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Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Lubbock, Texas)

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED AT
THE ABILENE JAYCEES HAPPY BIRTHDAY USA CELEBRATION

ABILENE CIVICS CENTER
ABILENE, TEXAS

I looked forward to being with you in Abilene today, for I knew that here I would be among people who are proud to be citizens of our great country.

And I thank the Abilene Jaycees for giving me the opportunity to join with you in saying: I'm proud to be an American. I'm proud of our country, proud of our heritage and proud of our people. We have a lot to be thankful for and a lot to celebrate in this Bicentennial year. In a relatively brief history, we've grown from a weak, struggling nation on the edge of a continent into the richest and most powerful country on earth.

We have gone through wars, scandals, riots and assassinations. We have passed through crisis after crisis both at home and abroad, and emerged stronger and stronger every time. After each crisis, we have closed ranks, joined together, and gotten on with the job. As a result, we have enjoyed unparalleled economic, technological and social progress in America, and through it all, we have had greater freedoms and liberties than any other people in any other country.

That's why I take pride in being an American. Because I know -- as you do -- that here as nowhere else we are free to do what we want to do, to think and say what we please and to be what we want to be.

That's the kind of country we have and so long as I'm President, that's the kind of country we're 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 had to face has been the threat to our free enterprise system. The most recent attack began with the Arab oil embargo in 1973.

The embargo did more than create long lines at filling 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'm happy to report that my Administration has broken the back of that recession, but our dependence on foreign oil remains. In fact, we are more dependent on foreign oil now than we were when the embargo took effect, 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, I recommended decontrol of oil and new natural gas prices. The Congress deliberated and delayed and debated and dawdled all the way from January to December of last year, and finally sent me an energy bill. It was a long way from perfect, but at least it was a start.

In that bill, the Congress agreed 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 would 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 decontrol of residual oil, and this decontrol plan will go into effect on June first. Plans are also being prepared to decontrol distillates and gasoline.

We are moving in the right direction in this area-- both to provide the production incentives we need and to reduce the control of the Federal bureaucracy. But my goal is, has been, and will continue to be the removal of all price controls from oil and new natural gas, as the best way to achieve energy independence for America.

Last week the Texas independent producers and royalty owners association expressed its support for my efforts to achieve energy independence. I appreciate that support, from one of the largest petroleum associations in Texas, and let me assure you I intend to keep right on with these efforts for the next four years.

Meanwhile, my Administration has pulled us out of our worst recession in forty years. When I became President, the consumer price index was at a runaway rate of 12 percent annually. In the first three months of 1976 we have cut that rate to less than three percent--reducing the rate of inflation by fully 75 percent. 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 seven and a half percent. That is about 15 percent better than we expected.

On the job front, more Americans are gainfully employed than at any time in our history. More than 86 million, 700 thousand Americans are in the work force. And considering where we started from, that is a darn good comeback by any standard. Try as they might, even my opponents find it difficult to dispute that we have made substantial economic progress since the low point of the recession. We are on the way to a new prosperity in the United States, and I do not plan to rest until every American who wants a job can find a job, and we put all of America back to work.

As President, I want more than prosperity for my 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 adapt and perfect our government and institutions so that they more completely serve the needs and 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 they serve.

(MORE)

I want our Bicentennial celebration to mark the beginning of an effort by government to win back the loyalty and trust of disaffected Americans.

I want to heal the antagonisms and divisions that exist in our society, and to convert cynicism and despair into active, constructive concern for our country where so much still needs to be done.

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

I have enjoyed very much this three-day visit to the Lone Star State. I have enjoyed having the eyes of Texas on me during this very spirited primary campaign. Tomorrow I would appreciate having a lot of the votes of Texas supporting me, and the policies of peace and freedom and prosperity for which I stand.

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