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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
DELEGATES TO GIRLS AND BOYS NATION

THE EAST GARDEN

4:52 P.M. EDT

Good afternoon.

Commander Wiles, Mrs. Schanel, Vince Marazita, boys, girls of this wonderful organization, your officers and the participants:

Mrs. Ford and I are very, very delighted to have the opportunity of saying hello and welcoming almost 300 of the First Joint Boys-Girls Nation.

I congratulate each and every one of you, first, for being selected to attend this very unique event, but also just as importantly, your accomplishments, your activities here in the Nation's Capital. Obviously, you have won the respect of your fellow students, your high school teachers and administrators and the representatives of Government at every level.

I couldn't help noticing that three of your four highest officers are from Michigan -- (Laughter) -- including your president. I won't say anything more. I like your thinking. (Laughter)

Let me take this opportunity to thank my fellow members of the American Legion and its Auxiliary for making Boys Nation and Girls Nation a success. Since 1935, when the idea of students' participation in Government was first conceived by the American Legion, the Legion has worked very diligently to help our young people gain an understanding of democracy as it is best practiced in the world, in the United States of America. More than a million students have participated in Boys and Girls Nation over the past 41 years.

If I might indicate my own participation, going back when I first joined the American Legion in the late fall of 1945, after World War II, I joined Furniture City Post in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and for a number of years before I became active in politics I was an officer and a very active member of that post and participated in my way in trying to stimulate Boys Nation, Girls Nation, selecting the nominees, and subsequently I had the privilege and honor of participating at State conventions of Boys Nation, Girls Nation, and I can say from personal experience over a long, long period of time that these two organizations -- Boys Nation and Girls Nation -- have contributed very significantly to making this country a better place in which to live.

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I am proud of my association with the American Legion. Mrs. Ford is proud of her affiliation with the Auxiliary of Furniture City Post, and I congratulate you as another wave of young people who are having an opportunity to see first hand and to find out first hand how Government works. So, I like the American Legion and I like the kind of young people they have selected over the years.

Your involvement in the political process is one of the keys -- and I say this with great emphasis -- one of the keys in maintaining an educated and responsible electorate. As long as our citizens in all 50 States understand the vital issues and responsibly evaluate the political leaders, America will remain strong and America will remain free.

This was the dream of our forefathers as they declared our independence in 1776. During this joint session here, you have traveled to many of the historic sites that mark freedom's birth. During our national Bicentennial celebration, I had a wonderful opportunity to visit many of these same places that you visited. I noticed something quite remarkable as I went from Valley Forge, to Philadelphia, to New York City and saw the Tall Ships, and to Monticello. I saw something quite remarkable taking place throughout your country -- a new reverence for the American dream and a new acceptance of the American adventure.

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I hope that each and every one of you have the same reaction, the same feeling that I had and you now have resolved to take a very active part in rekindling a sense of pride in our great country.

The future holds many, many wonderful opportunities for each and every one of you. One opportunity -- and I say this with emphasis -- is a career in public service, whether it is in elective office, serving in the Executive Branch, or serving in the Judiciary, the American dream cannot continue without your serious commitment to it, not on a one day a year basis, when you vote, but on a total 365 days a year commitment. This commitment can be of the local or the state or the national level, but it has to be a real commitment.

Now, after closely examining Government at all levels -- and I know you have had that opportunity -- you may have learned that our system isn't perfect, but I hope you realize now that it is perfectable, that it is worth your personal involvement. As I said a moment ago, you can contribute significantly.

To be truly representative, Government must serve all of the people. To do that effectively, it must be sensitive, it must be responsive and it must be close enough to the people to understand, so that they feel that you have a feeling toward them and they, in turn, have a feeling toward you. This means that we must and we can encourage smaller local units of Government to take responsibility back from big Government as we see it here in Washington.

What can be handled by the individual, in my belief, should not be usurped by Government. What can be accomplished by localities should not be taken over by the Federal Government. I might say, historically, we find that the first 100 years of this country involved a process of our forefathers making a system of Government that worked, that didn't fall apart, that met the stresses and the strain. The second hundred years of our history in this country gave us the opportunity to develop the greatest industrial nation in the history of mankind. The third century is our responsibility to see that it becomes the century of the individual, the right of the individual to be different from mass Government, mass education, mass labor, mass business, so that each of you can develop to the best of your abilities and dedication, your opportunities in this great nation.

What we really need is a better balance where individual freedom is protected, not stifled; where productive capacity is encouraged, not strangled through overregulation; where human problems are solved with compassion, not bound in red tape; where integrity is a reality, not just a political slogan.

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Such a system would ensure that the renewed faith our people have found during this Bicentennial will continue in our third century as a nation.

The third century is your century. So, you will have problems and you will have responsibilities. You will have opportunities. I think you have already demonstrated your great capacity for leadership or you wouldn't be here. And because of you, as I look in the eye of each and every one of you, I know that America will be in good hands, that the America of the third century will be a better place and the great American dream will become a reality.

Thank you all very much.

END

(AT 5:02 P.M. EDT)