



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE THE POLISH LEGION OF AMERICAN VETERANS, STATLER HILTON HOTEL, CLEVELAND, OHIO, AUGUST 26, 1972, 8 P.M.

I am delighted to have been able to accept your most gracious invitation to be here.

But despite events of the past week, I have no intention of using my time here for partisan rhetoric. Indeed, this a year for reason rather than rhetoric -- a year for deliberation rather than diatribes. As the Washington Star-News commented day before yesterday, "This is an election which may well determine the mood and direction of American politics not just for the next four years but for a generation."

"There are basic differences between the platforms and philosophies of the two major parties," the paper continued, "and these differences need to be scrutinized and weighed." So, my only political comment for you this evening is to urge you to make your vote the most important vote you have ever cast.

In correspondence with George Wrost of the Polish American Congress here in Ohio, it was suggested that I bring to this wonderful 21st biennial national convention banquet a few comments on my trip to Poland in 1971 -- some six months prior to President Nixon's historic visit to Warsaw this past May.

Mrs. Volpe and I look back upon our visit to the homeland of your fathers with very fond memories. From our arrival at the airport where we were met by Transportation Minister Zajfryd -- to the Mass at the Church of Saint Michael the Archangel -- dinner at Jabłonna Palace -- an overnight train trip to Krakow -- and tours of Wawel Castle and Collegium Maius -- our whirlwind visit gave us an outstanding glimpse of the extraordinary heritage that has developed over the centuries in the land between the Carpathian Mountains and the Baltic Sea.

In my arrival statement at the airport, speaking as the first U.S. cabinet officer to visit Poland since 1963, I remarked on the close ties between our peoples -- noting that we have been brothers in arms in past wars for freedom and that we share several national heroes such as Pulaski and Kosciuszko.

I brought your greetings -- the greetings of the 12 million Americans of Polish descent (over 5 percent of the total U.S. population) and stressed how much you are contributing to our society, our economy, our entire way of life.

My trip was a working visit, too. As an official representative of President Nixon, I called upon Chairman Jaroszewicz of the Council of Ministers, and also Mr. Jedrychowski, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I was briefed at both the Institute for Automotive Transport and the Central Railway Research Institute. I met with the Polish Committee for Science and Technology as well as with the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

And as a representative of the U.S. Government, I signed a memorandum of understanding between our two great nations that opens up a new program of research and scientific cooperation in the problems of transportation.

I look upon this memorandum as a very positive step in the development of more fruitful contacts between our nations. Valuable technical cooperation enhances overall understanding between nations, and can serve the world in developing additional courses to lasting peace.

And I speak of lasting peace before this group-- the men and women of the Polish Legion of American Veterans and the Ladies Auxiliary -- with a confidence and assurance that the world is indeed far closer to such a goal than it has been for many a year.

While the founding of your organization -- going back to the conclusion of World War I -- stems from service in the armed forces of the U.S., the continuation of your efforts is based upon the perpetuation of friendships, the promotion of patriotism, and the preservation of the true spirit of fraternity that can and will mean peace for all corners of the world.

Now when I speak of peace, do not misunderstand. I think our President stated the case with flawless accuracy just four nights ago when he said, "We should not spend more on defense than we need. But we should never spend less than we need. Spending what we need will cost us money. Spending less than we need could cost us lives."

And he wrapped it all up when he said: "Let us take risks for peace but let us never risk the security of the United States of America."

I couldn't agree more, and I am sure you feel the same way too.

And that is why, dear friends, it is such an occasion of pride and humility for me to be here with you in Cleveland for this important convention. You are my kind of people.

Disregarding for a moment the fact that you and I share a resounding pride in our respective national origins, I salute the Polish Legion of American Veterans for dedicated, committed Americanism. That's what we need more of today -- an understanding of the fact that there are a lot more people who want to come to this country than there are who want to leave. This is still the greatest nation on the face of the earth.

Through your mutual aid and cooperation in patriotic, charitable, educational and civic activities, you show what a real understanding you have of what is right about America. You show, through your activities, your endorsement of the American tradition of strength in unity. You show, through your determination to keep alive the traditions of your ancestral home, that you are not about to abandon any corner of the world to those who would invade and oppress.

In this era of instantaneous communication and jet transportation, we can close no doors that might lead to greater international understanding. And we can have no tolerance for those who would slam shut the doors of world-wide cooperation. In my meetings with Foreign Minister Jedrychowski, we covered a broad array of topics, and spoke man-to-man about the full scope of international relations.

And while there were many differences of view on many points, as you can well imagine, our sessions were highly cordial and there was mutual respect for each other. And that's what this world must continue to develop -- respect between nations to overcome the potential disasters of misunderstanding.

That sort of respect was evident when Transportation Minister Zajfryd visited the U.S. last May to attend TRANSP0 72, the world's first transportation exposition.

President Nixon commanded the respect and admiration of all when he signed the Warsaw Joint Communique at the conclusion of his visit three months ago. And I received a reflection of the importance of international understanding in my meetings with Cardinal Wyszynski in Rome and with Bishop Dabrowski in Warsaw. Each of these men of God expressed to me the importance and the effect of the deep warm feelings of friendship that exist between the Polish and American people -- who, like all citizens of this small planet -- are children of our Lord and must always strive for compassion and understanding throughout the world.

And in that connection, let me say that I share your satisfaction in recent news reports out of Poland that the Black Madonna is traveling again -- that the Communist rulers have freed the historic portrait of Our Lady from its sanctuary near Warsaw and that priests are touring the nation -- from village to village and city to city -- resuming the centuries-old tradition that is so much a part of the Polish heritage.

My friends -- I have perhaps spoken too long on my personal experiences and observations. You are, over and above the common bond of ethnic unity inherent in your charter, a group of American veterans. And you understand that the most important implication in the word "veterans" is an implication of conflict gone by.

Let me give you what I consider to be a tremendously important statistic:

Since 1969, over 3 million Americans have left the military service. They have become veterans. Close to half a million of these had served as combat troops in Southeast Asia. Their return came, of course, on the heels of over half a million men being sent to Vietnam in the three years preceding 1969. If the expanding number of veterans on our rolls isn't an indication that President Nixon has wound down the war, and is bringing it to a successful and honorable close, then I don't know what is:

He has gone the extra mile. He has ended America's ground combat role. No draftees are being sent to Vietnam. And we have reduced our casualties by 98 percent.

But as the President said on Wednesday night, "There are three things we have not done and will not do:

"We will never abandon our prisoners of war.

"We will not join our enemies in imposing a Communist government on our allies -- the 17 million people of South Vietnam.

"And we will not stain the honor the United States has earned."

As a veterans group of long standing, you are well aware of the difficulties inherent in restoring 3 million men and women to profitable employment within an economy that is phasing over from a wartime footing to a peacetime base.

But look at what has happened from a veterans standpoint in the last three years:

The President has proposed and implemented measures to provide greater income security, increased opportunities for education, training rehabilitation, adequate housing, better hospital and medical care, and aid in securing employment in our peacetime economy.

The results of the President's programs have greatly benefitted veterans of all wars, not just Vietnam.

Pensions have been increased 17 percent. Education benefits for a single veteran attending school full time have been raised from \$100 a month to \$175.

Medical care has been improved and extended and a jobs-for-veterans program has been established.

The President has continued his efforts to provide assistance to veterans by proposing further necessary increases in benefits and services.

He knows that we owe our veterans a debt of gratitude for their services, but that we also owe them something more. We owe our veterans an extra measure of help in making the difficult transition back to civilian life. And he knows that civilian life should be worth coming back to.

There is a strong future for this nation.

There are those who care.

There is cause for hope and trust. And the strength of this nation is bolstered again by people like you.

Again, my thanks for inviting me to be with you. You have my sincerest wishes for continued success.

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