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Office of the White House Press Secretary

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THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
TO BE DELIVERED TO  
THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON  
DOMESTIC AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS  
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

The first thing I want to express is my pleasure at being here in St. Louis. Anyone who visits this city can't help feeling that he is standing at the crossroads of America. That's not a bad place to be when you want to find out what is on people's minds. And that is what these regional Presidential town hall meetings are all about. This is the ninth such conference since I became President. Some of you will recall that my very first pledge in this office was to open up the doors of Government and create better communication between the people of this nation and their Government. But the most important part of communicating is listening. That's what I'm here to do -- to listen and to learn.

That's what makes Democracy work -- people and their leaders in Government talking with one another.

In the more than 13 months I have been President, we've faced some tough problems. We've solved some; we're still working on others. One we're hard at work on is the economy -- and we're making progress. Since March, some 1,500,000 more workers are back on the job and the unemployment rate has dropped slightly. In the last two months industrial production rose at a 5.6 percent annual rate. After tax real personal income rose in the second quarter at a 21 percent annual rate. From March through July retail sales rose at an 8.9 percent annual rate.

To me that means one thing: our free enterprise system is working. That's the strength of our system -- it has tremendous bounce and resiliency.

I'm not saying all our troubles are over. They won't be over until every American who wants to work has a job. They won't be over until we enact a comprehensive energy program that will free America from dangerous dependence on foreign oil. They won't be over until we deregulate natural gas and decontrol oil prices to stimulate more production in the years ahead and provide jobs for more people.

They won't be over until, as Governor Bond has said, we pull Government rules, regulations and red tape off people's backs, so they can produce wheat, automobiles and steel instead of paperwork for the bureaucrats. People can't eat Government forms or fill their gas tanks with questionnaires. If we stick to doing the things Government can do -- and should do -- to help this great, free enterprise system work, our economy will continue to grow.

I would like to comment on one more issue because it relates directly to my presence here today: I am referring to the incident in Sacramento last week.

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Since then, I have been criticized for continuing to insist on making these visits around the country. Those who express this opinion say that the business of the country is best conducted in the White House.

While I appreciate the attitude that inspired this advice, I must respectfully disagree. The business of the Presidency is people. It is to their hopes, their dreams and their aspirations that the Presidency is addressed.

You cannot begin to gain a sense of what is on people's minds by sitting in the safety of the Oval Office and looking at opinion polls. Only by going around the country to meetings like this, by meeting people face to face and listening to what they have to say, can you really learn how people feel and what they think.

Doing this is an important part of my job. I have no intention of abdicating that responsibility. I have no intention of allowing the Government of the people to be held hostage at the point of a gun.

Now let's hear your concerns.

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