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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
24TH ANNUAL NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST

WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL

9:11 A.M. EST

Congressman Preyer, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Our Nation was born 200 years ago poor and very weak. Our leaders were untested and our land remote from much of the world. This continent was mostly a virgin wilderness.

Yet our new Nation displayed extraordinary determination and near limitless capacity for discovery about ourselves and about our future. Our Declaration of Independence surpassed all worldly doctrines in its enlightened pronouncements on human rights and individual liberty.

Our leaders showed that the inspired will and raw courage of our ragged defenders could defeat not only hardship and privation but the disciplined power of an empire. Our people demonstrated extraordinary belief that their cause was just and that it would prevail.

I think it is well to recall at the start of this Bicentennial year that it was not might nor wealth which ultimately gained American independence and liberty but more powerful forces -- the unshakeable, unbreakable belief of our people in themselves and in their cause. They proved that a people's greatest strength is its own faith.

We are gathered here this morning to recall and to renew that faith -- faith in God and belief in the future of our country. We seek to sustain and to increase our spiritual strength at this time of prayer and recollection.

John Muhlenburg wrote in his diary in 1776, about 200 years ago: "There is a time to pray and a time to fight. This is the time to fight."

If he were alive today and writing in 1976, he may have written "This is the time to pray."

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Let men and women of faith remember that this Nation, endowed by God with so many blessings, is also surrounded by incredible needs. At the beginning of this century in American history let us remember Jesus who surrounded by needs still early in the morning went away to a solitary place to pray.

We are one people, one Government and one Nation. We are, by any name, an indivisible land and people.

Benjamin Franklin, addressing himself to religious faith and worship in God in the society in which he lived, told the framers of the Constitution: "Without God's concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our little partial local interests. Our projects will be confounded and we ourselves shall become a reproach and a by-word down to future ages."

Today, unlike the times of Dr. Franklin, our Nation is mighty and is wealthy. The many changes in our land in these 200 years may be as frightening as they are wondrous.

This becomes apparent when we ask ourselves this question: Do we have the faith, the belief of Washington, Adams, Jefferson and the others? Has our spiritual growth matched our temporal destiny as a Nation?

We know that wealth and power do not measure the greatness of this or any other Nation. Our spiritual principles and moral values transcend the physical capacities and the boundaries of our land.

That is why we come here humbly this morning -- to ask from God strength and guidance so we may leave to our third century a legacy of leadership worthy of the inheritance left us by our forebears.

Often, as I walk into the office, I realize that man's wisdom and strength are not sufficient so I try to practice the truth of Proverbs 3:5-6:

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart;  
Lean not unto thine own understanding.  
In all thy ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct thy path."

Tolerance, understanding, love -- let us pray for all of these because we need them as a people. Let us pray for God's guidance in our pursuit of peace.

Let us rediscover our past and renew ourselves in its cherished principles, and then let us begin our journey into this third century with the same faith and the same purpose of our Nation's founders. Let us span the centuries at this moment and unite the past, the present and the future in spiritual communion.

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Let us make it our "earnest prayer," as George Washington did two centuries ago, that "God would graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with charity and humility and a peaceful temper of mind, without which we can never hope to be a happy Nation."

And let us make it our "constant prayer," as Lincoln did more than a century ago -- not only that God is on our side, but that we "and this Nation should be on the Lord's side."

Finally, let it be said that in this great Nation of ours freedom still flourishes and liberty still lives. As we declare our dependence on God, let us unite in the same bond which united those who signed America's Declaration of Independence 200 years ago.

Let us today reaffirm their pledge, as written in the closing words of that majestic document, that "For the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

Thank you.

END (AT 9:19 A.M. EST)