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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
OLD NORTH BRIDGE

CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS

9:54 A.M. EDT

Thank you very, very much, Mr. Suter, Governor Dukakis, Mr. Ambassador, Senator Brooke, Senator Kennedy, Members of the House of Representatives, distinguished guests and fellow Americans:

Two hundred years ago today, American Minutemen raised their muskets at the Old North Bridge and answered a British volley. Ralph Waldo Emerson called it "the shot heard 'round the world."

The British were in full retreat soon afterwards and returned to Boston. But there was no turning back for the colonists. The American Revolution had begun.

Today, two centuries later, the President of the 50 United States and 213 million people stand before a new generation of Americans who have come to this hallowed ground.

In these two centuries, the United States has become a world power. From a new-born Nation with a few ships, American seapower now ranges to the most distant shores. From a militia of raw recruits, the American military stands on the front lines of the free world. Our fliers and our planes eclipse one another in power and in speed with each succeeding new breed of airmen and aircraft.

From a Nation virtually alone, America is now allied with many free worlds in common defense.

The concepts of isolationism and fortress America no longer represent either the reasoning or the role of the United States foreign policy.

World leadership was thrust upon America and we have assumed it. In accepting that role, the United States has assumed responsibility from which it cannot, and will not, retreat. Free nations need the United States and we need free nations. Neither can go it alone.

MORE

There are some in the world who still believe that force and the threat of force are the major instruments of national and international policy. They believe that military supremacy over others is logical and legitimate of their revolutionary doctrines. Such aims have left a trail of tyranny, broken promises and falsehood.

Tyranny by any other name is still tyranny. Broken promises in any other language are still promises unkept and falsehood by any other description is still a lie.

This is not the rhetoric of the past. It is reason about the present because history keeps repeating itself. Force as an instrument of national and international policy continues to be a major instrument of change in the world. Reasonable societies and reasonable people must do all in their power to reconcile all threats to peace.

Now is a time for reconciliation, not recrimination. It is a time of reconstruction, not rancor.

The world is witnessing revolutionary technological, economic and social change -- a massive and rapid breaking of barriers.

We -- all men and women of all lands -- must master this change. We must make this revolution an evolution -- to make and accept change with greater order and greater restraint.

How can we achieve, how can we accomplish this evolution? It is not enough to call upon material resources. No material resources are sufficient to themselves to inspire the continued confidence of men in reasonable change. We must summon higher, greater values as we proceed.

These higher values are found in the principles of this Republic forged by our forefathers in the Declaration of Independence.

Thomas Jefferson wrote of change in the light of American principles and he said, "Nothing, then, is unchangeable but the inherent and inalienable rights of man."

Jefferson accepted change in the ordinary course of human events but he rejected any fundamental change in the principles of our Republic, the inalienable rights of man.

MORE

Often change is healthy for a people and a nation. That is why America has always been a land of new horizons and new hopes. Free choice, the consent of the governed, represent the American philosophy of change.

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are sacred rights, not to be given or not to be taken by shifting winds or changing moods. It is important to recall these truths because the men and women of America must renew that faith, their courage and their confidence.

Our belief, our commitments to human rights, to human liberties, must also represent belief and commitment to ourselves.

It is a time to place the hand of healing on the heart of America -- not division and not blame. When all is said and done, the finest tribute that may ever be paid this Nation and this people is that we provided a home for freedom.

Freedom was nourished in American soil because the principles of the Declaration of Independence flourished in our land. These principles -- when enunciated 200 years ago -- were not a dream, not a reality.

Today, they are real. Equality has matured in America. Our inalienable rights have become even more sacred. There is no government in our land without the consent of the governed.

Many other lands have freely accepted the principles of liberty and freedom in the Declaration of Independence and fashioned their own independent republics.

It is these principles, freely taken, and freely shared, that has revolutionized the world. The volley fired here at Concord two centuries ago, the shot heard round the world still echoes today on this anniversary.

One hundred years from now, a new generation of Americans will come here to rededicate this Nation and renew the spirit of our people and the principles that inspire us on this occasion.

Let it be said that those of us who came to Concord today reaffirm these final words of the Declaration of Independence: "We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

Thank you very, very much.

END

(AT 10:03 A.M. EDT)