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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION
AT THE
JAYCEES' SPECIAL HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA CELEBRATION
ABILENE CIVIC CENTER

5:52 P.M. CDT

Billy Taylor, Senator John Tower, Mayor Hughes, Mr. Anderson, Dr. Fleming, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Aren't you glad I brought some rain for you today?
(Laughter)

I am really delighted to be in this wonderful auditorium and I congratulate all the citizens of Abilene for providing this superb facility, but I am obviously tremendously impressed and overwhelmed by the warmth of your welcome. Thank you very, very much.

You know, as a long-time football fan, one of the great names that came to mind as we landed here in Abilene was Clint Longley, who all of you know as an outstanding graduate of Abilene Christian University and now an outstanding quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys.

I don't think anybody in Washington, D. C. will ever forget Clint Longley. (Laughter) They won't forget that long, long, long, long pass that he threw to beat the Redskins in the last minute of that Thanksgiving Day game in 1974.

But you know, a winning team also depends on a great coach, and here in Texas you have one of the greatest coaches in the history of football -- Tom Landry -- and I am very proud to say that Wednesday Tom Landry announced his personal support for my campaign and all I can say to Tom is, with his help and the help of many, many more concerned Texans like him we are going to win tomorrow and we are going right on winning for America in the challenging four years ahead.

I really looked forward to being in Abilene today for I knew here I would be among the kind of people who are very, very proud to be citizens of our great country, the United States of America.

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I especially want to thank Billy Taylor and the Abilene Jaycees for giving me the opportunity of joining with you and saying I am proud of being an American, proud of our country and proud of our heritage, just like you are.

We have a lot to be thankful for and a lot to celebrate in this Bicentennial year. In a relatively brief history, we have grown from a weak, struggling Nation on the edge of a continent into the richest and most powerful country in the history of mankind. We have gone through wars, scandals, riots and assassinations, we have passed through crisis after crisis both at home and abroad, and emerged in each instance stronger and stronger as a country, and I think that tells us something about the people in this country.

After each crisis we have closed ranks, joined together and gotten on with the job. As a result, we have enjoyed unparalleled economic, technological, social progress in America and through it all we have had greater freedoms and greater liberties than any other people in the history of mankind.

That is why I take great pride in being an American, because I know, as you do, that here, as in nowhere else, we are free to do what we want to do, to think and to say what we please, and to be, each of us, what we want to be. That is the kind of a country we have, and so long as I am President of this United States, that is the kind of a country we are going to keep.

But it will take more than good intentions to maintain our independent traditions as we enter the third century of our history. It will require a vigorous national effort to protect our way of life, and one of the greatest threats we have to face has been the threat to our free enterprise system.

The most recent attack began with the Arab oil embargo in the fall of 1973. The embargo did more than create long lines at gasoline stations and increase the price of fuel or expose our dependence on foreign suppliers for petroleum. As much as any single factor, it contributed to the most serious economic recession in four decades.

I am happy to report that my Administration has broken the back of this recession, but our dependence on foreign oil still remains and we have a job to do in that regard. In fact, we are more dependent on foreign oil now than we were when the oil embargo took place, and that is because the Congress of the United States failed to act when you demanded that they act, when I demanded that they act, and when America's energy needs demanded that they act.

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Fifteen months ago, in January of 1975, I recommended in the State of the Union message that I submitted to the House and to the Senate decontrol of oil and new natural gas prices. The Congress deliberated, the Congress delayed, the Congress debated, the Congress dawdled all the way from January to December of 1975, and finally sent me an energy bill. It was a long, long way from perfect but it is the law.

In that bill that Congress agreed, fortunately, for the first time, to remove controls on 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 on petroleum products. I also pledged that I will use all the flexibility available in the legislation to allow the increases in crude oil prices that are 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 made -- prepared, I should say -- to decontrol distillates and gasoline. We are moving in the right direction in this area, both to provide the production incentives that we need and to reduce the control in the Federal bureaucracy, but my goal is, my goal has been and my goal will be to continue the removal of all price controls from oil and new natural gas as the best way.

Last week, the Texas Independent Producers and Royalty Owners Association expressed its support for my efforts to achieve energy independence. I am deeply grateful for that support from one of the largest and most influential associations in Texas, and let me assure you that I intend to keep right on with these efforts for the next four years until we get total decontrol.

Meanwhile, my Administration has pulled us out of the worst economic recession in 40 years. When I became President, in August of 1974, the Consumer Price Index was at a runaway rate of 12 percent or more. In the first three months of 1976, we have cut that rate to less than 3 percent, reducing the rate of inflation by 75 percent over this span of some 20 months.

Just last week the Commerce Department reported that the Gross National Product, representing the value of all the goods and services produced in America, rose at an annual rate of 7-1/2 percent. That is about 5 percent better than we anticipated.

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On the job front, which is of deep concern to all of us, more Americans are gainfully employed at this time than at any time in the history of the United States. More than 86,700,000 are in our work force today, and five out of six of those jobs are in the private sector, and considering where we started from, that is a darn good come-back, by any standard.

Try as they might, even my opponents find it somewhat difficult to dispute the fact that we have made very substantial economic progress since the low point of the recession, just about a year ago. We are on the way to a new prosperity in the United States and I will not rest until every American who wants a job can find a job, and we have put all of America back to work.

As I said a moment ago, five out of the six jobs in our society are in the private sector. Now there are, or have been, some in the Congress, particularly, that wanted us to come out of this economic recession by loading up the Federal payroll, by adding one spending bill after another. That is not the way we should have done it and that is not the way we did do it.

Let me say this, that one of the things that I feel I can take the most pride in is that I combatted the Congress, they sent down one spending bill after another, I vetoed 48 of them, Congress has sustained 39, and in the process we have saved the taxpayer \$13 billion.

One of my strongest supporters and best friends in the Congress, a man who has done a superb job as your senior Senator, John Tower -- I thank you, John.

One of the great dangers and fears that I have is that Government could burgeon, it could grow, it could almost do it behind our back if we aren't careful. One of the basic truths that we have to remember and recall is that a Government big enough to give us everything we want is a Government big enough to take from us everything we have.

As your President, I want more than prosperity for us as fellow Americans. I want to lead our country into a third century of progress on all fronts. I foresee a century of individual and national fulfillment, a century in which we can adapt and perfect our Government and its institutions so that they more completely serve the needs and the aspirations of the American people.

I want to strengthen our tradition of individualism to make our institutions less remote and more responsive to the needs of the people that they serve.

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I want our Bicentennial celebration to mark the beginning of an effort by Government to win back the trust of the disillusioned among us in this great country. I want to heal the antagonisms, the divisions that exist in our society, and to convert the cynicism and the despair into active, constructive concern for our country where so much still needs to be done.

I want to keep America strong militarily, technologically, scientifically, agriculturally, but most of all morally, for only through the strength, that strength, can we meet and overcome the many challenges to our way of life.

I have really enjoyed very much this 3-1/2-day visit to the great Lone Star State. I have enjoyed having the eyes of Texas on me personally and my record, during this very spirited primary campaign.

Tomorrow, I would deeply appreciate having a lot of the votes of Texas supporting me and the policies of peace and freedom and prosperity for which I stand.

Thank you very kindly.

Now I am looking forward to, and I will be delighted to respond to the questions.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am a student from Abilene Christian University, and I was wondering how you feel about Federal funding of private institutions?

THE PRESIDENT: That is a question I have been concerned about for a long, long time, and I am glad to report to you that for a number of years it has been my deep concern and belief that private schools from primary to secondary to higher education ought to have a way in which they can receive contributions and donations without the harm and detriment of Federal taxation.

It has been my belief that it is good for the public school systems to have competition in the primary, the elementary and the higher education fields of education. Competition in education is just as good as it is in politics, business, professions and otherwise.

So we ought to, under our tax law, make it as easy as possible for individuals to contribute as generously as they can to the support of private education.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: President Ford, I am one of the four delegates pledged to you tomorrow.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

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QUESTION: So many people have become concerned, I think due to the publicity, about the possibility of our losing or giving away the Panama Canal. Can you enlighten us on this?

THE PRESIDENT: Let me start out by saying, under no circumstances will I ever do away with our right, our authority, our national defense useability of the Panama Canal. You can start with that, period.

But let me say that in 1964, if your mind will go back to that time, we had a riot in Panama. Twenty Panamanians were killed. The National Guard and other military forces got involved, and four Americans were killed.

At that time, a great Texan, President Lyndon Johnson, decided that we ought to negotiate rather than fight, it would be better to talk rather than have riots, and the net result was that those negotiations started, they have continued from 1965 to the present time, and what we are seeking to do is to establish a treaty of an extended period of time, 50 years, well into the next century, and in that treaty, during the period of that treaty, we would have the authority and the right to maintain, to operate and to defend that Canal, which in effect means for the remainder of the Canal's useful economic lifetime.

Now let me take the alternative of what my opponent has said. He says that in effect we should stop those negotiations. Let me be very candid and say that if those negotiations were terminated, you would have a resumption of the riots and the bloodshed, you would have the antagonism of every Latin American, every South American country, 25, including 309 million people in that part of the hemisphere.

You would undoubtedly, because of the actual riots and bloodshed, have to send another 10,000 to 20,000 American GIs down to defend the Canal if they could, because it is a place -- if you have been there as I have been -- which is not easily defendable. Guerrilla warfare would very easily destroy the useability of that Canal, so what we are trying to do, and Mr. Johnson tried to do and Mr. Nixon tried to do, and I am trying to do, is to make certain that we get a treaty that gives us the rights for as long as that Canal is economically viable, and we will get that kind of Canal right and it will be for at least 50 years, which is for the economical useability of that Canal, period.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am from Abilene Christian University. Everyone here is concerned about taxes. Would you like to expand upon your statement yesterday concerning a possible tax cut within the next two years?

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THE PRESIDENT: I certainly would, but I would like to start with the message that I sent to the Congress in January of this year, when I recommended to the Congress that starting July 1 of this year we get an additional \$10 billion tax reduction, 75 percent of it going to individual taxpayers and 25 percent going to business to provide jobs. Let me tell you what the main ingredient is of the tax reduction that I have proposed for July 1.

Today, under existing law, a personal exemption for every taxpayer or every dependent of a taxpayer is \$750. I want the Congress to increase that personal exemption from \$750 to \$1,000.

What that will do is give to the great middle income taxpayers, who have gotten short shrift in recent years -- it will give to them the kind of tax relief that they badly need and really deserve.

The recommendations for additional tax reductions for business are aimed at the following: To give to business an incentive to stimulate the modernization, the expansion, the improvement of their facilities.

What does that mean? That means more jobs for Americans.

So what we have is a tax bill to give more money back to the people so they can spend it as they see fit and not as Government dictates; and, number two, an incentive for business so we will have more jobs in America. That is what I recommended starting July 1 and I hope the Congress has enough good sense to accept that proposal.

Now I have promised, and I reiterated here today, that if we follow my budget recommendations to curtail the rate of growth of Federal spending by cutting it in half, if Congress will do that we can have an additional tax reduction of major proportions in two years, and that is what we want, in addition to what I have recommended for this year.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am from Tennessee. I wonder if you could comment on the policy that you took as Congressman and as President in controlling our growing bureaucracy in Washington, D. C.?

THE PRESIDENT: First, as a Member of the Congress and for 16 years as a Member of the House Committee on Appropriations, I was known among my colleagues, both Democratic and Republican, as a hard-liner, as far as Federal expenditures were concerned. I am proud of that record.

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Incidentally, in Congress I cast about 4,000 votes and anybody who wants to look at that record they can go back and check it and you will find I was one of the most conservative individuals in the spending of taxpayers' money during that 25-plus years.

Now, as far as the term as President, let me indicate to you what we are doing and what we hope to achieve. First, about six months ago I told the Director of the Office of Management and Budget that we had to cut by 10 percent the red tape, the forms that people have to fill out when they deal with the Federal Government, and I am glad to report to you that I got information just a week or so ago that we have already achieved about 4 to 5 percent of that cutback, and I have a deadline of July 1 of this year that they--the departments, the agencies, the bureaus and the commissions--better have achieved that record by July 1 of 1976 of a 10 percent cutback. If they don't, there will be some action some of them won't like. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Mr. President, have you made a decision on your runningmate?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I have not. I believe, and believe very sincerely, that we have a wealth of talent in the Republican Party, men in the Senate such as John Tower, men who are Governors -- well, there are a number of them -- members, or individuals who were former public officials, who I think could fully qualify, could fully carry out the responsibilities of the office of Vice President.

I think it is premature to make any decision on that important choice and I can assure you we don't lack good potential people for that important responsibility in our Government.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I am a student at Angelo State University and I would like to ask you what your Administration has done or what it plans to do to help control crime in the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: The question is, what has this Administration done in crime control in the United States?

First, in 1975, I would say July, as I recall, I submitted a comprehensive crime control bill to the Congress of the United States, and let me just give you one of the particular provisions that I recommended, which I followed up last week in the Drug Abuse Control message that I sent to the Congress.

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I recommended using this as an example -- a mandatory three-year sentence for anybody who is convicted of trafficking in drugs, and for a second conviction a mandatory six-year sentence for any conviction.

Now, as I understand it, some newspaperman has written a story to the effect that what I submitted last week for the drug abuse control proposal was that under my proposal they could have a parole after six months. That is wrong. When I say mandatory sentence for three years, I mean three years, period, or six years, period.

Another proposal that I recommended a year ago in the Crime Control message was that anybody carrying a gun who was convicted of committing a felony must also go to jail for a mandatory period of time, period.

May I say parenthetically, while we are on the subject of guns, I am unalterably opposed to the registration of gun owners and the registration of guns. We must make certain that the person who uses a gun in the commission of a crime goes to jail and the individuals who collect or legally use guns are not inhibited by a bureaucracy from the Federal Government.

There were a number of other provisions in the crime message that I submitted a year ago. Congress hasn't acted on this legislation. I hope they will before they adjourn this year.

But I am able to report to you that because we, I think, have created the right environment, because we have done some good things with what we call career criminal programs such as in Houston and in Dallas and elsewhere throughout the country, we have reduced the rate of increase of crime in the country from 17 percent in 1974 to 9 percent in 1975. But we are going to do better and better with the kind of endorsement, the kind of legislation that I have recommended.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I understand Mrs. Ford leans favorably toward the movement for women's rights. We would like to hear your comments on where you stand concerning equal rights for women?

THE PRESIDENT: When the issue was before the House of Representatives and I was still a Member, I voted for the proposed constitutional amendment so that it could be submitted to the 50 States for its approval or disapproval. That is my record. I don't try to hide it. When I do something I don't believe it is fair to anybody to try and disguise it. I think it was the right thing to do then and I think it is the right thing to do now.

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QUESTION: Mr. President, one final question.

There have been various bills proposed for national health insurance, and I would like to hear your Administration's policy on national health insurance.

THE PRESIDENT: I see no national health insurance program that we can afford at this time. I see no national health insurance program that has been put together that would protect the patient-doctor relationship. I see no national health insurance program that can be implemented without expanding the bureaucracy unbelievably. I see no such program at the present time that anybody has submitted to me that I could, in good conscience, recommend to the Congress of the United States.

QUESTION: Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: One more question. If anybody else has one more question I will be glad to try and answer it.

QUESTION: Mr. President, I want to know your stand on the Social Security, whether it is going to be extended through 1978?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I recommended in the budget for fiscal year 1977, which runs into October 1 of 1977, that the Social Security recipients or beneficiaries should get the full cost of living increase, and this year they will get a 6.3 percent increase, as I recollect -- is it July 1 or October 1? I am not sure. But I have recommended the full cost of living increase for all Social Security recipients.

QUESTION: Thank you.

END (AT 6:25 P.M. CDT)