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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE  
RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE YOUTH DELEGATES  
THE EAST ROOM

4:20 P.M. EDT

Secretary Butz, Mr. Dollinger, Mr. Mitchell,  
students and guests:

I am extremely happy to welcome the 900 winners of the 12th Annual Government in Action Youth Tour to Washington D. C. Your selection from 20,000 high school seniors and juniors indicates you have won over some pretty stiff competition.

Obviously there is an awful lot of talent here. We might recruit you for other purposes. (Laughter)

But I am also delighted to greet the 100 adult representatives of the local Rural Electric Distribution Cooperatives, and you should be proud of the work you have done and the work done by those that you have sponsored.

Finally, let me welcome the representatives from eight different countries who are a part of this group, and I especially am anxious to have an opportunity to say hello to them.

Now I have watched with enthusiasm the very rapid growth of your program. I was interested to find that it existed in only two States in 1957 but by 1964 it had gained the sponsorship of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. And as Vice President two years ago I remember greeting your delegation from Kansas up on Capitol Hill. Last June I welcomed last year's winners and their sponsors in the Rose Garden, and we had hoped to have it out in the Rose Garden this year but the weather was a little uncertain so we thought you might enjoy coming into the East Room

And this year I congratulate the entire program for involving students from some 23 States.

MORE

I understand the essays you wrote on political and community involvement indicate your very sincere concern for the future of this great country. For four decades electric cooperatives have brought power to rural areas. Perhaps no group better understands the essentials of conservation and careful planning in energy use than this organization -- all of you and those that have sponsored you.

Our energy resources and our energy production are very limited in this country. We are importing more and more oil than we take from our own fields.

Two years ago we were importing about 31 percent of our oil that we use. At the present time in 1976 we are importing 40 percent or maybe slightly more. So we have a real problem and a serious crisis, and I think it is a problem where we must find an answer and an answer without further delay.

We must increase production and the utilization of coal. We must expand and increase our use of nuclear power. Marketplace incentives need to be provided for gas and oil in the domestic market. The Government must work with private industry for the development of alternative forms of energy such as solar, geothermal and wind power. A coordinated effort in this area can and will make American self-sufficient and the target date must be no later than 1985, and we need your help.

Now in your visits with Members of the Congress I hope you will express your deep concern for America's electrical needs. As you visit various historical sights, realize that those sights represent a heritage of sacrifice, discovery, freedom and achievement unparalleled in the history of mankind. To maintain that level of accomplishment, we must foster the kind of involvement in crucial issues you have demonstrated by your participation in this program.

And as you visit departments of the Executive Branch, study how they operate to serve you and how you can work with them.

It is my understanding this afternoon you toured the White House. I hope you felt a sense of involvement in America's adventure. As leaders you are dynamic participants in that great adventure and your contributions can be tremendous in the months and years ahead.

Tonight the Rural Electric Cooperative Association will choose a President and Vice President for the new Youth Advisory Board. The candidates, I understand, come from Texas, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Tennessee, Florida and South Carolina. I wish all candidates the best of luck. Since they must come from this group, they will be among the very best in your generation, and your generation has a great deal to offer.

I thank you all for coming to see us at the White House and I wish you all a most enjoyable and productive visit to our Nation's Capital, and I extend to you the very best wishes from Mrs. Ford and myself. Thank you very much.

END

(AT 4:28 P.M. EDT)