, unfortunately, the circumstances are such that the United States of America, after being abundant in energy, all its lifetime, for 198 years, today is faced with a very severe and a very critical shortage of energy. Today the United States imports roughly 38 to 40 percent of its oil consumed. A few years ago we imported very little oil. Every day the dependence on imported oil becomes greater and greater.

Now we don't expect any cutoff of our foreign oil imports. But it did happen in October of 1973, and for a period of four or five months America was literally limping along with an insufficient supply of crude oil. We don't produce enough domestically. It so happens that our daily production of domestic crude oil in this country is getting less and less and less, which means that our dependence on foreign oil becomes greater and greater and greater every day.

Now this great country should never let itself get into the position of being vulnerable to either price actions or supply actions by other countries overseas.

Your generations are the generations that are more and more critically affected than mine, because the United States in the future has to have a self-sufficiency, and if we don't we can't have all the blessings and the good things that have been available in the past.

What am I saying? I am saying we have got to develop nuclear power and produce more nuclear plants around the country. We have to get more natural gas and crude oil production in the United States, in Alaska, and other areas that are potentially very important. We have to open a good many more coal mines. We have to use coal, which is our greatest source of energy in this country.

The estimates indicate we have some 300 years of coal supply. We have to use our ingenuity, our scientific capability, to find how we can take the power of the sun, solar heat, solar energy. We have to investigate and find ways to expand our geothermal energy capacities.

What I am saying is America, in a wide variety of ways, must maximize its efforts to be self-sufficient so that your generation cannot be held hostage by other foreign governments.

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We have asked the Congress to pass energy legislation which stimulates production and forces conservation. As you get to know your Congressmen, your Senators, -- I hope you will -- urge them to pass an energy program, to pass energy legislation. It is their obligation to do so, for the country, for you, and for the future of the world, as a matter of fact.

Now let me conclude with this simple statement: I really enjoyed having the opportunity to visit with you this afternoon. I understand later on you are going to have a happening -- if that is the right word (Laughter.) -- 1,000 helium-filled balloons, pizza, hot dogs, hamburgers, popcorn, potato chips, candied apples, a rock band, and dancing.

One of your members just invited my wife and myself to come. Unfortunately, we won't be able to. Susan makes it a practice never to let us attend a party in anyone's home when the parents aren't there. (Laughter.)

Well, it is nice to see you. Good luck, congratulations, and I do hope that you benefit from your experiences here; that you go back and become enthusiastic supporters of our way of life, our Government, and what it can do to make all of us better citizens, not only domestically but otherwise.

This country is fortunate to have you, every one of you, but you are also fortunate to have this country.

Thank you very much.

END

(AT 2:33 P.M. EDT)