

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JULY 23, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
JAMES A. WAGONSELLER
NATIONAL COMMANDER
AMERICAN LEGION

THE ROSE GARDEN

10:05 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning to all of you, and let me thank the head of the American Legion, who heads the organization that I am proud to have been a member of since late 1945, even before I got out of military service in World War II, and let me congratulate all of you who are here at Boys Nation representing some 48 States and the District of Columbia.

It is nice to have all of you here, those from the Legion and those that are here because of the Legion. I would be very, very remiss if I did not speak up very strongly on behalf of the American Legion.

The post that I belonged to in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I know firsthand has done a tremendous amount of fine work in the community, helping the less fortunate, helping in activities for the youth, helping in the community as a whole, so I am proud to stand here as a member of the American Legion and compliment that organization for its long and fine record.

I would also like to congratulate each of you who have been selected from your respective States. I have had the opportunity, on a number of occasions, to speak to the gathering in my State of Michigan. What an enthusiastic group of young people.

That is the kind of energetic enthusiasm we need in politics. That is the kind of enthusiasm that is required to make our country an even better place in which to live.

MORE

You are down here and have been here to learn a great deal about our Government. You will learn something about the Congress, the White House and hopefully the Judiciary. It is a great form of Government, but it can only be great and greater if we get people like yourselves as participants.

You can have an organization chart. You can have a structure. But if you don't have people that have the right motives and the right kind of enthusiasm and the right training, it won't work. And all of you, like the others who have been here on the previous experiences -- I think this is the thirtieth get-together of Boys Nation -- I am positive that some who have gone through the training or the experiences you have gone through are now down here working with and being a part of this Government, and you will be better prepared because of your experiences this week.

What are some of the problems that we face -- and when I say "we" I mean the Congress and myself. We face an energy problem -- and I spent about two hours last night on the SEQUOIA talking to the Democratic and Republican leaders of the House and Senate trying to find a key to the impasse that we are faced with at the present time.

The United States right now is extremely vulnerable to foreign oil sources, and those sources in 1973 turned off the spigot and we had an embargo. We had waiting lines at gas stations. We had to conserve, and we had some unemployment that resulted from the lack of foreign oil.

Fortunately the problems in the Middle East were solved; the oil embargo was raised. But those problems in the Middle East are still very volatile and the differences are still very serious.

And although we are working literally night and day to find an answer with the Arab nations and the Israelis, it might not work. And if it doesn't and a war flares up there, as it has four times in the last 20-some years, we could have another oil embargo and we would be worse off now than we were in 1973.

All of the problems we had then would be multiplied, not eased. So somehow the Congress and the President have to find an answer to do two things -- one, to stimulate additional domestic production of oil. The charts show that in the last two years our domestic production of oil has gone down, which means that we are buying more and more foreign oil, and that makes us inevitably more vulnerable to a cutoff if it should occur.

MORE

Secondly, we have to conserve. That means that all of you might have to drive a little bit less. Others will have to conserve in one way or another -- in the winter not turning the temperature up as high, or in the summer not turning it down as low.

But we have to conserve this year enough so that we are buying less, not more foreign oil. And we have to find a total answer to our energy problem in the next 10 years. And that involves a tremendous amount of research and development in the exotic fuel areas -- solar heat, additional nuclear power, and a wide range of other things that don't seem feasible today.

But our scientists and technicians tell us it is worth the effort in research and development. We hope to find an answer within the next few days, the next week, so that the Congress and the President can work together, not at odds.

What I am saying to you is that despite political differences -- and there are some -- if we are going to continue to be a great country -- and I am optimistic that we will -- you have to find a way to disagree without being disagreeable. You have to find a way to solve a problem with no one losing face and everybody doing a job for the country. And the experiences you are having right here at the present time--that is a training ground for the time when all of you will have an opportunity at the local, the State or the Federal level to come down and be an active participant.

A long time ago, back when the ball was round, I played a little football for the University of Michigan -- (Laughter) -- and that is the truth, it was round, and some of these older fellows can remember it here. But anyhow, you know in those days we had some other problems.

But by working together, the American people finally found a way to solve most of them. And somehow I and others, my vintage, found an inspiration to come here and be a part of the Congress--House, Senate--and to be a part of the Executive Branch of the Government. And that is what we need from all of you -- that desire, that stimulation to be a part of your Government.

I am absolutely convinced that, as I look around here, you have got all the talent, all the enthusiasm. We are not going to solve all the problems -- my generation -- but we are building slowly to a better America.

MORE

But you, because of your better education, better opportunities and all the other things that bless us in this country, can take what we have built and make it the kind of America that we dream about and hope for. And that is the message I would like to leave with you from the Rose Garden and the White House.

Thank you very much.

COMMANDER WAGGONSELLER: Thank you very much, Mr. President; for those very inspiring words to these young people who are here with us this morning.

Mr. President, you will recall a day this past December, at the Alexandria railroad depot, when you launched the Bicentennial American Freedom Train on its historic 21-month journey throughout the United States. Aboard the Freedom Train is the American Legion's Freedom Bell, a bell twice the size of the revered Liberty Bell.

But unlike the Liberty Bell, our bell has no crack in it and it is perfectly capable, Mr. President, of ringing loud and clear to remind Americans now and in the future of their precious liberties.

To that end, American Legionnaires and their auxiliary throughout the Nation are raising funds to insure the permanent enshrinement of the Freedom Bell in an appropriate location here in the Nation's Capital.

At the conclusion of the Freedom Train journey the American Legion will present this Freedom Bell to the Nation as a gift on behalf of America's children, who represent, as these young people do, our future. It is our fervent wish that the Freedom Bell will become a permanent and prominent symbol of the celebration of the Nation's 200th birthday, and will provide an inspiration for future generations of Americans.

On behalf of American Legionnaires and their auxiliary members everywhere, Mr. President, it is my great pleasure to present you with this replica of our Freedom Bell.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Mr. Commander, and I am deeply appreciative and most grateful for the Legion's Freedom Bell. I can assure you it will be prominently displayed in the Oval Office and in my private office.

Thank you very, very much.

MORE

COMMANDER WAGGONSELLER: Mr. President, I have a few introductions I would like to make to you, sir, and since you brought up the subject of football, I might tell these young people here this morning that the President and I find ourselves in violent disagreement every November on the outcome of the Ohio State-Michigan football game.

Mr. President, there are two young people here from your home State that I would like to introduce you to.

First of all is Mr. Jonathan E. Brand of Huntington Woods, Michigan, and Jonathan Davis Mays of Charlevoix, Michigan.

Mr. President, as you well know, in every election there are winners and losers, and this morning I would like to present to you two young gentlemen that ran for President and Vice President of Boys Nation and were defeated very narrowly.

First is James H. Sugarman of Marblehead, Massachusetts, and Daniel T. Henley of Bolair, Wisconsin.

The gentlemen that won the election -- and he would like to make a presentation to you, Mr. President -- the President of Boys Nation, Joe Davis, whom you met, and Vice President, John E. Frank.

On behalf of myself and the President of Boys Nation, Joe Davis, and Vice President John Frank of Idaho and the staff of Boys Nation and Boys Nation itself, Mr. President we present you with an official Boys Nation T shirt.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much.

COMMANDER WAGGONSELLER: My Vice President, Mr. John Frank of Idaho, will come and present you with another gift, and then we have a special song for you, Mr. President.

MR. FRANK: Mr. President, on behalf of the American Legion, for taking time to come see Boys Nation, I would like to present you with a Boys Nation pin for participating in our program.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much.

Let me thank you again for the thoughtfulness for the gifts, and I will probably wear the shirt and also the pin, but I am not going to be under illusions. I am not as young as all of you.

Thank you very much.

END

(AT 10:22 A.M. EDT)