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SEPTEMBER 24, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
(Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
NATIONAL QUADRENNIAL CONVENTION
OF THE POLISH-AMERICAN CONGRESS

THE BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HOTEL

10:35 A.M. EDT

Your Excellence Cardinal Krol, Senator Schweicker, Congressman John Heinz, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I feel great. How do you feel this morning?

I am greatly honored by your invitation to address the Convention of the Polish-American Congress, and I am mighty proud to be here, not just as President but as a friend of American Polonia.

It has been the policy of mine -- and the policy of my Administration -- to listen carefully to the voice of Polish America. When it comes to sacrifice and achievement, you have given more, far more, than your share in making this the greatest country in the history of mankind.

Fifty-eight years ago another Polish-American conference was addressed by the great patriot Jan Paderewski. His feats as an orator were no less stunning than his genius as a musician and as the leader of the Polish-American people.

His address to his audience in Polish for over two and a half hours -- I will not try to emulate that performance.

However, let me repeat a few of Paderewski's comments and observations. He said, and I quote, "The Poles in America do not need any Americanization. It is superfluous to explain to them what are the ideals of America. They know very well, for they have been theirs for 1000 years."

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Another Polish American leader put the same thought this way. "I feel I am 200 percent American because I am 100 percent Pole."

Much of what America celebrates in its Bicentennial year we owe to Polish Americans. Before the Pilgrims even landed at Plymouth, Poles had already first built the first factory in America in the colony at Jamestown. Poles had already pioneered American civil liberties demanding and receiving from the Virginia colony a voice in their own government.

For more than 3-1/2 centuries, Polish Americans have been working hard to build a better life for themselves and for their children. You have been soldiers and settlers, teachers and clergymen, scientists, craftsmen and artists. You have earned a distinguished place in the new world as your ancestors did in the old.

Yet today, you are troubled. You look abroad and see friends and relatives who do not fully share your freedom in America. You look at home and see too many of your neighborhoods deteriorating. I share your deep concern and I am also troubled.

But there is much we can do, as much as we have been doing, both at home and abroad. In the first two years of this Administration, I have worked hard to build a positive and expanding relationship with the people and the Government of Poland. A powerful motivation for that policy has been the knowledge that for many, many Americans, Poland is the home of their ancestors and their relatives.

I have sought to tie our countries closer together economically and culturally. In the last two years, trade between our countries has almost doubled. For America, that means more jobs and more production. For Poland, that means a higher standard of living and greater exposure to the American way of life.

A valuable worker in this important task has been the head of the Small Business Administration, Mitch Kobelinski. Last week in Washington, I met with Mitch. He told me personally how badly he wanted to be here this weekend, but this week, he is in Poland discussing how and by what means we can expand trade between our two peoples. My own meetings with Polish officials in Washington in 1974 and in Warsaw and Krakow in 1975 have led to a better understanding between our two countries.

In 1974, we signed a Joint Statement of Principles of Polish-American relations. In that statement, I reaffirmed for the United States the importance we attach to a sovereign and independent Poland. That statement was a part of a broader policy I have advocated throughout my entire life. The United States must continue to support by every peaceful and proper means the aspirations for freedom and national independence of peoples of Eastern Europe. As I have said many times before, as I told a group of Polish-American leaders at the White House just two weeks ago, the so-called Sonnenfeldt Doctrine never did exist and does not exist. The United States is totally opposed to spheres of influence belonging to any power. That policy is fundamental to our relationship with Poland and that policy will continue as long as I am President of the United States.

In my several meetings with Polish leaders, I also stress the importance that all Americans attach to humanitarian issues. People everywhere should have the right to express themselves freely. People everywhere should have the right to emigrate and travel freely. People everywhere should have the right to be united with their families.

I will continue to see that humanitarian matters are treated with the highest priority, not only in our relationships with Poland, but with the rest of the world. If we are to keep the respect throughout the world that the United States has today and must maintain, we must keep America strong. We must make sure that America not only has strong defenses but a strong heart.

Polish Americans know what it means to be strong. Many of your families came here without material wealth. In the countryside you cleared the land and made productive farms. In the cities you built neighborhoods you could be proud of. You built and paid for your own churches. You built your own schools and financial institutions. You built orphanages for the young and hospitals for the aged. You built your own institutions, the great fraternal organizations represented here today.

We must insure that what you have done, what you have earned, what you have built, will be here for your children to enjoy -- these wonderful young people here on this podium and in this hall. We must insure that your families will have the neighborhoods they need to build a decent life of their own.

A family needs a neighborhood that is safe. A family needs a neighborhood that is stable. A family needs a neighborhood with local churches, local shops and local schools.

Some of the healthiest neighborhoods in our cities are Polish American neighborhoods, but today too many neighborhoods are threatened by urban decay. You are paying a terrible price in lost property values -- property you worked hard to buy and maintain and that you love.

In cities like Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago, too many young men and women are finding it impossible to remain in the neighborhoods where they were raised. Too many parents are forced to watch helplessly as all they have worked and saved to build up is eaten away.

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This does not have to happen. I will continue to do everything in my power to see to it that it does not happen.

On the first day of this year I signed into law the Mortgage Disclosure Act to prevent redlining and neighborhood decline. Last month I met with the ethnic leaders to see what more we could do. As a result of that meeting, I created the President's Committee on Urban Development and Neighborhood Revitalization. I charged that committee with developing a sound Federal policy to help preserve our neighborhoods. That policy will be based on local initiative and local control.

Revitalizing our neighborhoods will help preserve your investments in your homes, your churches and your community facilities; it will help keep families together; it will help keep America together. America itself is a wonderful family. We must keep that family close -- closer in the future than it has been in the past.

As a young boy in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I was very fortunate to have as close friends Americans from many backgrounds. In high school I was lucky. I worked as a part-time waiter and a dishwasher in a restaurant owned by a man named Bill Skougis, who was of Greek descent. That was in 1929 and 1930, when jobs and money were not easy to come by. I earned \$2 a week and my lunches, and Bill Skougis earned my admiration and affection and respect.

As a young Congressman, my first administrative assistant was my long and dear friend John Milanowski, who is incidentally running for probate judge out there, and let's get him elected. John and I worked together for many, many years, and on my recommendation he became our United States District Attorney in the Western District of Michigan. I was proud of the job he did, and it earns him the opportunity to be one of our three probate judges in the City of Grand Rapids.

But, as President of all of the people, I am determined that every voice in the American family must be heard. The voice of American Polonia will be listened to because all of us are proud of the red, white and blue. We should be proud of the great heritage of the red and white.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 10:50 A.M. EDT)