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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND

W. J. USERY, JR.
AT THE SWEARING-IN
OF

W. J. USERY, JR.
AS
SECRETARY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

THE EAST ROOM

2:10 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Chief Justice, Mr. Vice President, Mr. Secretary-designate, Bill Usery, distinguished Members of the Cabinet, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me welcome you most heartily here on this very fine occasion and to indicate to you at the conclusion of my remarks in the swearing-in I welcome all of you to join us in the State Dining Room for some refreshments.

There can be no doubt whatsoever as to the capability and the ability of Bill Usery to handle this very important job at this very crucial time. You just have to take a good, hard look at his impressive credentials, the record he built up over so many years, in successfully mediating complex controversial differences between both labor and management.

Everybody who has had any experience with Bill in this field, and those who have watched from the outside, know that he is trusted and respected by labor and management, because he understands the needs as well as the concerns of both.

Bill has had a very outstanding record in the field of both labor, as well as labor-management relations. He served for many years as a representative of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers of the AFL-CIO.

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He was appointed Assistant Secretary of Labor for Labor-Management Relations in 1969 and did a superb job in that responsibility. In 1973 he became the Director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, and he has been my Special Assistant for Labor-Management Relations -- or Negotiations -- since the day that I took office.

Bill Usery assumes this responsibility of great leadership at the Department of Labor at a very challenging time. As we look at the labor contracts expiring in 1976, we know that twice as many workers are having their contracts expire this year as last year.

Some very key industries are involved -- rubber, auto, electrical manufacturing, construction, as well as many others.

I think the success of our program of steady, balanced economic recovery will depend significantly on reaching common sense labor management agreements without prolonged major stoppages and without inflationary settlements.

One of our top priorities -- it is a job of all of us -- is finding more jobs for more Americans. We must generate real, permanent, fulfilling jobs, not Government sponsored jobs that make work but do not make a future.

This is important for America, as well as all Americans. Permanent jobs have to be generated primarily by a steady, balanced growth of our private sector, where five out of the six jobs that exist today in our society.

It seems to me as we look at recent statistics that the steady approach is already yielding convincing results. We know from the statistics released last week by the Department of Labor that we now have more than two million people gainfully employed than we had last March, at the depth of the recession.

We also know that the largest monthly decline in the jobless rate in over 16 years took place between January of this year and December of last year. The record is not as good as we want it, and the record is going to be better, but we can be encouraged, and properly so, by the results of this last month's report.

In the meantime, as we have an unemployment rate that is still too high, we will continue those proven job training and opportunity programs, such as CETA, as we work our way out of this economic problem and as we work our way to total economic recovery.

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I know that Bill Usery has had a very longstanding, deep and sincere interest in helping unemployed young people, in helping veterans, and I can assure you that Bill will give his maximum attention to the whole spectrum of jobs for Americans.

We have a prime priority, all of us, those in Government as well as out of Government, to make certain and positive that our economic recovery program proceeds with the right focus, with the right energy, and certainly with the right results.

Bill, it is a privilege for me to ask Chief Justice Warren Burger to administer the oath at this time.

(Chief Justice Burger administered the oath of office.)

SECRETARY USERY: Mr. President, Mr. Chief Justice, Mr. Vice President, distinguished members of the Cabinet -- and I assume I can say colleagues -- members of my family and dear friends:

Never in my lifetime have I had a greater feeling of both pride and humility. To be nominated and confirmed as the fifteenth Secretary of the United States Department of Labor is an honor that was beyond my comprehension just two dozen years ago, when I was still an hourly worker in a plant in Georgia.

I look forward, Mr. President, to joining you and the distinguished members of your Cabinet in making every contribution I possibly can to bring to all Americans a Government that will best serve their interests and protect their liberties.

I also pledge, Mr. President, to do all that I can faithfully to carry out the duties as Secretary of Labor and that I will do so in a way that will make the department truly responsive to the needs of all citizens.

Many times during the past few days I have thought about just how fortunate I have been to be a part of a free and open society, where with a lot of hard work and a little luck, too, a person can achieve his or her dreams.

I am deeply gratified by the opportunities that have been made available to me. In response, I am determined to do what I can to make the freedom of opportunity more accessible to all Americans of all races and creeds of both sexes.

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A basic requirement in meeting this commitment is an economy that can provide employment for those who want to work. Like all Americans, and as, Mr. President, you just stated, I have been encouraged by the steady advancement in the rate of employment and the steady decline in unemployment that has occurred during the past few months.

The drop of a half percent in the unemployment rate in January, the largest decline in a single month in 16 years, was especially pleasing to us all.

Combined with the recent rise in sales and profits, the leveling of interest rates, the new help with the stock market, the increase in the productivity and the return of consumer confidence, the brighter employment picture indicates that we are in a position to bring a new vitality to our Nation's economy.

Each of these plus factors will contribute to the changes and the chances for peace on the collective bargaining front during this heavy year of extremely heavy negotiations.

Our system of free collective bargaining has served the Nation well, providing a sound and just method for labor and management to resolve their differences. I am confident that labor and management together will exercise a reason and responsibility that are necessary to avoid conflict and to enhance the chances of a more speedy economic recovery.

I pledge to both labor and management my full cooperation during the critical year ahead. Reality tells us that with all of the optimistic signs that are evident, we are still just at the beginning of our climb toward a healthy, vigorous economy.

The recession did not occur overnight, and a solid recovery, a lasting recovery, cannot come with the wave of a wand. There is still much to be accomplished.

As Secretary of Labor, I am determined to take every action within my power to stimulate the creation of jobs, to help relieve the hardships of displaced workers, to advise and train those in such work and to help people find employment.

While the Federal Government bears a responsibility to help those who are not fortunate enough to have a job, we must -- as an economic democracy -- rely primarily on the private sector to reach our goal of full employment.

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Of the 86 million jobs in our Nation today, more than 70 million are provided by private sector employers. That is where the greater opportunity lies in producing the millions of jobs that are needed now and that will be needed continually in the foreseeable future.

While the Department of Labor has a heavy responsibility in helping the unemployed, and in the search for new employment, it has equal accountability for many programs keyed to protecting the employee.

For example, the department is charged with enforcing laws that establish minimum wages and maximum hours. It is responsible for seeing to it that the places of employment are safe and free from known health hazards. It has a duty of protecting the financial integrity of pension benefits earned by workers.

In fulfilling these obligations, it will be my desire not only to carry out the intent of Congress, but to carry it out in a manner that is most practical and effective for everyone involved.

These programs were created in order that Government might serve the people, not that the people might become servants of the Government.

I will make every effort to see to it that the effectiveness of the program for the Department of Labor is not constricted by the complexities and sheer bulk of paperwork involved.

Mr. President, you have often addressed yourself to the plight of the victims of Government red tape. A number of employers are complaining, with justification, that they are suffocating under a mountain of Government-imposed paperwork.

The burden has been particularly time-consuming and expensive for small employers. All of this, I know, is necessary if we are to fulfill the mission of the Department of Labor, a mission that is as current today as it was when it was written some 63 years ago.

That mission is, "To foster, promote and develop the welfare of the wage earners of the United States; to improve their working conditions and to advance their opportunities for profitable employment."

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Today, that mission becomes my calling. My personal knowledge of the dedication of the more than 14,000 employees of the department adds to my confidence that together we will succeed.

If I might pause briefly, even though we have many here from the department, we have selected one to represent us today, and I am going to ask Homer Cousins, will you stand, who has more than 35 years of service in the Department of Labor.

We also have with us many other employees, as I stated, who together we will become colleagues.

In closing, Mr. President, I want to make reference to a passage from your State of the Union Message. You said, "Government exists to create and preserve the conditions in which people can translate their ideals into practical reality."

Today, Mr. President, my ideals have been translated into a practical reality, and I pledge to you that I will do everything within my power to help the Government to serve others as well as it served me.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 2:23 P.M. EST)