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MARCH 13, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY  
(Greensboro, North Carolina)

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
GUILFORD COURTHOUSE  
NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

1:55 P.M. EST

Thank you very, very much, Governor Jim Holshouser, Congressman Rich Preyer, distinguished mayors, Reverend, Clergy, Director Everhardt, Mr. Forelich, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a very high honor and a very great privilege for me to participate in the anniversary of a memorable battle that typified the deeds that we so proudly celebrate on our National Bicentennial.

And let me say parenthetically that all of us who come from the other 48 States are deeply indebted to the heroism and the accomplishments of those who fought in this battle 195 years ago.

It was here on this battlefield that North Carolina's famous tar heel spirit inspired the men of many States to stand together against a common foe. The enemy came on with drums beating and feathers in their caps, but the tar heels provided the tar, the feathers flew, but the tar stuck.

Our farmers and frontiersmen dealt your best professional soldiers a blow that led to their ultimate surrender.

The North Carolinians posed on the front line made the difference. Today tar heel tenacity remains a model for America's tenacity. Tar heel pride is America's pride. And tar heel common sense and moderation symbolizes the new realism of the United States of America.

When I leave here today, I hope that some of your magic tar sticks to my heels.

I congratulate you not only for your State's courage, but for your mode in North Carolina lifestyle. You combine the very best of the present with the finest values of the past, and you do this in North Carolina with genuine humility. I like the North Carolina approach.

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Two hundred years ago the Founding Fathers favored what they called mild Government. They believed that you can only achieve mild Government if you maintain State and local Government so responsive that the national Government is limited in scope. They believed in the ability of individuals to govern themselves.

In this Bicentennial year North Carolina and other States are striving to restore the necessary and effective balance between the States on the one hand and the massive centralized power of the Federal Government. You know all too well how State and local authority has eroded, as the Federal establishment has grown and grown and grown.

When your State Constitution was adopted, you took great care to preserve the basics of self-government. The power has been drawn away from your State, your county, your city, your town, your farm to an increasingly centralized national Government -- always bigger, always more meddlesome -- but not always more efficient nor more responsive to local and individual needs.

This process undermines the individual resourcefulness and pride. It threatens our economic prosperity, it dims our vision of a future in which you can control your own life.

I pledge that I would never transfer serious problems from the Federal Government to State Governments or to local Governments without regard for human needs or fiscal realities. I want to preserve a constructive partnership with North Carolina and the many communities and the many people in this great State.

I am likewise determined to cooperate with North Carolina to move the decision-making process back to the people here in North Carolina and in the other 49 States. If the Bicentennial is to have any real meaning, we must restore to you on a State and local level a real voice in your own destiny. Should this Bicentennial year accomplish nothing else, this alone would be a fitting tribute and a fitting tribute.

What was the Battle of Guilford Courthouse all about I asked myself before coming here. Americans dared to challenge the oppression of a distant and unresponsive Government that tried to govern without the consent of the governed and to impose taxation without representation. Our struggle for independence, as we read in the pages of history, was really a fight to assert the elementary principle of local control over the fate of local people.

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The soldiers who stood here under General Nathaniel Green did not dribble away their resources in foolish experiments. They made very wise use of their terrain, they made every shot count.

The time has come for a resurgence of the common sense that made men become heroes on this precise battlefield. To keep the faith with the Americans who died here, we must strive for responsible self-government that they were willing to sacrifice their lives for and that they sought.

A self-governing republic requires responsible citizens. They must have the traditional virtues of self-discipline, self-reliance and a patriotic concern for the public good.

These qualities must be nurtured and rewarded. They must not be penalized or exploited.

I believe, as you do, in America and the capabilities of all 15 million Americans. North Carolina provides us with a showcase of progress. You have made tremendous -- you have made great breakthroughs in industry, in agriculture, in education, in harmonious rural and urban development in helping all citizens achieve their highest human potential.

Southerners, including Tar Heels, must be doing something right, and I commend you and congratulate you for it.

You know it and I know it. A lot of others must know it, too, as we watch the trend of people moving toward the South rather than away from it. Your region is growing much more rapidly than any other part of the United States.

In North Carolina, the rate of high school graduates has increased faster than in most of our States. There are significant increases in students attending your excellent institutions of higher learning.

I should say with some pride, but some humility, that two generations of the Ford family have come here to study.

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Back in about 1937 I went to the University of North Carolina Law School in Chapel Hill and stayed in Carter Carr dormitory. I never dared to go back and look at the grades I got, but I am sure some of the press will.  
(Laughter)

I also attended the Naval Pre-Flight School at the University of North Carolina for nine months during World War II and my oldest son attended and graduated from Wake Forest University.

I wish we had a few more that we could spread around. (Laughter)

But we all share with you an affinity for the enlightened spirit of your great State. I can say without qualification the patriotism, the dedication and the will-power of the 13 original States still burns brightly throughout the Old North State.

Two hundred years ago some individual said that it was unwise to make a stand here against the enemy. They said that we lacked adequate experience, that we were short of weapons and that we would be wiped out, but there were many, many more who said we are North Carolinians, we are Americans, we can do it. They did it, and we can do it.

Our challenge, yours and mine, is to foster new courage and realism at home, new moderation in the relationship of Government to the governed, and new American strength throughout the world.

Together all of us, in all 50 States, in all walks of life, old and young -- we welcome America's third century. Together we offer optimism to all our fellow countrymen and all of the world. Together we will build a better America and we will build a better world.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 2:07 P.M. EST)