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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
ANNUAL DINNER OF THE
ALFRED E. SMITH MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

THE WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL

7:37 P.M. EDT

Your Emminence, I thank you very, very kindly for your very warm and exceedingly kind introduction.

Members of the Smith family, Governor Carey, Senator Javits, Senator Buckley, Mayor Beame, Mr. Silver, Dr. Rusk, distinguished officials, guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me say first how busy it is, keeping running the country and the campaign at the same time. We seem to go from one place to another without pausing. Sometimes it gets confusing, but it is always nice to come back here to Philadelphia. (Laughter) I should say thank you and good night. (Laughter)

But, you are not going to get off that easy. You know one of the first speeches I made when I became Vice President-designate in 1973 was here at the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Dinner. I got out a copy of that speech and read it.. It was very short. I have in mind Al Smith's famous political maxim, "Don't speak until you have something to say." He also had a favorite line with a surprisingly modern ring, "Never promise anything you are not perfectly sure you can deliver."

It is no wonder that so many politicians of both parties come here every year to pay tribute to Governor Al Smith's memory. But, the dinner also gives opposing candidates a chance to meet in good fellowship for a brief respite from the ardors of their campaign, and I sincerely regret that Governor Carter is not here yet. (Laughter)

We are coming into the home stretch of this great campaign, and tomorrow is our last debate, only this one is going to be a little different from the others. Governor Carter is going to answer his questions and I am going to quetsion my answers. (Laughter)

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I do have a message for Governor Carter. It is about some new security measures we have taken. We just installed a special lock on the front door of the White House. (Laughter) It is "Jimmy-proof."

I wish I had time to mention all of the distinguished Americans who are here this evening. Looking around this head table, I am not sure whether it is October at the Waldorf or Thanksgiving at Hugh Carey's. (Laughter)

Let me just say a word about your exciting Senatorial race right here in the great Empire State. Before the program, I asked Cardinal Cooke what significance he would attach to the fact that this year Jim Buckley and Pat Moynihan -- two good Irish Catholics -- are running for the United States Senate. Cardinal Cooke said it meant only one thing -- God answers prayers. (Laughter)

Tonight, rather than talking about what divides us, I would rather focus on what unites us: a deep belief in the Almighty, a deep belief in the dignity of human life, a deep belief in the morality of American leadership.

Earlier this week Cardinal Cooke dedicated a church on Staten Island which had been destroyed by fire only a few years ago. The people of that church had rallied and worked together to restore what they had originally created, and so deeply believed in.

Similarly, in the last two years the American people have rallied. We have restored our belief in ourselves and in our system of Government. During our great Bicentennial celebration this past July, we felt that renewed spirit. The sight of those tall ships from all over the world made every American stand taller.

It is one thing to cite the problems that we have in America, to list our complaints and to note the frustration over things that don't work, the disillusionment with Government that has grown so widespread.

But, we should do more. Our politics ought to mean more than noting a negative tone or negative mood in America and becoming its champion. Our politics ought to be able to capture the hope that there is in America and to find out how to nourish it in specific ways.

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There is a wide range of institutions in between which can bridge the gulf between the person and the huge, impersonal institutions of modern life. These same institutions can solve problems which are beyond the power of men and women to meet as individuals and beyond the power of Government to even understand. They are the communities which a free people freely formed -- the communities of families, of neighborhoods, of friends, the communities of faith and charity.

The Jewish-Christian tradition from which this great country emerged encouraged people to help other people in need, especially the stranger, the newcomer. Those of us who were called upon to serve a people born into that tradition do well to recognize the abundance of good will and neighborliness that characterizes such people.

If we ask everything of Government, as powerful as Government in America is today, we soon may end up looking to Government to set the standards for compassion and for care.

We may soon forget that the highest standards were already set for us -- not on Capitol Hill, but long ago on two loftier peaks: On Sinai and the Mount of Olives.

So, it has been a great honor, Your Eminence, to take part in this evening's demonstration, of how good and how great is the heart of this great city and how strong are the bonds of compassion and concern that unites us as Americans.

Before I go, I note that among those absent tonight is one distinguished American who has brought his infectious good humor to many gatherings just like this one, one we can justly call the rightful heir in our time of Al Smith's nickname, "The Happy Warrior." My good friend and the good friend of many people here, Hubert Humphrey, is fighting another battle just tonight in Sloan-Kettering Hospital. He should know that he has our heartfelt prayers for a very speedy and complete recovery. We look forward to having him with us again next year, and I may dare say that vote among us all is unanimous.

Many years ago I shared a banquet podium just like this with the then Vice President Hubert Humphrey. What I said then I say again to you, to all my supporters and to all Governor Carter's supporters, and to Governor Carter himself: As we head into the final days of this great campaign, the things that unite us as Americans are far more enduring than the things that divide us. Let's all remember that both Democrats and Republicans are striving together to create a more perfect union with liberty and justice for all.

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Our unwritten compact of respect for the convictions of others and faith in the tendency of others allows Americans the luxury of rugged political competition. Let's all work to banish war from our shrinking world and hate from our expanding hearts, to make this whole planet as full of friendship and felicity as this room tonight.

Thank you and good night.

END

(AT 7:50 P.M. EDT)