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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
OHIO GOVERNORS' CONFERENCE ON AGING

THE STATE FAIRGROUNDS

4:24 P.M. EDT

Jim, distinguished members of the Ohio delegation-- and let me personally introduce each and every one of them to you because they are old and very dear friends of mine. They are strong supporters of what all of you are interested in. Would you please stand up and remain standing while I introduce the others, Andy Devine, Bill Harsha, Chuck Mosher, Bud Brown, Chalmers Wiley, Tennyson Guyer, and Tom Kindness.

They are great people, they have been invaluable in their aid and assistance to me, and I thank each and every one of them. Of course, we have on the platform here a man who spoke from the heart to you just a few moments ago and who has been a tremendous asset to me as a member of my Cabinet, Earl Butz. Earl, come on, get up again.

Then it is great to be in the City of Columbus and Tom Moody, it is nice to see you, your great, great Mayor here in the City of Columbus. May I also thank the Walnut Ridge Band -- great music. You play that Victors very well.

In 1952, Winston Churchill, then a mere 77 years old, had been called into the service of his country for a second term as Prime Minister of Great Britain, and smiling somewhat impishly he told the British Commons, and I quote, "Everyone has his day, and some days last longer than others."

Today, I welcome this great opportunity to be a part of your annual Governors' Conference, and I congratulate Jim Rhodes for undertaking it back in 1968, a conference concerned with the many, many Americans whose days have lasted longer than others.

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The careers of Winston Churchill, as well as others who rose to prominence in later years, reminds all of us -- if we need to be reminded -- that advancing years need not mean a retreat from active, even future enjoyable life, nor should advancing years be the certain barrier of poor health, meager income or social isolation.

The ancient philosophers taught us that the measure of a civilization's advancement and greatness can be found in its proper treatment of the elderly.

Let me say that here in Ohio you have demonstrated your concern in a very solid and a very practical way.

This conference is but just one example of your ongoing commitment. I congratulate Jim and all those associated with him for initiating it in 1968 and continuing it in his term at the present time.

You all know, and so do those of us from outside of Ohio, that this State has pioneered in providing senior citizens' centers that offer a very broad range of services to the elderly.

The two golden age villages constructed by your State provide a model alternative to institutional care at a very reasonable cost.

Now let me thank and commend Jim Rhodes for my participation in the Golden Buckeye program, which was begun some three months ago.

I am told that in the very short span of 90 days 178,000 Ohioans have signed up and now it is 178,001. (Laughter)

Obviously, I am very proud of the fact that the Federal Government was able to make a contribution to the Golden Buckeye program, making it a reality by providing to the Governor's office for use as he saw fit -- through the comprehensive education and training legislation -- and I have been so impressed with the program as a whole.

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When I get back to Washington, we are going to take a real good look to see if we can't, on a national scale, implement something comparable to this. We have to, of course, see what the law says, what the money is, but the concept is good and we are going to do our best to expand it beyond the borders of the State of Ohio.

For more than 40 years, through the vehicle of Social Security and other programs, the Federal Government has made a firm commitment of support for older citizens of our society. I pledge to you that I will continue without hesitation, reservation, to uphold that commitment.

In recent years there has been some very dramatic progress to meet the needs of America's older generation. I want to do better and, with your help and with the help of a responsible Congress, I will, and we will. And this is something that all of us owe to this great generation of Americans, those at the present and those that are to follow. And as President of the United States, I will do everything possible in my power to help our Nation demonstrate its deep, deep concern for the dignity, for the well-being of our older generations.

The Social Security program, the largest of its kind in the world, will pay almost \$83 billion to more than 32 million Americans in this next fiscal year. This is more -- and I emphasize more -- than a \$10 billion increase over the current year. And, of course, I suspect many of you know -- but I want to reemphasize it to show my commitment -- in my budget for the next fiscal year, which begins October 1, 1976, I am recommending that the full cost of living increase in Social Security benefits be paid in that year.

As you also know, however, there are problems facing our Social Security system. Next year, unless my reforms are adopted, the Social Security Trust Fund will run a deficit of nearly \$3-1/2 billion, and the next 12 months after that, if we don't follow a responsible course as I have proposed, the deficit will be \$4 billion in a 12-month period.

But let me assure you very emphatically, my Administration intends to preserve the integrity and the solvency of the Social Security for your benefit and that of all working Americans now as well as in the future. As long as I am President, we are going to keep our Social Security protection and every other retirement program strong, sound and certain.

In addition to the Social Security program, we are continuing our commitment to benefit programs for more than 3 million railroad, military and Federal Government employees.

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After many, many years of sacrifice and hard work, these Americans have contributed much to our great Nation. They have earned our respect as well as our admiration. They have earned more than the prospect of poverty in their retirement years.

In my budget, the Supplemental Security Income program, or SSI, will pay almost \$6 billion in Federal benefits to more than 5 million disabled and disadvantaged older Americans in 1977, 140,000 of them right here in the great State of Ohio.

In the field of health care, the Federal Medicare program, in 1976, will provide more than \$17 billion for the health care of 24 million older and disabled Americans, 1,200,000 again right here in the great State of Ohio.

Now, there are some flaws in this program, which actually help raise the cost of your medical care and which fail, unfortunately, to provide or to protect you adequately against the economic burdens of a prolonged illness. I have proposed major improvements in the Medicare program to make it serve you better. One of the most important improvements would provide for the payment of all but a very small fraction of the catastrophic costs of complex or extended care as well as treatment.

I don't have to tell you that medical treatment is very, very expensive these days. If you have to stay in a hospital or in a nursing home or under a doctor's care for a very long, long time, it puts an incredible strain on your lifetime savings or on your peace of mind, and that strain is felt by your loved ones just as well as yourself. All of us know cases -- a friend, a neighbor, a part of your family -- in which someone has been stricken with an illness that lingers on and on and on. We know of the pain, we know of the heartache associated with a prolonged and expensive illness. We know that being sick and bedridden for an extended period of time is bad enough without having a person's income and life savings dwindling as the medical bills keep piling up.

This must not continue and I, as President, will not permit it to continue and, therefore, I recommended what I think is a good program to solve the problem. There is no reason that older Americans should have to go broke just to get well or stay well in the United States of America. Under my proposal, the individual's contribution to Medicare would go up very slightly, but consider what the increase would provide to you and to the other 24 million who would be covered. Nobody eligible for Medicare would have to pay more than \$500 per year for hospital or nursing home care or more than \$250 a year for a physician's services. Medicare would pay the rest, whether it is \$1,000, \$10,000 or \$50,000.

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That is good protection, and I think it is a good program, and I hope you will support it. This proposal provides the full protection so vitally needed by older Americans and, if the Congress passes it, the ruinous economic burden of catastrophic illness is one thing America's older citizens will never have to worry about again.

Another of my programs would consolidate 16 Federal health programs, including Medicare, into a single \$10 billion block grant program to the States. If we can consolidate these programs, we can make them far more humane and far more effective.

We can improve the services that they provide to you and millions like you, and we can get those services to more people who really need them. Programs of this kind, despite some abuses, do a tremendous amount of good. They provide food services and health care for many of our older citizens. For some of our elderly neighbors, they provide the means for life itself.

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I know it is all too easy to say that the Federal Government is too big, that this program and that program ought to be cut out of the Federal budget, tossed back to the States to cope with it if their taxpayers will permit it.

Jim Rhodes knows and I think most of you know it is not that simple. I know it and anyone who has thought it out knows it very, very well. The programs -- if I can put it this way -- the problems and the challenges discussed at this conference will center on the needs of Ohio's older citizens. They are often very, very special needs.

But, the elderly of our nation are also vitally affected by the problems and concerns that face all of the 215 million Americans. Perhaps the greatest of these are the problems of inflation. During 1974, August 9 to be precise, when I became President, inflation was ranging at an annual rate of 12 percent or higher, eating away at everybody's buying power, but absolutely devouring the livelihood of people on fixed incomes.

Americans living on fixed incomes could see their purchasing power eroding with each visit to the supermarket. I knew that something had to be done to bring the situation under control as quickly and as effectively as possible. I knew that deficit spending by the Federal Government was a major contributor to inflation, that slowing the growth of Federal spending was essential to solve the problem. In short, I believe our Government should spend less and our Government should tax less.

I am proud to say to each and every one of you, I am proud of the sound and steady policies of my Administration that have succeeded. In the last four months -- from January through the month of April -- the rate of inflation on an annual basis is less than 3 percent, and that is a 75 percent reduction from what it was when I became President.

It is a victory for all Americans because inflation is no respecter of age. The old as well as the young suffer. What I want -- and I think all of us want, young or old, black or white, rich or poor -- is to live in dignity, to live in security and to live in peace.

If we continue making the progress America has made in the last 12 months, we will see that goal achieved. If I had to sum up the record of my Administration in just a very few words, it would be peace, prosperity and trust.

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Today, America is at peace. There are no American boys fighting anywhere on the face of the earth, and I intend to keep it that way. I will continue my policies of cutting your taxes, expanding the private economy, reducing bureaucracy and useless regulation and restraining Federal spending.

My policies have brought us from the depths of a recession to a sustained recovery, and will insure that runaway inflation never again robs us or our loved ones of the rewards of honest work and lifetime savings.

Finally, I want to finish the most important job -- the restoration of trust in the Presidency itself. As your President, I will promise no more than I can deliver and I will deliver everything that I promise.

I need your support to insure peace, prosperity and trust for the future, the good, secure, fulfilling future that we owe to our children and to our grandchildren. Americans have always wanted a life to be better for our children than what it was for us because life for us has been better than it was for our parents.

Now, what do I see for this great country of ours in the future? I see a strong and confident America, secure in a strength that cannot alone be counted in megatons, a nation rejoicing in riches or blessings that cannot be eroded by inflation or by taxation.

I see an America where life is valued for its quality as well as for its comfort, where the individual is inviolate in his constitutional right, where the Government serves and the people rule.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 4:44 P.M. EDT)