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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT A BREAKFAST HONORING
REPRESENTATIVE JAMES MARTIN

THE HOLIDAY INN - WOODLAWN

10:12 A.M. EST

Jim, Governor Holshouser, Charlie and Annie Elliott Jonas, Dr. Martin distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure to be here in Charlotte, and I think you very much, Jim, for those overly generous words. I can assure you in the months ahead I will do my utmost to live up to those high standards that you have set, and I will give my best efforts to not disappoint you in any way whatsoever.

I was looking at the records the other day, and I have been in Charlotte three times in the last two years. The last time I was here was in May of 1975. At that time, Jim Martin assembled 105,000 of his closest friends, (Laughter) to meet me at the Mecklenburg County Bicentennial celebration. It was a great occasion, and I enjoyed it very, very much.

You gave me a very, very warm welcome at that time, and I certainly appreciated that enthusiastic reception.

But, let me say I am especially pleased to be here and have an opportunity to say a few things that I feel very strongly and very deeply concerning your fine Congressman, Jim Martin.

While I am here, I think it appropriate that I say a few words in a salute to some of the other distinguished guests who are here. First, I think it is a very opportune time for me to wish Jim Martin's mother a very happy birthday today, which I understand will take place tomorrow. (Laughter)

Mom and Pop Martin are well known in Washington because of their very well-known son. Jim is every bit as proud of you, Mrs. Martin, as I am sure you are of him.

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It would be redundant, but I feel so strongly I want to compliment you on our outstanding Governor, Jim Holshouser. But, I likewise would feel it very appropriate for me to compliment you on one of my dearest and finest friends in the Congress, Charlie Jonas.

Charlie and I served on the Committee on Appropriations together for a good many years, and I know what a superb job he did, what a hard struggle he made year after year after year to try and get some sense and responsibility from the consideration of the various appropriation bills, but particularly the Labor and HEW appropriation bills, and believe me, that is not an easy job. So, Charlie and Elliott, it is great to see you.

Let me also put in a good word for Cornbread Maxwell (Laughter) and Lou Massey and the 49ers of UNC, Charlotte. I wish them the very best.

The Ninth Congressional District of North Carolina has been accustomed to winners, and I can personally vouch for the fact that this district has a great reputation in Washington, D.C., and particularly in the House of Representatives.

You don't settle just for a good Congressman, you insist on a great Congressman, and Jim and Charlie represent that.

You sent Charlie Jonas to Washington on ten occasions, and as I said earlier, he did a superb job. You sent Jim Martin to Washington on two occasions, and let me urge you as strongly as I possibly can that you send Jim Martin back for at least a third term.

I am proud of Jim because I know that he is one of the very strong people that serves in the House of Representatives, and during my 25 plus years there, I had an opportunity to pass judgment on a good many Members of the House.

They sort of would come and go like Greyhound buses, as one of our friends used to say, and so I can speak with some authority when I say that you have great representation in Jim, as you did in Charlie Jonas.

Jim, when he first went to the Congress in January of 1973, and from then on, has demonstrated an outstanding capability to deal with issues forcefully, intelligently and with a great deal of plain old North Carolina common sense, and I think those are great attributes for any person in public office.

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Jim has proven beyond any doubt whatsoever that he is a dedicated, powerful advocate of fiscal responsibility in our Federal Government, and I honestly wish that we had a good many more Jim Martins serving in the House of Representatives. I can assure you that my job would be infinitely easier and the country would be far better off.

But, in addition to his duties as a Member of that prestigious Committee on Ways and Means, Jim is also the Chairman of a Republican conference committee, or task force, as we call them, on health, and he is seeking through that group to study the problems in the broadest possible sense and to find some answers where we have had difficulties in trying to get the best care and the best arrangement and to stop some of these crazy schemes that are coming from some sources where they want to destroy the doctor-patient relationship. Here they want the Federal Government to actually take over the health of this country and run it, as some would propose, as it is being run and not being run very well in some of the countries in Western Europe.

Now Jim has an interest in, as I do, in a subject matter of health where I think we have to do something, and I speak here of catastrophic or prolonged illness. Jim takes a slightly different approach to trying to find an answer to that problem than I do, but we have the same goal and I appreciate Jim's interest and his involvement in this very critical and very serious matter.

Jim knows, as you and I do, that there is no reason people should have to go broke just to get well or to stay well in this great country that we all are proud to be a part of.

Jim is also one of the very few -- just a handful in the House of Representatives or in the Senate -- who is a scientist in his own right and, as a result, he recognizes perhaps better than most anybody in the House or in the Senate how serious our energy problem is in this country.

Jim had several amendments to the energy legislation which was considered by the House, amendments which were very significantly important to the State of North Carolina, and, as a result of his efforts, at least some progress was made in meeting your unique problems here and, of course, because of his role as a scientist and a statesman, he has been able to give special emphasis to the role of research and development in trying to develop some of the exotic fuels that aren't the answer for tomorrow in the energy field but can and will be in the decade of the Eighties.

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Jim is also a strong supporter of a program that I think is tremendously important, and I speak now of general revenue sharing.

Back in 1972 I helped to lead the fight in the House of Representatives to get the Congress at that time to approve the general revenue sharing piece of legislation and, incidentally, I intend to fight just as hard in 1976 as I did in 1972 for this legislation. I just wish that the Congress would respond more affirmatively.

As a matter of fact, last year, I think it was in July, I submitted to the Congress a proposal to extend the existing legislation. So far only subcommittee tentative action has been taken. It is unbelievable that the Congress has been so negligent in acting on this legislation, which currently expires on December 31, 1976. Every Governor knows how important that legislation is.

You have to include, Jim, in your budget, the anticipated funding for your next calendar or fiscal year and, if Congress doesn't act before that budget has to be put together, your Governor and 49 other Governors either have to reduce services or add taxes, and every mayor and every local official -- and there are 39,000 of them -- are placed in exactly the same position, so it is vitally important that the Congress move on this legislation. Otherwise, there will be chaos, in my judgment, in 50 State capitals and in 39,000 communities around the country.

Now, let me cite some specific figures. The impact of general revenue sharing -- the City of Charlotte has received over \$20 million in this program since its inception about 4-1/2 years ago, and Mecklenburg County has received more than \$10 million.

I recommended a 5-3/4-year extension of the legislation and, under that legislation during the full term of its existence, Charlotte would receive \$31,600,000 and Mecklenburg County, \$15 million-plus, and the figures for the State of North Carolina would be greater under the program I recommended than they have received under the existing program.

This is something that we all know has worked well with the Federal Government collecting the money and sending it back to the States and to the local communities with a minimum amount of red tape and a maximum amount of local decision-making by the Governors and by the locally-elected officials, the people who honestly know what the problems are. I think we ought to encourage this trend of giving the decision-making to the people at the local level, and revenue sharing has been probably the most successful Federal program in that regard.

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Now in fighting for general revenue sharing, and in many other legislative efforts, Jim has proven his expertise, his deep commitment to service and his truly outstanding representation here for all of you.

Let me summarize by saying Jim is a darned good Member of the Congress and I hope and trust that you will keep working for him in the years ahead.

That brings me to another incidental reason I am in North Carolina today. (Laughter) There is a rumor going around that North Carolina is planning a Presidential primary next Tuesday. I heard about it on the plane coming down here this morning. (Laughter)

But let me give you a few reasons or a few pluses concerning the State of the Union, and I will talk about that in the remaining time. Things are really locking up for the United States of America and we should be very proud of that fact. We should recognize, however, that we have been through some very bad times in America in recent years. There is no denying that. We ought to be frank and honest about it but there is also no reason whatsoever for us to dwell on it.

I think all of us should look to the future, and that future, as I see it, is filled with hope and expectation, promise and fulfillment, and I can say without hesitation or qualification, I am very, very proud to be an American and I am proud of America.

In the last 19 months, as we scan that period of time, really great progress has been made in a number of areas under the most difficult circumstances. Today, America is at peace. Today, there are no Americans committed in combat anyplace throughout the world, and I can assure you that I intend to keep it that way.

The best way I know to maintain that is to have what I call peace through strength, and let me say firmly and strongly America's defenses are second to none and they will continue to be second to none in the next four years.

In addition to our military strength, America's economic strength is being steadily restored after the worst recession in 40 years. It is easy to get lost in a sea of statistics when we talk about economics. A simple way to look at it is to recall that 19 months ago everything that was supposed to be going up was going down and vice versa.

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However, today we are headed in the right direction in every possible economic indicator. Thanks to some common sense policies and support of people in the Congress like Jim, at the beginning of this recess, and thanks to the determination and courage and ingenuity of the American people, we are working our way out of this recession, and doing it in the right way.

We are on the road to a new prosperity in the United States, and I am not about to take any detours or roadblocks put in the way by a Congress that wants to fool around with our economy in a political and a partisan way.

Unemployment is going down, prices are stabilizing, inflation has been cut in half in the last 19 months. In fact, the Labor Department announced just yesterday that consumer prices increased only one-tenth of 1 percent in the month of February, the smallest monthly increase in over four years, and that is progress by any standard:

On an annual basis, that represents an inflation rate of a little more than 1 percent per year, and that is a whole lot better than the 12 percent that we were experiencing in 1973 and 1974. I won't try to mislead you and say that the news on the inflation front will always be this good in the months ahead. But, this new announcement is powerful evidence that we are really getting inflation under control, and we are not going to let down under any circumstances.

There is still some other good economic news. The rate of growth in Federal spending has been cut in half in the budget that I submitted for the new fiscal year.

Charlie Jonas, as I indicated, served with me on the Committee on Appropriations, and we used to go into the budget in detail. He was on several subcommittees; I was on several others. But, he knows, as I know, that for the last ten to 15 years the rate of growth in Federal spending has been between 10 and 11 percent, much too high. You cannot possibly sustain it, and it is unjustified otherwise.

The budget that I submitted for the next fiscal year calls for a reduction in 50 percent of the rate of growth for Federal spending a rate of 5 to 5-1/2 percent.

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If we can get a handle on that rate of growth in this coming fiscal year and maintain that control in the months and years ahead, we can have a balanced budget and we can have a tax reduction, a sizeable reduction in three years, and that is what we want and that is what we have to get.

Let me speak of some other good economic news. The last report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that our total U.S. employment in the month of February was 86 million 300 thousand. It reached the all time peak. The rate of unemployment was still too high, but we made substantial progress in that regard.

But, the main point is we have gone from the depths of a recession in March or April of last year, where we lost several million jobs, and we have regained every one of those jobs numerically. Our aim and objective, with sound policies, is to continue that progress, and we will.

But, one of the most important factors is -- and you here in this room represent that -- consumer confidence is up, and for good reason. Industrial production is up. Housing starts are up. The Gross National Product is up. Real earnings for the average American are also up.

In short, just about everything is looking up for America this year. There is no reason whatsoever that we should change or alter our course because we have been right.

Obviously, there is more that we ought to do for America, but it ought to be done in the private sector, not in the public sector. We still have our share of problems, but the trends are all in the right direction. Where we have the problems, we have to face up to those difficulties and decide what is the right course, with the emphasis on the private sector.

It is one thing to admit our problems and another to be hypnotized by them and refuse to see the strength and the resolve and the courage and the confidence and the pursuit of progress which characterizes the American people.

The very fact that we have weathered so many difficulties, so many challenges, proves to me that the United States of America is still the greatest nation in the history of mankind.

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We have endured shocks to our system and to our people that might have paralyzed a lesser country or a weaker citizenry. But, as I look at the record, we have emerged from these challenges stronger and stronger on each occasion. This is a great country. We are lucky to be Americans, and I don't think any of us would trade places with anybody from any other country.

It seems to me that we should emphasize instead of downgrading America, the future and the prospects and the benefits. We should emphasize trying to make America an even better country. You and I both want to make America prosperous, and we want America to walk in the path of peace.

If I can close with one final comment, I hope that I can get some help and assistance, and I would appreciate it, next Tuesday.

Thank you.

END (AT 10:37 A.M. EST)