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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
ALAMO PLAZA

12:15 P.M. CST

Senator Tower, Mayor Cockrell, honored guests,
ladies and gentlemen:

May I at this time express my very deep appreciation and gratitude to Mayor Cockrell for the very thoughtful and very beautiful gift on behalf of the people of San Antonio. I can say without any hesitation or reservation that both Betty and I will prize this very, very highly, and I thank you very, very much.

At the outset, may I thank the San Antonio Bicentennial Committee and the Daughters of the Republic of Texas for making this memorable occasion possible. It is a tremendous honor for me to join all of you in a new commemoration of the cradle of Texas liberty. These hallowed grounds were already in physical ruins when Colonel Travis sounded his battle call for the people of Texas and all Americans in the world.

But, because of a single great battle, the Alamo has put on the immortality of history. More than a shrine to Texas valor, more than a landmark of American courage, the Alamo is a monument to human freedom. Here the eyes of Texas and the attention of the world focused on more than 180 remarkable men who gave all they had to give in the defense of liberty.

The names of some of these very brave defenders are written large on the page of history. Travis, Davey Crockett, Jim Bowie, among others, have entered the domain of American legend, as well as lore.

But, these were only a few of the more than 180 valiant men who waited out a deadly seige and fought against incredible odds for days on end in the defense of the Alamo of Texas and our great liberty in America.

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We rarely hear of Joseph Bayliss or Antonio Fuentes or Robert Musselman or Charles Zanco, but these men were here too. They fought and died with the same courage that marked their more celebrated compatriots and their names, too, have been written on the rolls of honor that history reserves for only a few. Some of these men came here believing one hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name. Others thirsted for battle with the Napoleon of the West, Santa Ana, but all of them came to the defense of this capital fortress knowing full well that they would meet victory or death.

Like America's Revolutionary heroes a half century earlier, these were men yearning for freedom and a new life, and like those earlier patriots, these men were struggling not only for the priceless treasures of liberty, but for a land of incredible beauty as well as abundance.

As one early Texan wrote, "It does not appear to me possible that there can be a land more lovely with so much worth defending." It is no wonder that when Colonel Travis was issued a demand for surrender, he answered that demand forthrightly with a cannon shot. It is no wonder that more than 180 rugged men made so valiant a defense here, 140 years and one month ago.

This great epic of courage, this great epic of defiance, which is the story of the Alamo, is without doubt a story quite familiar to those of you who live in the shadow of this chapel or in the city that surrounds it. But whether the story is old or new, it is to us and will always be a towering source of inspiration to every American.

In our time, far removed from the sounds of ferocious battle which filled this courtyard in 1836, we look back and honor those more than 180 men who did battle here and thereby nobly advanced the cause of Texas liberty and independence.

All Americans who have gone to battle in defense of liberty share a kindred spirit with these men of the Alamo. Since 1776 Americans have paid a high price for the freedom that each one of us and all of us enjoy. We have paid it in the universal currencies of courage and sacrifice and blood.

We are thankful today that America is at peace and is blessed with freedom. We rejoice that this day finds no Americans in combat anywhere on the face of the globe. Yet, we know that in peace, as in war, we must stand ready to defend liberty. Brave as these men were who fought in this immediate area and despite the heavy casualties they inflicted on their advancing enemy, the garrison that fought here fell at last before an army of superior size and superior strength. In global terms, America must never give away such an advantage to any potential enemy, and we never will.

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All of our courage, all of our skill in battle will profit us very, very little if we fail to maintain the unsurpassed military strength which this dangerous world demands of us, but neither do vast stores of armaments alone constitute America's greatest strength.

Our greatest strength resides within our own hearts, hearts filled with pride and past achievements, hearts filled with hope for a promising future, hearts filled with courage for challenges that stand before us.

It is the duty of everyone of us, whatever our age or race or station in life, to insure that we have something worth defending in America, a land of liberty and opportunity and justice, a Government that guards our rights, defends our shores, protects our safety and sustains our progress and a people of independent spirit, determination and faith.

As we dedicate ourselves again here today to the defense of these priceless treasures, we know that they are the same ones which others fought for on this site 140 years ago.

May we always share their courage, and may Americans always be inspired as we have all been by those thrilling words which echo still in this old courtyard -- "Remember the Alamo."

Thank you very much.

END

(AT 12:28 P.M. CST)