

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 29, 1974

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
(Grand Rapids, Michigan)

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT
CALDER PLAZA

5:35 P.M. EST

Thank you very, very much, Governor Milliken, Mayor Parks, Jack Root, every one of you for being here. Nobody can accuse any of you of being fair weather friends. Thank you very much.

But let me say somewhat inadequately, there is no way in which I can personally express my gratitude, my appreciation, my indebtedness to all of you who are here in this difficult weather to say hello, to warmly welcome me. I am just overwhelmed and words are inadequate to express everything that I feel deep down in my heart. Thank you very, very much.

There was a wonderful crowd at the airport, and we stopped at one of the crowds on the way in. I just cannot believe so many are here in these circumstances, and as I shook hands, either at the airport or on the way in or with those that I have had the privilege of saying hello to here tonight, I saw friends that I went to Madison School with, friends that I went to South High with, friends that I worked with in many, many scientific projects--Democrats, Independents, Republicans young and old--there is nothing I can say except thank you, every one of you, for being here.

And may I thank Althea Bennett here for the box of cookies which she has given me. As was indicated, I used to stop in at Petersen's Drug Store for an early breakfast, and she was there to help prepare it, and I used to enjoy those cookies very much then, and I am sure I will now.

But I must tell Althea, I have a big appetite. It is a long trip back to Washington. They may all be gone before Betty sees a single one. (Laughter)

MORE

(OVER)

Now, let me talk about why I am here. I came back to Grand Rapids because on 13 different occasions in the past over a period of 26 years, I campaigned in the Fifth Congressional District--which originally was Ottawa and Kent counties and is now Kent and Ionia and four other counties -- because I love the communities and whether it was Ottawa, Kent, Ionia, Clinton, Montcalm, et cetera. I love the communities and the people.

And as many of you know, I have taken Jerry Ford's Main Street office to Byron Center, Standale, Caledonia, Alto, Rockford, Kent City, Sand Lake, Ionia, Belding, Wells, Portland and everyplace else, and it was a great privilege for me to talk with you in the trailer.

It was a great privilege to go to your service club, to your farm bureau community meeting, to go to your churches, to your city hall, to meet you on the street, to go to the Lowell Showboat, rodeo, the Red Flannel celebration -- well, you name, wherever you had five people, I went there because I like you and I am back here today because I just could not stay away from this area one more time. I thank you again for the opportunities of the past.

As I have seen so many of you here today and as I said a moment ago, Grand Rapids, Kent County, Ionia, Ottawa County and the others, you are a good cross-section of America. You represent all segments of our society.

We have some wonderful farms, we have some excellent businesses, we have some tremendously productive working people in this community. I am prejudiced, but I think we have the best here, and all of you who are here represent the best in America.

As I have said to our good friend, Mayor Lyman Parks, Grand Rapids is big enough to have many of the problems of some of the major metropolitan areas. We have enough diversification in agriculture, so that I learned from firsthand experience the problems of the dairymen, the cattlemen, the apple grower, and other people that produce so all of us can eat.

MORE

But the main thing that I loved about this area was we had some big city problems, but we were small enough so that you got to know people. You have got to love them. You have got to enjoy working for whatever the problem was. I do not know how many times I walked down Cedar Springs behind about five bands in that Cedar Springs Red Flannel Parade, or how many times I have had the privilege of visiting one community or another.

It is the warmth, it is the friendliness, it is the look in the eye of people that makes you welcome. And the most important thing is that people in this area seem to want to work out the problems that they have, whether they are labor and management on the one hand, or consumer and producer on the other.

I cannot help but make a comment, Lyman, about that Calder that you gave me. I was in Chicago a couple of days ago, and some of my friends over there were kidding me about Grand Rapids being a small town. And some of the commentators and writers were kidding me about perhaps the lack of culture in Grand Rapids.

Well, I happen to think -- if my memory is correct -- we had a Calder in Grand Rapids before Chicago thought of it.

And then I have had some friends from various parts of the country tell me that, well, Grand Rapids was a little on the conservative side. Well, I cannot help but ask them in good conscience what they mean. Do they mean the people here have a healthy skepticism of quick and easy solutions? If that is a definition of conservatism, yes, we are skeptical. We are a little conservative about some of the superficial answers that some people try to sell us.

But if they mean that Grand Rapids and its environs are skeptical about new ideas, the answer is no. We are broad minded. We have a good outlook. And when a new idea comes along that is constructive, that is fair to everybody, we, in Grand Rapids, embrace it and make it work. And that is what we have done all my lifetime.

Let me reminisce a moment, if I might. Some of us in the audience here can remember when the old B. F. Keith Theater was down here on Lyon Street, and some of us can remember when the Regent Theater was right over there, just where the Federal Building was, I guess, and some of the other old broken-down business places that needed to be removed -- and this wonderful Vandenberg Center constructed.

MORE

And in honor of one of Grand Rapids' outstanding citizens, in my judgment, probably the outstanding Senator that I have known in Washington, we built this Vandenberg Center in honor and in tribute to Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg.

And you know that Federal Building -- I used to have an office right up there in the corner. I used to look down here, and I could see at various times of the day there would be periodic meetings and wonderful luncheon gatherings. Occasionally we had a demonstration or two, and sometimes in the moonlight, I could look down and see a few friendly people holding hands. And what is wrong with that?

But the point is that this great Vandenberg Center with the Calder Stabile is, in my opinion, a tribute to a great Senator, a tribute to a great people. It is a product of a community that has the vision and the foresight to do something for themselves in conjunction or a partnership with the Federal Government.

And that is the way Arthur Vandenberg believed. He was receptive to new ideas. He was a senior Senator in Washington when Betty and I first went to the Nation's capital. He and his wonderful wife, Hazel, could not have been kinder, could not have been more receptive to two newcomers to the Nation's capital.

He gave me, in all honesty, the inspiration to take a look at the world as a whole. Arthur Vandenberg, some of you may recall, was former -- with former President Harry Truman -- was the architect of a bipartisan foreign policy following World War II.

The two of them -- a great Democratic President, Harry Truman, and a great Republican Senator, Senator Arthur Vandenberg -- worked together, hand-in-glove, following World War II when the world was in devastation, when a good share of the world was on its back, and other nations -- like our own -- had serious problems.

But from those ashes, Harry Truman and Arthur Vandenberg put together a foreign policy that brought allies together, presented a common front against potential adversaries, helped under-developed nations grow, and become a vital part of our world society.

MORE

And that bipartisan foreign policy, which I learned and fortunately learned from one of the masters, I think is the future of the world.

And we in Washington today, representing all of you -- Democrats, Republicans, Independents -- should march shoulder to shoulder to make sure that our country, our great United States of America, gives the leadership in consolidating friends, and gives leadership in trying to make new contacts, broader contacts, with potential adversaries.

What we want to build is a world of peace so that your children and my children and their children can live in safety and security and a better world wherever they might live -- Grand Rapids or elsewhere.

And I pledge to you, as President of the United States -- believe me, folks, my friends at home -- I never thought for one minute, when Betty and I left here in December of 1949, that I would be coming home to all of you as your President.

But as President, I will pledge to you, as I have pledged to you in 13 previous elections, that I will do my best, I will be fair, I will be open, I will work, and I will continue the love and affection and the dedication that I have, that all of you have, for your community, for your friends, for your State, and for your Nation. This is what you can give and what I can give, and on behalf of Betty and myself, I pledge you nothing but all I can do for all of you and many like you.

Thank you very, very much.

END (5:50 P.M. EST)