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Office of the Vice President
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REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
AT THE
COUNCIL OF 100 DINNER
WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL
WASHINGTON, D. C.

November 19, 1975

All of us are here to promote the election of more Black Americans to Congress and to other political offices. That is a means to an end. The end is to expand opportunity for all Americans on the basis of full equality. The best argument for expanding opportunity is right here in the Council of 100.

Behind each of your lives is a success story often achieved against formidable obstacles; success in fulfilling yourselves individually; success in strengthening our country collectively; and success in presenting a model to which black youth can aspire.

I also want to take this occasion to thank the Council of 100 for your invaluable support during the Vice Presidential confirmation hearings. It is an honor for me to serve the President -- and through him to help serve our country.

You have allowed five generations of Rockefellers to march with you on that long journey -- still unfinished -- toward human justice, individual dignity and equality of opportunity for all. I can still remember how some of the most exciting stories of my childhood were told about my great-grandparents, the Harvey Spelmans. They ran a station on the underground railroad from their home in Ohio. Spelman College in Atlanta is named after their daughter, my grandmother, Laura Spelman Rockefeller.

My grandfather, John D. Rockefeller, had enormous faith in the power of education -- though I must say both my grandfathers did all right for high school drop-outs. Under John D. Rockefeller's various philanthropies, about \$62 million went to advance the opportunities of black youth through better education in this country.

When I was elected Governor of New York, I had the chance to put into practice myself the family's long-held convictions and dedication to human rights, equal opportunity and public service. During those 15 years, the number of black state employees rose by 50 per cent. More important, blacks in professional posts rose by 140 per cent. And Ersa Poston, my appointee as Chairman of the State Civil Service Commission, deserves a lot of the credit.

I appointed six black New Yorkers to head state agencies -- and 30 others to judgeships and key sub-cabinet posts. I appointed these men and women because New York State government needed their talents.

Racial prejudice is not only morally wrong -- it is stupidly wasteful. This country simply cannot afford to waste human talents. Obviously, there are a number of things that are essential to the development and release of those talents.

Good health and good education are indispensable. One of the most effective roads to success is the pathway to elective office. Nobody has stated the case more concisely than Senator Ed Brooke. "Political power and public office", he has said, "have been the keys which opened the doors of opportunity for various groups in America since the founding of our country."

Kenneth Clark put it this way: "Social implementation in a democracy is politics -- and the agents of implementation are public officials. They are both right. The courts can only do so much. Public opinion does not remain aroused.

But elected officials provide the on-going leadership and laws that are essential. Elected officials have to create the framework of laws and incentives to formulate and encourage the creativity and dynamism of the private enterprise system -- which is the wellspring of economic growth and increased job opportunities as well as the strength and vitality of America.

Political power means being heard. Political power means being heeded. Political power means clout. The way to work towards one's legitimate goals in our system is to make the political system work for the best interests of all. This is exactly what black Americans are doing to an increasing and impressive degree.

In 1969, that outstanding research organization, the Joint Center for Political Studies, began keeping score. In 1969, there were 1,185 black elected officials in this country. Today, there are 3,503 -- an increase of almost 200 per cent.

Blacks have won election to offices that would have been undreamed of -- and in places that would have seemed inconceivable just a decade ago. We are inspired by these election victories.

But Floyd McKissick laid it right on the line: "The myth must be destroyed", he has said, "that all blacks can be represented by one political party." No voter's politics ought to be taken for granted. The considerable leverage of black voters should not be conceded to one party.

Just look at 1974 -- a tough year for Republicans. But those Republican candidates -- liberal or conservative -- who ran well among black voters were the ones who got re-elected: In the U.S. Senate, for example: Dole in Kansas; Bellmon in Oklahoma; Javits in New York; Mathias in Maryland; Schweiker in Pennsylvania. In the races for Governor: Bennett in Kansas; Milliken in Michigan; and Rhodes in Ohio.

Just keep this fact in mind: Fifty-five per cent of all black voters are either Republicans or Independents. And less than half are Democrats. So the Republican party has an excellent chance to succeed with black voters and black candidates.

The Republican party has got to show Americans in all walks of life that it understands their problems, that it cares about their problems, and that it has positive approaches for dealing with their problems.

The party of Lincoln has got to make it clear that it still is, in fact, the party of the people -- by the people -- and for the people -- and that means all kinds of people.

Martin Luther King said it all with simple eloquence. "The most significant steps that black Americans can take", he said "is the short walk to the voting booth." Of course, the immediate reason for encouraging that short but significant walk is to open fully the opportunities of American life to its black citizens. But the even nobler and wiser reason is to release the best that lies within each American, for the benefit of us all, and the betterment of our entire Nation.