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Address by Rep. Gerald R. Ford, Jr.

Des Moines Industries Council  
May 29, 1962

I'd like to point out today what I believe are some alarming developments in our national internal life--primarily the pitfalls of the New Frontier. Let me enumerate them:

1. FISCAL IRRESPONSIBILITY
2. THIRST for PERSONAL POWER
  - (a) government by Presidential Fiat
  - (b) government by Presidential Propaganda
  - (c) government by Presidential Anger
3. DEMAND for a SUBSERVIENT CONGRESS
4. APPOINTMENT of a PARTISAN JUDICIARY and QUASI-JUDICIAL REGULATORY BODIES.

At the same time I will suggest the role that you can play in helping our nation to meet these challenges. As I do so, I hope to avoid either the undue optimism of a pollyanna or the unwarranted pessimism of a modern Cassandra.

Basically I am an optimist. In the past few months, I have had some opportunity to travel about our country and, once again, I was reassured by what I saw. We live in a marvelous country. As one leaves the hothouse atmosphere of Washington and goes out among the people, one cannot help but be deeply impressed by the basic strength of our country. That strength is reflected in our abundant resources, in their dynamic development, and above all, in our energetic, freedom-loving and God-fearing people.

Over the long haul I have no fear for the future of such a nation and such a people. I believe they can meet and conquer any problem once they understand the nature of the problem and its significance.

It is in this area, the area of recognizing our problems, of understanding them and of choosing the right solutions, that we face our greatest challenge, and it is here where my basic feeling of optimism is tempered by more than a few nagging doubts. They are brought on by a number of warning signals in our economic and political life which we cannot afford to ignore as we move into the decade of the fabulous 60's.

However, as a prospering, highly-developed nation, we face the same danger which has confronted every successful nation or civilization since history began. Our danger is that, as we enjoy our strength and prosperity, we neglect, and thus weaken, those very institutions and principles which made us strong and prosperous and free. Our

danger lies in complacency, selfishness, ignorance, and irresponsibility.

While my message today is that it need not happen here, let us not delude ourselves. It can happen here. Just because in our lifetime we have seen our nation move from one plateau to the other, each higher than the last, until we now stand the greatest nation in the world, let us not think that we cannot fall--in fact the precipice may be closer than we think.

Perhaps the first thing which should be taught in the civics and political science courses in our schools is the story of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The story of a nation which became the undisputed ruler of the world and then collapsed so utterly and so completely that it plunged the civilized world into darkness for centuries, should be studied by every American. We would learn that just because an economy and a civilization rises to spectacular heights is no reason it will remain at the pinnacle in perpetuity.

We would learn that stupidity, selfishness, and ignorance on the part of the population and its rulers can bring on not just a temporary reversal but a collapse so complete as to wipe out the whole structure with all of its accomplishments. The Roman Empire collapsed because it became rotten within. It became rotten because the people and the government failed to preserve those virtues which had led to its strength and because its citizens refused to apply any restraint to their demands upon the government. Literally, the Roman Empire tore itself to pieces through the weakness and demagoguery of its rulers and the enormous burden of expenses they incurred in meeting the demands of a citizenry which forgot the public interest in its selfish fight for the fruits of national prosperity.

The comparison between our nation and the Roman Empire is not a perfect one, but we cannot ignore the obvious warning signals which are flying today.

First as a nation, in spite of the heaviest tax burden in its history, we appear to be constitutionally unable to restrain our expenditures below the level of our income. It is almost beyond comprehension that this year our federal government cannot pay its way with abundance and prosperity in our midst. However, deficit financing by our government seems to be habit forming and even desirable economic theory among top White House economists. We have balanced our federal budget (lived within our income as a government) in only five out of the last 31 years. Needless to say, I am gravely concerned that this fiscal year will end on June 30th...\$7 billion in the red, and responsible forecasts predict a deficit of over \$3 billion in the next twelve months.

Let me lay aside one myth that we are in financial trouble because of sizeable spending increases by the Army, Navy, and Air Force. In the ten-year span between

July 1, 1953 and June 30, 1963 military expenditures will have increased 8 percent while during this same ten-year period non-defense costs will have zoomed upward 92 percent. Furthermore it is often alleged by New Frontiersmen that the tremendous increase in expenditures in the last eighteen months have been caused by a vast boost in defense costs. This also is a myth. Federal budget expenditures have skyrocketed under the Kennedy Administration, but approximately 70 percent of the increase has been generated in the non-defense area where the big government planners hold forth in Washington under this Administration.

What are the long-run fiscal implications of the Kennedy Administration? Implementation of the various Kennedy programs would result in total annual spending of \$124 billion by 1970 compared with \$92 billion for 1963. This gigantic spending spree would increase the national debt to \$330 billion and the annual interest charges on the debt to \$12.5 billion.

Tragically we appear unable to reduce our tremendous national debt which now stands at \$297 billion. Interest on that debt alone amounts to over \$9 billion dollars each year which is more than our total annual expenditures for every purpose only 22 years ago. As a result of this irresponsibility with our national wealth, coupled with the selfish demands of the more highly organized segments of our economy, we are fighting a losing battle against insidious inflation. The Department of Labor last week announced a new all-time high on the cost of living. Over the past thirty years the cost of goods and services have been going up. The value of our money has gone down. Caught in this vice are those who are least able to protect themselves. Unfortunately, the victims are our senior citizens who have retired on fixed incomes and the young, even the unborn, who must assume the responsibility of paying the debts of our generation. Deficit financing, the failure of our government to live within its income in times like these, is an act of indefensible immorality. The New Frontiersmen want material benefits today but refuse to pay the bill, preferring to pass on the burdens plus interest to future Americans.

These results, however grave they may be, are but the symptoms of a far more serious defect in our national life. There is a growing tendency of our people, encouraged by demagogues whose only principle is a lust for power, to take the easy way out. We know, each of us in our own hearts and minds, that the right way is not always the easy way and that no nation which has consistently taken the path of least resistance, including the Roman Empire, has ever survived. The easy way, if it is the wrong way, leads only to the misery of retraced steps or the finality of disaster. Yet, what are our constantly recurring deficits, what is our huge debt, what is our inflated

currency--if they are not the symptoms of a people and a nation which have fallen into the habit of taking the easy way out?

The hard way, we know, is to rely on our own individual initiative and self-reliance for the solution of our problems. The easy way is to pass these problems on to government. The easy, soft and lazy way is for the local units to pass them on to the state government and for the state government, in turn, to pass them on to the federal government. This trend in the last eighteen months has added about 75,000 more federal employees. And if Congress enacts several of the major legislative proposals recommended by the President, federal bureaucracy will eventually increase tremendously.

Too many of our politicians find it politically expedient to suggest that the solution to any problem should rest on government. As of May 23rd President Kennedy has asked Congress in 1962 for twenty five (25) new delegations of power and made sixty-two (62) requests for added spending programs. Sadly, no politician has found it difficult, or seemingly has lost any votes or Gallup Poll popularity, by suggesting that the solution for any state or local problem was the responsibility of the national government. How simple and easy to shift responsibility to government. It is also much less risky, from the politicians point of view, to remove a problem from the careful scrutiny of the folks back home and dump it in the legislative pit of the national congress where its costs, complexities, and waste are hidden in a multitude of other federal activities.

Another political technique used to revise our traditional concepts in government is to enlarge the scope of executive authority and down grade the responsibility of the legislative branch. To be specific the New Frontier has an unquenchable thirst for personal power in the White House and a rubber stamp congress. For example, the President demands the power to lower and raise federal income taxes, to initiate without limitations a vast public works program using funds in trust or previously made available for specific purposes, to regiment agriculture by executive decree and to lower and/or eliminate tariffs regardless of the impact in local jobs or business. Such demands if approved by the Congress will downgrade forever the legislative branch of our government and substitute a government by Presidential fiat.

Very recently we have seen ample evidence of the power which can be generated by White House anger and propaganda. Once the elected members of the House and Senate have relinquished their constitutional responsibilities, the working man, the businessman, those in professions, and our citizens as a whole will have lost their protection against the iron fist of a dictatorial executive.

The expansion of the power of the federal government and the concentration of authority in the Chief Executive are the easy ways to avoid responsibility. This is the path which our people are being encouraged to take by those who think more of the next election than they do of the next generation.

If you think I overstate the case, examine the proposals that are being advocated daily for the solution of most of our problems. Pass a federal law concentrating responsibility in Washington, create a new agency with dictatorial, bureaucratic authority, appropriate billions. Allegedly, that ends the problem.

It is not a question of the need for the program or project. The tragedy is that we have succumbed to what we have been led to think is the easy way of meeting a recognized need. The demagogue has no difficulty in selling us on the idea of using federal funds, which incidentally must be borrowed by a debt-burdened government, in preference to raising the funds locally. There has been spread across our land the idea that there is some magic in federal money and that its supply is somehow unlimited-- a bottomless pit. The demagogue is not concerned with the true facts of our precarious fiscal position. He is interested only in providing painless benefits for his greater glory.

The demagogue has also discovered it is easier to influence one legislative body, the federal congress, than it is 50 state legislatures or thousands of local governing bodies. He knows the national government is farther away from the close scrutiny of the people. He knows he can more easily bring to bear on the national legislature the heavy influence of powerful pressure groups.

The net result of deluding ourselves into believing that the easy way can safely be traveled is not alone the financial and fiscal difficulties it inevitably creates. In the process, we not only weaken our basic economic strength through lavish and uncontrollable expenditures, but we weaken ourselves as individuals and we weaken our local and state governments. Weakness and lack of power is the inevitable consequence of the constant sloughing off of responsibility to someone else. If we choose to make figureheads of our local governments whose function, under our constitutional form of government is to help preserve our individual liberties, then we have laid the basis for the complete concentration of power in the federal government and its inevitable corruption into absolute tyranny. This concentration of power has one most serious implication. A government big enough to give us everything we want is a government big enough to take away from us everything we have.

I have spoken pessimistically of what I have described as the tendency of a prosperous and successful people to rest on their oars, to avoid difficult decisions, and to take the easy way out of their difficulties. I have spoken of it in terms of our fiscal difficulties, in terms of its dangers to our liberties and, specifically, in terms of its relationship to some of the problems in which I hope you are primarily interested. I have suggested that a continuation of this trend to its logical conclusion can only lead to a grave weakening or possible collapse of our nation. I have said this collapse is possible, and I call to your attention, as another reminder, the work of the British historian, Toynbee, whose study led him to the conclusion that of the 26 major civilizations in world history, 16 are now dead and buried and the remaining 10 are rapidly losing their character.

But, early in my remarks, I said I was an optimist, that I had great faith in the basic strength of our nation and our people and that, while it can happen here, it need not happen here. Whether it does or doesn't happen depends on you and me and every citizen in this land. It is up to us to determine whether we will continue to forever adopt the easy solution, the expedient answer and the least distasteful course of action, or whether we will pursue the right course, the sound solution and the intelligent program regardless of how difficult they may first appear to be.

Several centuries ago, the Italian poet, Dante, put it this way:

"The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in a period of moral crisis, maintain their neutrality." My plea to you today, as leaders in the communities in your state, is to discard your neutrality in this period of moral crisis and to enlist in the fight to preserve our nation and its institutions.

But I would be derelict in my duty if I merely summoned you to battle and left it at that. You are entitled to a knowledge of the nature of the struggle and to my ideas as to the kind of strategy and tactics which must be employed by those who choose to fight for the right rather than the soft, lazy, and easy way.

When I speak of a summons to battle, let me make clear what I mean. I call upon you, as leaders in your professions, in the business community and otherwise, upon your various organizations to take part with enthusiasm, with courage, and with determination in the political life of our nation. I do not refer to political theorizing in an ivory tower or polite discussions on a high plane among yourselves; I refer to the down-to-earth, back-breaking job of nominating and electing candidates to political office. I refer to the only kind of political action which has any meaning if we are to reverse the trend I have described today. I refer to the defeat of those who oppose everything

for which you stand through the victory of those who will work shoulder to shoulder with you on behalf of the principles which brought greatness to America.

I can give you one word of encouragement. It is my considered opinion, as one who has spent some years in American politics, that the principles of government in which you believe are held by a majority of the American people. I believe what Thomas McCauley once said, "Nothing is as galling to a people...as a paternal or in other words a meddling government, a government which tells them what to read and see and drink and wear." If the cause of common-sense conservatism, with its dynamic urge to preserve the best American institutions, has suffered in recent years, it is not because of any change in the basic philosophy of the majority of Americans. It has come about instead because radicalism and the proponents of the easy way have done a vastly better job of mobilizing their strength and in hammering home their something-for-nothing philosophy. You know that is so without my telling you. The really effective political action groups in this nation are in radical hands. They are working the soil which produces the most abundant harvest. They are developing and electing candidates who will promote their viewpoint. These extremists in political philosophy have all developed highly-effective political organizations which are producing results when the votes are counted. While I violently disagree with their philosophy and with many of their ruthless methods, I am not one to stand on the sidelines wringing my hands in despair and criticizing their activities. Fundamentally, they are doing what every citizen should do in a representative republic. They are taking part in the basic process of representative government. They are electing office-holders who will advance their views, and the answer to this activity is not simply criticism. The answer to radical political action is middle-of-the-road or conservative counter-action. The sooner we realize that fact the sooner we can restore the balance of power in our internal political life.

What I am saying, I believe, has particular meaning for each of you. I hold you in high regard, but I ask you quite frankly whether too many of us and the organizations to which we belong, in the crucial struggle for the preservation of our institutions, have taken the easy way out by an excessive preoccupation with political neutrality? That is a question which every individual or group in our nation should now be asking itself, individually and collectively.

Political success cannot be achieved by well-meaning attempts to influence men who have already been elected to office. That is the easy way, but, unfortunately like many other expedient methods, it just doesn't work. The farmer well knows the finest seed ever produced will not sprout if it is sown in a bed of hardened concrete,



Your efforts to achieve political success cannot be harvested in a legislative body unless you have prepared the soil in the precincts at home.

What is called for, I sincerely believe, is a decision on your part, both as individuals and as members of your local groups and associations to renounce political neutrality during elections and to bring your entire individual and organizational strength to bear on behalf of candidates who meet your rigid specifications of honor and outlook.

As individuals, you have the responsibility and duty to become actively engaged in partisan politics. I am not here as a recruiter for the Republican Party although I will be glad to take membership applications at the door. What I am saying is that you cannot, as individuals, expect to achieve concrete political results if you are unwilling to join and work for the party of your choice. Only within a party can you help to determine party policy, help select candidates for party nomination and work for their eventual election. Only within a political party can you till and fertilize the soil which will produce the kind of legislators who will, for example, get some of our basic problems, state and national, out of politics. Many like myself in the political arena are disappointed that more of our highly motivated citizens of all walks of life are not working actively in a political party. If this is true across the land, then I say too many of our citizens have no complaint when they find the halls of our legislative bodies slowly filling up with those whose views are diametrically opposed to their own.

I will go even further and say that, beyond your clear call to duty as individuals, your professional, business, and civic associations and organizations, if they hope to be effective in promoting their programs and policies, must take an active interest, as organized groups, in the nomination and election of legislative candidates. You can discuss and deliberate issues in local non-political organization meetings and come up with strongly worded resolutions and yet all of your efforts will go for naught if the group is willing to stand naively on the sidelines and permit the election of legislators whose views are contrary to your basic philosophies. The day has long since passed when you can confine your political efforts to education after the elections have been held. How, I ask you, can even the most efficient local, state, or national association staff sell your philosophy to a Congressman who owes his political allegiance to some other group or organization leader.

I am not suggesting that the local Chamber of Commerce, the PTA, or the groups representating business or the professions become the wing or adjunct to one of our political parties. I hope, however, that I have made it crystal clear that I believe none of us can afford to be neutral in any political contest where one candidate is for the other against everything for which we stand. Nor indeed, do I see much hope for America if our best citizens and our most respected groups stand smugly aside while the real struggle is being fought and permit victory by default for those whose policies can lead only to the collapse of our nation.

The 18th century British statesman, Edmund Burke, said:

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." He also said that "the people never give up their liberties but under some delusion." The gravest danger confronting our nation today is that the people delude themselves into believing there is an easy way out of all their difficulties. The triumph of such evil can only come about if good men stand idly by. Let it never be said that you and I were among those who, in a period of moral crisis, maintained our neutrality and did nothing.