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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE
NATIONAL EXCHANGE CLUBS

SHERATON PARK HOTEL

9:49 P.M. EDT

Jack, Lee Wells, distinguished guests, fellow Exchangeites, ladies and gentlemen:

I am deeply grateful, Jack, for your very kind introduction. It is really a great thrill and a wonderful honor to have the opportunity of saying a few words at your 58th Annual Convention here in Washington, D. C., and I congratulate you, Jack, on your year of service as National President of the Exchange Clubs -- as you called it, a duty to destiny. Congratulations.

I also congratulate your President-elect Leaborne Eads, who was chosen as I understand it for his motto of the year: "The challenge of achievement." A fine example of that challenge is the record of your 1976 National Youth of the Year, David H. Daniel.

Obviously, his school, his community and his parents, who I understand are here tonight, are mighty proud of his accomplishments and achievements, and may I say to you, David, congratulations, from me and all of those here tonight.

Jack sort of stole a part of my speech, because I look back a good many years ago when I had the great privilege of going with my father to the Exchange Club father and son banquets in Grand Rapids, Michigan. That was the third Exchange Club, as I understand it, in the entire United States. Dad and I used to go, or he used to take me, and I can vividly recall those experiences. They were great then and I hope you continue them now, and may I say, they are not unconstitutional. (Laughter) They are not illegal. They are pretty wholesome, I think. I learned a lot and I got a great deal from the opportunities of friendship and service. They brought me a lot closer to my father and I don't think my mother objected very much, either.

I also enjoyed the opportunities of going to a number of father and son banquets with our own sons -- Mike, Jack and Steve -- and I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity of attending a father and daughter banquet with our daughter Susan. And let me assure you, we are not going to stop them if I have anything to say about it.

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Last Sunday and Monday, our great 200th birthday, those were two of the most memorable days in my entire lifetime. I was fortunate. I went to celebrations in five historic places -- Valley Forge, Philadelphia, Washington, New York and Monticello. I could feel a spirit of renewal, a spirit that took hold across our entire country. That spirit will be remembered.

There was apprehension on the part of some that this Independence Day would fizzle or maybe explode. Some thought it would be an occasion for some hollow, self-congratulation or cheapened by commercialism -- a Bicentennial bought or sold. Still others, remembering a past decade of discord, feared the day would demonstrate national divisiveness rather than national unity.

The fears proved groundless. I had a feeling they would from an experience that I had about a year ago at the very first Bicentennial event. I went to the great State of Massachusetts and participated in some of the early Bicentennial experiences. I watched and saw the faces of people who lined the roads from Lexington to Concord. I could see our great celebration would be a success, as it turned out to be.

Americans enjoyed their national birthday party. It renewed our sense of purpose. A great tide of rejoicing washed across the land, removing past discords. Americans felt proud -- a pride some thought we had forgotten.

That feeling was summed up in the words of one American who was interviewed as he watched the fireworks at the Washington Monument last Sunday. He said: "It gave me a feeling of how great this country is, how beautiful the people are."

Americans realized once again what America is. From the Fourth of July weekend, I felt a new optimism, a new era of good feeling in America. And as I watched the television and heard the radio and read the newspapers, not just in the places I visited but everywhere in this country, the same feeling prevailed.

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The pageantry and the fireworks did not create those feelings, they merely provided the spark for a spirit that was always there waiting to be rekindled. It blazed across the country on the Fourth of July, and every American felt it.

The day has gone, but the spirit remains. While it still burns brightly, while it is still there, let's do something about it. We have got plenty to do.

In our third century, we must increase the freedom and the opportunity for all Americans. We must conquer disease, unlock the secrets of the earth and the universe, make our people secure in their jobs, on their streets and in a peaceful world.

Local activities and service programs are one way to focus on national energy on these great challenges.

The National Exchange Clubs have fostered such activities for over 65 years. Your projects are of national importance, and they are selected and carried out by local people sensitive to the special needs of the individual communities. Neighborhoods and churches, schools and civic groups can keep America as proud and active every day as it was on this last Fourth of July.

You can maintain America's renewed confidence in itself. Your projects will bring Americans together. You can give some real meaning to your motto by making this time of national rebirth an era of unity for service.

Our Government should be a focal point for national pride. It must nurture the energy and the spirit that we saw on the Fourth of July for the good of all. Governmental power must be used wisely, cautiously, constructively. It can only work if every Government official, elected or appointed, is a model of personal integrity.

We can all aspire to achieve that goal set by George Washington at the Constitutional Convention when he said, and I quote, "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair. The rest is in the hands of God."

In this way, with this new spirit, with this new energy, with this new dedication, with this greater vision, we will sustain not only just the spirit of a single historic weekend, but the spirit of two centuries which will give us the impetus to move to a greater century so we can celebrate our Tricentennial, an even greater American birthday party.

Thank you very much.