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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT
CONROE TOWN SQUARE

12:04 P.M. CDT

First, let me thank you very deeply for the opportunity to participate in this memorial ceremony and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the replica which will be appropriately displayed and greatly appreciated in the White House. I thank you very, very much.

It is obviously a great pleasure to be in Conroe, Texas, the third fastest growing county in the United States -- Montgomery County. I gather I have a friend or two here in Conroe and Montgomery County. Thank you very, very much.

The purpose of my visit can be summed up in a very few words. As much as I believe in a strong and prosperous American automobile industry, I am here to say that this year there is absolutely no reason to trade in your Ford on a new model. (Laughter)

The year 1976 is a very important, very critical year for this great country. It marks the turning point for our country as we enter the last quarter of the 20th century and begin the third century of America's independence.

It is good for us sometimes to take stock where we have been, where we are now and where we are going as a people and as a Nation. America has come a long, long way in the last 200 years. We have grown from a very small, poor, weak and struggling collection of colonies to the greatest Nation in the history of the world -- the United States of America, and we are proud of it.

We have come through wars, depressions, droughts, riots, assassinations, scandal, practically everything that fate can throw at America, but we have also enjoyed phenomenal economical, technological and social progress in America and that progress has made our way the life, the envy of all peoples all over the world.

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Despite all the problems we have had, I don't think any one of us would trade places with the people of any other country in the world today.

We hear some talk these days about America being in a state of decline. We hear that America's best days are behind us. We hear that America is only a second rate power in the world today. Frankly, I am tired of hearing those who would run down America.

I am proud of America and I am proud to be an American. I know that each and every one of you feel exactly the same way. I believe in this country. I believe in its values, its traditions, its institutions, its people. I believe deeply in America's future.

We have the capacity in this country to do just about anything we set our minds to. America today remains the best hope of peace, the strongest guardian of freedom in the world, in the globe, and we are pursuing a policy of peace through strength and we are going to keep it that way.

I can assure you that America's defense capabilities are fully sufficient to keep the peace, to deter aggression, to protect our national security and our freedom, and let me assure you once again, without any hesitation, qualification or equivocation, we intend to keep it that way.

But America's strength is measured by more than armaments alone. America today is the greatest agricultural power, the most prolific producer of food and fiber in the history of mankind. I want to see the family farm survive in this great country. I want to make it easier for people to pass on their farms, the products of many years of hard work, love and faith to their sons as well as to their daughters. I want to make it easier to keep those farms in the family rather than sacrificing them to the tax collector.

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I have proposed two measures to help promote that result: First, a proposal that Congress act to stretch out estate tax payments at greatly reduced interest rates over a 25-year period and, second, I have proposed an increase in the estate tax exemption from \$60,000 to \$150,000. We need that kind of action.

These proposals, if enacted, would help not only family farms but family businesses as well. Family-owned businesses, like every other segment of our economy, suffered very heavily in the worst recession in 40 years. But, thanks to some strong common sense policies, at the outset of the recession, and thanks to the determination and the courage of the American people, we are working our way out of this economic difficulty.

With one favorable economic indicator after another pointing the way, we are on the road to recovery and to prosperity in America, and we are picking up more and more speed every day.

One of the main reasons this recession hurt us as much as it did was our dependence on foreign energy sources. Price increases, as we all know, in 1973 quadrupled the cost of foreign oil. Our dependence on foreign oil was too great then, as I recall 30 or 31 percent, and that dependence cost us a great deal more than the long lines at the neighborhood gasoline stations.

It cost us hundreds and hundreds of thousands of jobs, billions of dollars in production, increased inflation and many, many months of major economic problem. But, the really shocking thing about all of this is that our dependence on foreign oil has actually increased since 1973, because the Congress, or a majority of the Congress, simply refuses to recognize either the urgency or the severity of this problem.

This is an oil country, I understand, around Conroe and Montgomery County, and you fundamentally understand the problem. We in America need energy independence, we must have it and we are going to get it.

The sooner we get the Government regulations off the back of America's oil and natural gas producer, the sooner we will achieve energy independence for America for 215 million Americans. Obviously, I say the sooner the better.

Five months ago, as Senator Tower and Congressman Wilson know, I recommended decontrol of oil and new natural gas prices. The Congress deliberated, delayed, debated and dawdled all the way from January to December of 1975, and finally sent me an energy bill. Believe me, it was a long way from perfect, as John and Charlie know, but at least it was a start.

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In that bill, the Congress agreed for the first time to remove control over oil prices. Unfortunately, the Congress insisted that full decontrol be carried out over a 40-month period. I indicated last December that I would order immediate steps to remove controls of petroleum products. I also pledged that I would use all of the flexibility available in that legislation to allow the increases in crude oil prices that are absolutely necessary to stimulate domestic oil production.

We have already sent to the Congress the plan for the decontrol of residual oil, and this decontrol plan will go into effect in a very few weeks. Plans are also being prepared to decontrol distillates and gasoline. We are moving in the right direction in this whole area, both to provide the incentives that we need and to reduce the control of the Federal bureaucracy over this great industry.

My goal has been, will continue to be, the removal of all price controls from oil and new natural gas as the very, very best way to achieve energy independence for the United States of America.

Last week, obviously, I was very pleased that the Texas Independent Producers and Royalty Owners Association expressed its support for my efforts to achieve energy independence for America. I deeply appreciate that support from one of the largest and most influential petroleum associations in Texas.

Let me assure you, as well as them, that I intend to keep right on with these efforts for the next four years.

Furthermore, I will do all that I possibly can to see that Government regulations and red tape do not enslave free enterprise and personal freedom in this great country. The heavy, heavy hand of Government has found its way into too many areas of our national and personal life.

If there is one thing that we must never forget, it is that a Government big enough to give us everything we want is a Government big enough to take from us everything we have. We have the very best system of Government in the whole globe. It is a system laid out with great care and paid for at great, great price by patriots yearning for freedom.

It is a system that can be a powerful instrument of progress and enduring peace, a source of strength and security. But, it must always be a servant, never the master, of the American people.

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We want the freedom in this country to choose our own course and our own life, to chart our own future on our own terms without the Government telling us everything we can and cannot do. The elections of 1976 will play an important role in deciding what course we chart for America's future. The future that I see is one in which we find all Americans living in dignity, security and harmony and in peace.

I see people taking pride in their work and finding pleasure and purpose and prosperity in their lives. I see an America which cherishes the old values of honesty, compassion and determination and courage. I see an America which continues to stand tall and strong and free among the nations of the world.

I see an America which rises to its challenges, fulfills its responsibilities and takes advantage of the opportunities for progress in every field of endeavor. These are my goals, and this is the reason why I ask for your help and assistance, your support on May 1, November 2 and in the challenging years ahead.

Thank you very, very kindly.

END (AT 12:18 P.M. CDT)