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OCTOBER 2, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
PETER J. DOMENICI  
SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
TO THE  
PRESIDENT FORD COMMITTEE ON ETHNIC AFFAIRS  
THE STATE DINING ROOM

11:40 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. It is wonderful to see you all, and I am very pleased to welcome you to the State Dining Room.

I know that the President Ford Campaign Committee on Ethnic Affairs is going to play a very vital role in this election. I am especially pleased to announce that my good friend, Pete Domenici, has agreed to serve as the chairman of this group.

I think Pete's story is a very inspiring one. He is the son of Italian immigrants, and I think Pete embodies all of the values that are the very backbone of this country. Pete is a great campaigner. He tells me he was out in New Mexico last night and flew back on the red-eye special. (Laughter) And so anybody with that dedication and that willingness to work is the right kind of chairman for this very, very important campaign committee. So, we thank you very, very much, Pete.

I am delighted to see not only all of you who are leaders in your respective communities, but the Members of Congress who are likewise vitally important, representing their congressional districts but also their ethnic groups. All of you as leaders in your community are vitally important in this campaign.

I have said on many occasions, at the Convention in my acceptance speech and down in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida that I don't concede a single State and I don't concede a single vote.

The election is going to be close. We started from behind, but we have the momentum, and I believe very strongly that this election can and will be won by the Ford-Dole ticket.

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It just so happens that the record and the program of the Ford Administration coincides with the aspirations of the groups that you represent. It is my observation that those who have an ethnic background want a job, a meaningful job opportunity. They are willing to work and will go out and try to find a job.

This Administration believes that everybody who wants a job should have a job, and this Administration is going to achieve that result.

We don't think the situation is adequate today, but our program of trying to expand the domestic economy, the private sector, where five out of six jobs exist, is the way to get a job for the young American; for those who want a job and who are willing to work.

American ethnics want a home in a decent neighborhood. This Administration believes that everybody who will work and save can get a home in a decent neighborhood under the program that we believe in.

We have to reduce down payments. We have to have variable mortgage payments so that young couples, when they start out, won't have to pay as much when their income is down, but as their income situation improves, they will be able to pay more.

This Administration has established under the Secretary of HUD, Carla Hills, a Committee -- a joint cabinet committee -- on Urban Development and Neighborhood Revitalization, and this committee will do a good job in making certain that your ethnic communities are preserved in our major metropolitan areas.

With a job and a home, you can raise a family, you can support your schools and you can support your social clubs. You can preserve your cultural and spiritual heritages, and those are vitally important.

This Administration believes that we also have to take a forward step in the area of education. We have supported the elementary and secondary education programs that where the Federal Government makes contributions to State and local educational bodies, we don't think the system works as well with some 24 categorical grant programs.

We believe that the same amount or more money ought to go to elementary and secondary schools in a block grant program so that teachers and administrators don't have to spend all of their time making out Federal forms; so they can spend their time teaching the children of all Americans and thereby get a better education for the young in this country.

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Although I am a product of public schools, I strongly believe that our nonpublic schools are vitally important in our society. Public schools are better when they have competition from nonpublic schools. Therefore, it has always been my view that we should find a way under our Federal tax policy to give an opportunity for those who want to send their children to nonpublic schools should get some tax relief.

One final comment. On July 4 this country celebrated its 200th birthday. It was a glorious day. I think more Americans were thrilled by what took place that day than almost any day in recent history.

On that occasion we honored the achievements of the past, but in the third century I think we have to write a new and better history for America. We have to have jobs for our people. We have to have homes for our old as well as young. We have to have safety on our streets. We have to have the opportunity for better health care. We have to have a strong nation with peace at home and with peace abroad.

This nation, over the years, has done a good job in keeping itself strong and healthy both here and abroad. But sometimes it is helpful for us to learn about the sadness and tragedy of other nations.

Just this past week, if you have been reading the papers, our strong and good ally, Great Britain, has been faced with a very serious crisis. You may have read that the Prime Minister of Great Britain appeared before his own Labor Party Convention, calling for them to support him in a strong fiscal and monetary policy so that Great Britain could meet the crisis that has confronted them in the last year or two, a crisis which has reached a peak within the last few weeks.

I read of the speech that Prime Minister Callaghan gave to his Labor Convention and one sentence in that speech impressed me tremendously, and it is a sentence that I think we should take a good look at and perhaps learn something from. Let me read it to you.

"Britain for too long has lived on borrowed time, borrowed money and borrowed ideas. We will fail if we think we can buy our way out of our present difficulties by printing confetti money and by paying ourselves more than we earn."

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That is a very, very powerful sentence given by a courageous Prime Minister, telling not only the people in his party but the people of Great Britain that they have to take strong action in a time of crisis.

Let me say that as long as Jerry Ford is President, Jerry Ford will never let the United States of America reach this kind of a crisis.

Now it is my great privilege to introduce your chairman, an outstanding Member of the United States Senate, a real leader, Senator Pete Domenici.

SENATOR DOMENICI: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

You know, you indicated to our adviser group that is here that I am the son of immigrant parents, and indeed I am. Both my mother and father were born in the country of Italy.

Mr. President, how proud my mother is that I am here today and that you have asked me to do this, and I am sure my beloved father would probably have flown back on the red-eye with me if he were alive, Mr. President, so he could be here today on this occasion.

Let me tell you a little bit about your advisory group. We have 26 nationalities represented here, Mr. President, from 13 States. We have been working to put this team together. We have a wonderful team of staff workers, and we are going to commit to you, Mr. President, that the Democratic Party and the Democratic candidates are going to find out this year that they cannot take the ethnic vote for granted anywhere in the United States.

Mr. President, we all support you for the same reason because basically we love our families, we love our country, we love our little homes that we have bought. Our sons and daughters have had a great opportunity in this land, and we admire and expect two things: Integrity--and you abound in that--and, secondly, you have a great respect for all people. You treat all people the same, and that means you are going to treat our ethnics just as other Americans have been treated.

That means, Mr. President, when you are elected and begin to serve your first year of your elected term, that we are going to look to you, Mr. President, to give back to us what we are giving to you. We are going to give you a full American treatment from ethnics, and we only want a full American treatment back to our ethnics from you and from Government.

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There is one thing, Mr. President, that those who came to our country from foreign lands--probably, above all else--one thing that they retain and that they will never let go away, and that is their religion; their love for their church and their desire that their children and their family participate in all the things that churches that they belong to can provide.

With that, Mr. President, I want to tell you that something disturbs me about Governor Carter's recent statement, and I will quote. He said recently, Mr. President -- and I also tell my advisory group this, we will talk about it today as we meet -- but he said in the Religion Liberty Association of America Seventh Day Adventist publication, and I will quote for you, Mr. President, that he would "favor the taxation of church property other than the church building itself."

Now, Mr. President, this disturbs me, and I am sure when we finish meeting today, that we will have a statement for you from our ethnic advisory committee on this proposition.

I don't favor that if that means that hospitals, or religious institutions that our churches own that are not directly related to a building called a church are going to be taxed so we can raise more revenue for the American tax coffers.

There are a lot of other ways to do it, and we don't want to do it that way, Mr. President. We know that profit-making endeavors of our churches are presently taxed, and I think you support that and I think we support that. But, Mr. President, we think it would do great violence to the ability of our churches to supply the great kinds of social needs that they are now giving to us and our children if this proposition by Governor Carter became the law of the land, that only the church building itself would be exempt from taxes.

I know that you have some feelings on this. If you would, Mr. President, I would like you to give us your observations on this and, once again, I thank you for the privilege you have given me for being your chairman and we make a commitment to you today -- that we are going to prove that the ethnics in this country just don't follow any party, they vote for a man and they are going to elect you as President.

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THE PRESIDENT: Senator, I was, of course, very, very disturbed when I heard about the proposal of Governor Carter. I think my opponent's proposal to tax church properties other than the church building is a very, very unfortunate and disturbing development. Nothing could be worse for church-operated schools, hospitals and orphanages, many of which face constant financial struggles to make ends meet.

I think the more we learn of my opponent's plans for future taxes, the more troublesome they become. I can tell you unequivocally, emphatically, that this Administration has neither plans nor supports any effort to tax churches beyond the present scope of Federal taxation.

It seems to me instead of a tax proposal to increase taxes in this way we should make additional efforts in the area of tax reform. When I talk about tax reform, I talk about tax reduction for the middle income taxpayer.

So, Pete, thank you. I thank all of you.

Why don't we take a few minutes and say hello and let me chat with each of you individually.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 11:58 A.M. EDT)