

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL
11:40 A.M., CDT (12:40 P.M., EDT)

August 19, 1974

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Chicago, Illinois)

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF AN ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED TO THE 75TH CONVENTION
OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

Commander Ray Soden and fellow members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars:

I deeply appreciate your medal and citation on my first trip out of Washington as your President.

It is good to be back in Chicago, among people from all parts of the Nation, to take part in this great 75th annual VFW convention.

As a member of the Old Kent VFW Post 830, let me talk today about some of the work facing veterans -- and all Americans -- the issues of world peace and national unity.

Speaking of national unity, let me quickly point out that I also proudly belong to the American Legion and the AMVETS.

As President and a veteran, I want good relations with all veterans. We all wore the same nation's uniform and saluted the same Flag. During my Administration, the door of my office will be open to veterans as it was in the Capitol.

Today, I am happy to announce my intention to send the Senate the nomination of my personal friend and former Congressional colleague, Dick Roudebush of Indiana, to be Administrator of the Veterans Administration. A past national commander of the VFW, Roudy has served well as Deputy Administrator of the VA. He is a man who gets things done.

The veteran is a human being and not just a "C" number to be processed by a computer system. The Government knew your name when you were called to service. This Administration is going to see to it that we still know your name and your problems. A veteran is a person, not just a digit in a computer system which often goofs.

I propose the VA take the best of our technology and the best of our human capabilities and combine them. As President, I want no arrogance or indifference to any individual -- veteran or not. The Government's machinery exists to serve people and not to frustrate or humiliate them.

I don't like red tape or any other kind of tapes.

Our veterans hospitals, which will not lose their identity, must be the best that medical skill and dedication can create. V.A. hospitals have made many important breakthroughs in the past. One of America's great challenges is the older veteran. The V.A. medical and nursing care system for older people must become a showcase for the entire nation. We can work together to humanize the V.A.

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But to achieve such progress, I intend to improve the management of the V.A. We must get the most from our tax dollars. While supporting the new Administrator in maximum efforts to make the best use of funds available, I want Roudy to take a hard new look at the V.A.'s structure.

The time has come to stop thinking of veterans in terms of different wars. Some may march at a different pace than others. But we all march to the same drummer in service to our Nation. I salute the men of many campaigns -- of World War I, World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam.

I am glad to see the VFW at this convention install a veteran of the Korean War, John Stang, as its new national commander-in-chief. John was a high school student when I took off my uniform at the close of World War II.

We have struggled for years to overcome discrimination against younger Americans, against older Americans, against Americans of various races and religions, and against women. I will not tolerate any discrimination against veterans, especially those who served honorably in Vietnam.

I am deeply concerned about employment opportunities for Vietnam-era veterans. We have had some success in placing veterans in the age span of 20 to 34, but tough problem areas remain.

As of last month the rate of unemployment for veterans between 20 and 24 was nearly 10 percent. The rate of unemployment for these young veterans who are members of minority groups was 19 percent. And far too many disabled veterans are still without jobs.

This Administration puts a high priority on aiding the men who bore the brunt of battle. If we can send men thousands of miles from home to fight in rice paddies, certainly we can send them back to school and to better jobs at home.

I am considering the Veterans Education Bill in this light. But your Government is constrained by another consideration. We are all soldiers in a war against brutal inflation. The Veterans Education Bill may soon come to me for action. It comes when I am working hard, along with others from the Congress, labor, management and elsewhere, on a nonpartisan battle plan against excessive Government spending.

America is fighting for its economic life. I will not hesitate to use the veto to control inflationary excesses. But I am open to conciliation and compromise on the total amount authorized so that we can protect veteran trainees against the rising cost of living.

I commend not only the past services of veterans but also the continuing involvement of many of you in the National Guard and Reserve forces. With current manpower reductions in the active duty Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, the Commander-in-Chief must place continuing reliance on the readiness of our National Guard and Reserves. I intend to put muscle behind this program.

Peace depends upon the strength and readiness of our defenses. I will support every sensible measure to enhance the moral and combat readiness of our armed forces.

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The United States, our allies, and our friends must maintain strength and resolve. Potential adversaries watch the state of our readiness. I will offer them no temptations.

America is not the policeman of the world. But we continue to be the backbone of free world collective security.

Just as America will maintain its nuclear deterrent strength, we will never fall behind in negotiations to control -- and hopefully reduce -- this threat to mankind. A great nation is not only strong, but wise; not only principled, but purposeful. A fundamental purpose of our Nation must be to achieve peace through strength and meaningful negotiation.

Our goodwill must never be misconstrued as a lack of will. I know I can count on you and your families. Peace and security require preparedness and dedication.

You have experienced war at first hand. I want to make sure that Washington never sends another tragic telegram. The list of mourners is already too long. So is the list of those who still wait and wonder -- the families of those missing in action. I will never forget them.

Together, we are going forward to tackle future problems -- including the scourge of inflation which is today's domestic enemy number one. Our task is not easy. But I have faith in America. Through our system of democracy and free enterprise, the United States has achieved remarkable progress. We have shared our plenty with all mankind.

This is the same Nation that transcended inflations and recessions, slumps and booms, to move forward to ever higher levels of prosperity and productivity. This is the same Nation that emerged from the smoke of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, to change its own destiny and the history of the world -- and for the better.

During the few months I was Vice President, I traveled some 118,000 miles and visited 40 States. What I saw and heard gave me inspiration. It made me proud of my country. It sustains me now.

Our great Republic is nearly 200 years old, but in many ways we are just getting started. Most Americans have faith in the American system. Let us now work for an America in which all Americans can take even greater pride.

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