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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND MRS. FORD
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

KEENE HIGH SCHOOL
GIRLS' GYMNASIUM

8:45 P.M. EST

MRS. FORD: I appreciate how much it means to us that you have all been here and stayed here, and it gives me great pleasure to present the President of the United States. (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: Those are kinder words than she usually gives me. (Laughter)

Let me thank you all for coming, staying, and it is a great privilege and pleasure for both Betty and myself to come and see you all first-hand.

If I don't violate the rules of the house, can I take a couple of questions here? I would be delighted to.

Yes, sir?

QUESTION: Mr. President, what plans do you have for the next four years to balance the Federal budget?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, in the budget that I submitted to the Congress in January, if the Congress holds the restraint on Federal spending that I have recommended, we can have a balanced budget in three years. The Federal budget has been growing at the rate of 11 percent per year for the last 10 years. In the budget that I submitted it cuts that in half -- it cuts the growth in the Federal budget expenditure-wise by 50 percent.

If we can, instead of going up like that, can cut it in half, we can have a balanced budget in three years and that will include another tax cut. So it is the kind of a budget that is, I think, responsible. It puts the main emphasis on the private sector and it gets some of these uncontrollable programs in the Federal Government under control.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, why didn't you take stronger leadership on the question of conservation, really lay it on the people? We have to start saving more energy -- we are running out.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say that I think it is unfortunate that America has not done as well as most other major industrial countries throughout the world. I was looking at some statistics just yesterday. Virtually every Western European country since the oil embargo of 1973 has done better than we have in conservation. Now the American people will always respond to a crisis but, unfortunately, once the oil embargo was lifted the American people mainly went back to many of their old habits.

Now I do have to say this: Prior to the oil embargo the rate of growth in energy use in this country was about 6 to 7 percent per year. At the present time, that has been cut to a rate of growth of about 1 percent, so we are doing better but compared to many other countries we are not doing as well as we should.

Now in order to conserve energy I have recommended to the Congress a number of proposals. One, to increase the efficiency of our automotive industry in the cars that they produce; another, to provide a tax incentive for people to insulate their homes, a proposal of \$80 million to get individuals who were in the disadvantaged groups to have insulation provided by their Government so that we could save energy in that way. We are trying to get more utilization out of our railroad system rather than relying on the automotive and the airplane. We are doing some things but I happen to agree with you that we ought to do better.

Yes, sir?

QUESTION: Mr. President, it is nice to see you here this evening.

My question is, a few weeks ago the Boston Globe stated that Margaret Chase Smith of Maine said she was surprised that you were still in the running as a candidate and she was wondering why you had not quit as yet.

THE PRESIDENT: I was a little surprised myself -- (Laughter) -- because I have always had very cordial and good relations with former Senator Smith. I admired her then and I admire her now.

The reason I am running is because I think I am the only person with a moderate middle-of-the-road political philosophy that can win as a Republican or as a Democrat, and I think it is vitally important for the future of America having somebody who is not on one side or the other.

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I think it is important for a person who has a middle-of-the-road philosophy to win to give us the kind of strength at home and the kind of strength abroad that is needed, not only for our generation but for a lot of these kids I see here tonight.

QUESTION: Mr. President, how do you feel about foreign aid?

THE PRESIDENT: How do I feel about foreign aid? Well, let me give you an example of how foreign aid was very helpful and then I can give you some examples where it hasn't worked.

I see some people in this audience who came back from World War II when Western Europe was devastated, and if it had not been rehabilitated most of the Western European countries today would be under Communism. But the United States contributed a substantial amount of money to the rebuilding of Western Europe and the net result is we have freedom in those countries -- France, West Germany, Belgium, Holland and so forth. That was a good investment by America in a foreign aid program.

Now we have helped some other countries where the programs have been good. I think the Chinese Nationalist Government on Taiwan, we helped them. We are no longer helping them because they are on their own.

Now we have made some bad investments, too. So I think you have to realize that in programs that involve distant lands, different kinds of people, different kinds of societies, you will be successful one day and you may not be as successful the next.

I think the United States should have a responsible foreign aid program for two reasons: One, humanitarian. We ought to help people less well off than ourselves. Americans are generous, humane and we ought to help them.

Secondly, I think we ought to in order to help ourselves in the implementation and execution of our foreign policy.

Yes, sir?

QUESTION: Mr. President, I want to say two things before I ask a question. Number one, bring your wife with you on all your campaigns. She is a real asset to you.

THE PRESIDENT: I agree. So are my kids, too, and I am proud of them.

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QUESTION: I have a good many questions. I think when people are well-informed they do right, and you have done it straight with me and I think you have done a good job.

I have a little question I would like to ask. We are thinking of phasing out Fort Devens. We have phased out almost all of our forts here in New England and I think you should consider thinking it over before you phase it out.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me respond to that. The Department of Defense is always in the process of trying to analyze where they can get the best results from the utilization of facilities. Three years ago we had 3,500,000 men in the armed services; today we have 2,100,000 so we don't need as big a base. I am not saying that Fort Devens is going to be closed or it won't be closed. All I am saying is that the Department of Defense is analyzing the situation because first the Congress cut them \$7 billion in the defense bill for this current fiscal year, and that is about 8 percent.

I added money for next year but, nevertheless, I can assure you that Fort Devens or any other facilities will get a fair shake but the Defense Department will make the analysis.

Thank you very much.

All right. Two more. This young lady back here.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, I would like to know what you feel should be our projected military involvement in Angola.

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think our military involvement should be in Angola at all. I never proposed that one American soldier ever go to Angola but I did say, and I tried to convince the Congress, that we ought to help in a very small way the two organizations that were fighting the MPLA and those two organizations, UNITA and FNLA, had more Angolans in their organizations than the MPLA did and they were winning until 12,000 Cubans and \$200 million worth of Soviet arms went into the MPLA.

I am convinced that we should help people who want to help themselves and we were anxious to help two out of three to give them arms for them to solve the problem themselves. The Congress didn't vote for it and the net result is the Soviet Union and 12,000 Cuban Communist mercenaries are in effect running that country. I don't think that is good.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: How long do you want to be President?
(Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I would like to be President until January 20, 1981.

QUESTION: Can you tell what your stand is on nuclear power plants and the Government supporting and regulating to reduce, if nothing else, the anxiety? There seems to be an economic interest in this.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me answer the latter part first. I know of no prospective energy source that our Government isn't supporting. I have increased the research and development in solar energy by about 40 percent, from about \$80 million to \$120 million in the next fiscal year. We have increased the money for geothermal research and development. We have put around \$160 million into coal research so that we could make it cleaner and that we could make it a more productive fuel.

If you know a source of energy that we are not supporting, I would like to hear about it and we will look into it. Every scientist that can come up with a responsible source of energy for us to seek to develop, we have got money in it.

Now talking about nuclear energy, there is an agency or a commission called the Nuclear Regulatory Agency. It has the responsibility of taking the applications for nuclear plants, analyzing the design and the construction, the site and determining whether that plant should be built in that area. We now have roughly 50 nuclear plants in this country.

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I saw some statistics the other day, and these are undisputed, that the chance of any nuclear accident to an individual is one in two billion, something like that, and the chances are far, far less according to the statistics than being struck by lightning. Now that does not mean we cannot improve this situation and I added to the budget for the next fiscal year a substantial amount of money to make nuclear reactors safer and to make them more reliable. I think we need nuclear energy under the right conditions and they will only be approved by the Nuclear Regulatory Agency if they are.

This lady has the last question.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President.

I am very much concerned about the rules and regulations that override the state laws. The people who make the rules and regulations are not answerable to our people because they are not elected officials. Is there some way that you could set up a legislative subcommittee to oversee the rules and regulations or get their approval before they are finally made?

THE PRESIDENT: I am sure you are familiar with the fact that under our system of government of checks and balances the President can't tell the Congress to establish a committee or a subcommittee; they are a separate and coordinate branch of our government. In fact, they would probably do just the opposite if I recommended it. If you recommended it, they might proceed with it. I am being very serious. I don't think that the Federal Government -- and I can only speak for the Federal Government -- should override responsible local or state decisions and frankly that is one of the reasons why I have tried to hard to get the Congress to move from categorical grant programs where some bureaucrat in Washington makes the decision and overrides the decision-making process of a local official or a state official. Under the program where I recommend taking Federal money and giving it to the local officials and state officials, then you don't have some bureaucrat in Washington making the decision, you have the process handled right here in Keene or Manchester or Portsmouth or Conway or any one of the other places.

Thank you all. It is a great pleasure to see you. Good luck to you.

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(AT 9:02 P.M. EST)