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REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE FOR THE COLUMBUS HOSPITAL DEDICATION, NEWARK, NEW JERSEY, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29, 1972

It's wonderful to be here. This is a very happy occasion.

I want to thank you for that warm and flattering introduction. It was a whole lot nicer than one I received in Miami a year or so ago. The toastmaster brought me on by saying, "Here's a man who needs all the introduction he can get!" Then he went on to say: "John Volpe has brought the Department of Transportation from relative obscurity to total oblivion."

I guess I should point out that it was a meeting of the Miami Saints and Sinners, and I was being "roasted" within an inch of my life.

This occasion, however, is far from a roasting. The warmth in this room is from the glowing feeling of a proud accomplishment. You have performed a great service to your neighbors and your community. I know that you are proud and you certainly are entitled to that sense of fulfillment that comes to men and women of good will.

I would like -- at the very beginning -- to congratulate all the people who contributed to this evening and to the great Columbus Hospital success story.

The history of Columbus Hospital is a history of heroism. Hundreds and hundreds of people worked long and hard -- often at great personal sacrifice -- and with no benefit to themselves. They worked to make a great dream come true. And because of the sacrifice of dedicated people, human lives were saved and men and women and children who might have been condemned to a life of misery and pain have been given good health and happiness. All of you here tonight are better for what you have done.

There are several elements of the Columbus Hospital story that stand out higher than all others. I am impressed, first of all, that a group of non-professionals -- representing various organizations of immigrants -- could, in the middle of the depression, begin a very complex and demanding project and make a go of it. In 1934, the people of the Federation of Italian Societies in New Jersey didn't have much working for them as hospital administrators. Yet, thanks to them, they turned the hospital around and pointed it to success.

I am also impressed by the sheer massive scope of this project. I am aware -- as you are -- that back in 1926, Mr. Steffanelli secured the original buildings at a bankruptcy sale with a mortgage of \$85,000. We tend to overlook how much \$85,000 was worth in those days. This was big business right from the start. (And Mr. Steffanelli's donation of these buildings was charity of major proportions!) Today, we are talking about a \$10 million project. But the figure \$10 million does not truly describe the whole scope of this great Columbus Hospital. There are a vast number of people involved -- doctors, nurses, orderlies, technicians, administrative people and support personnel. There are hundreds of services being rendered -- hundreds and hundreds of products consumer. And yet this vast enterprise is still being directed by a board of dedicated non-professionals. Gentlemen, I congratulate you.

I must confess I also am proud that Columbus Hospital is completely an Italian-American project. As the son of immigrant parents, I am delighted with the whole story. I remember particularly one paragraph in Dick Bonomo's history of Columbus Hospital. He was talking about the great Joe De Deo and he wrote, "Joe came from the middle part of Italy, Abruzzi, a region well-known for rugged individuals, hard workers with strong will power, so much that a typical dialect title is given them -- "La Cocce" -- meaning tough nut. Ladies and Gentlemen, I, too, am Abruzzese. Meet another -- "Cocce"!

In all seriousness, I am convinced that it was the hard workers with strong will power from all parts of Italy who supplied the essential spirit which built Columbus Hospital. I knew such a spirit in my own home. I came from the typical family all of us here know so well. We were poor and life and the times were hard. But nobody cared too much because my parents had great faith. Faith in God -- and faith in their new Nation. They believed that this great Country of America was the Land of Freedom and Opportunity. They believed that here a man who was willing to work could rise as high as he wanted. Of course we had to start working pretty early, back in those days.

My Dad was a plasterer. And I wasn't even in my teens when I started helping him out after school and on weekends.

I believe our Nation today would be much better off if we had some of the same faith and some of the same willingness to work.

But there is another chapter of the Columbus Hospital story. And I say it, too, derives from the same Italian background. There is a tremendous dedication -- a continuity -- in the people involved. Many families started with this project back nearly forty years ago and stayed with it. And they are still working today. I submit that this continuity of purpose comes from the essential stability of our Italian families. These families were built

on strong foundations -- with strong solid footings of discipline and love. We were disciplined, but we were loved as well. And I'm sure you agree that if we had more of this sort of family love and discipline today, there would be a lot less juvenile delinquency and crime!

One of the great unifying elements that kept Columbus Hospital going in the early days was the simple love of those involved for their neighborhood and their community. This -- combined with a sense of obligation, a sense of debt to this great land and what it stands for, was the driving force which made it possible for this hospital to grow and prosper into the great institution it is today.

And that great force is as alive today as ever. Many of the families who contributed -- and are now contributing -- so much to Columbus Hospital have moved out of the neighborhood. Most have indeed left the city for the distant suburbs. Yet they come back here to help. They come back here to work. They still want to help the Italian-American community where they grew up.

There is another source of this loyalty of the suburban people to Columbus Hospital. And to appreciate how glorious this is, let's look back a moment at the original need for Columbus Hospital. There was a need for a retreat for sick people who spoke no English -- or spoke it poorly. But incredibly as it seems, there was a need for a hospital that could provide internship training to young, beginning Italian doctors. They were not permitted to train in other hospitals!

It is difficult for many of our young people today to appreciate this fact of ethnic discrimination. Yet there is no prejudice or discrimination in Columbus Hospital. No one is turned away because of his race, religion or color. This is a great source of community spirit. This is the bigness of heart that is needed to triumph over the irritations and misunderstandings that are dividing our people today. Ladies and gentlemen, I salute you for your tolerance and openness.

But our dedication celebration of the new building is not the end of the Columbus Hospital story. You are going on to modernize the older buildings -- new improvements which will make this hospital one of the finest medical facilities in the East. This is a tremendous demonstration of optimism in the future of this city. It is a great testament of faith. I call upon your fellow neighbors in this city to bear witness to it and be guided by it. With this decision you have gone beyond being builders of hospitals and carers of the sick. You have taken leadership in the cause of reviewing man's confidence in man. Because of you, the local neighborhood -- the surrounding community -- indeed the whole city -- will, in the future know happier times.

This is the sentiment of a personal letter of congratulations I brought with me tonight. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great honor and privilege to read these words to you:

"My warmest congratulations go out to all who helped bring the building program of Columbus Hospital to this successful completion.

"Today's dedication is an occasion of great rejoicing. It represents the rewarding culmination of a generous and well co-ordinated civic effort.

"It demonstrates how local, state and Federal endeavors can join together to achieve a common goal. The Federal Government, through the Hill-Burton Program, is pleased to have had a part in this worthwhile undertaking.

"As it continues its long tradition of serving the people of the inner city, your modernized and expanded hospital will be a fine example of responsible citizenship and model community concern."

Signed,
Richard M. Nixon

My friends, there are many trials and difficulties in public life. Often things don't go the way you want them to and there are setbacks and delays. But public service has its privileges, and one of these privileges is mine here tonight -- the privilege of meeting with you and sharing with you these happy moments of triumph. Certainly for you it is satisfaction. For me it is inspiration. Our people are working together. They are achieving results. They are serving their fellow man. This is your message to me this evening and I am better for knowing it.

But this is not new knowledge to me. I have never lost faith in my fellow man. But to be reminded of this essential truth of the worthiness of our fellow human beings -- and to be reminded in the dramatic fashion of your great charity -- all this is truly inspiring. Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for a wonderful evening. I wish you well, and may God be with you and your work.

Thank you.

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