

U.S. Department of Transportation news:



Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION NEIL GOLDSCHMIDT, B'NAI B'RITH LUNCHEON, WASHINGTON, D.C., DECEMBER 5, 1979.

At other times and in other ages, as Americans and as Jews we have faced tests. Tests of our freedom; tests of our values; tests of our faith in ourselves and each other; tests of our faith in God. (We have even faced energy crises before, and found that divine conservation could make one day's oil last for eight).

Today we face a test which represents the sum of those we have faced in our country's history.

Today, the volatile situation in the Middle East threatens our nation's freedom, our economy, our ability to act on behalf of our friends and allies, and in particular, Israel. And for Jews in this country, the test of petro-politics takes on an added dimension - challenging our basic values here at home at the same time as we gird ourselves in defense of Israel abroad.

The key to our dilemma is our over-dependence on foreign oil. You can chart this country's political course on the axis of energy and inflation - for these are the twin factors against which we will make our choices:

* We are currently importing almost 50 percent of our oil at a cost of some \$70 billion - the equivalent of every man, woman and child writing a \$300 check to OPEC.

* The foreign oil we burn is fueling inflation - robbing the elderly and those on fixed incomes, eating away at savings, undermining the value of the dollar.

* Finally, just as the Iranians are holding Americans hostage, so OPEC is holding our economy hostage. And with our economy, they hold our foreign policy hostage and, finally, our freedom itself.

We cannot tolerate and will not accept international blackmail - not by Iran and not by OPEC.

We can and will free ourselves from the threat of domination created by our reliance on foreign oil. And we will wring the inflation out of our system, at the same time. And we will hold steadfast to our historical commitments to Israel, and to our other allies abroad.

President Carter has proposed - and is winning Congressional approval of - an energy program that will guarantee America's energy security. By taxing the excessive windfall profits of the giant oil companies, we can get the resources needed to build a solid energy foundation for this country in the 1980's:

* We can cushion the blow of rising energy costs on elderly and low-income citizens.

* We can mount a major attack on energy waste through investments in conservation - our most readily available and most cost-effective source of new energy.

* We can strengthen the nation's transit systems and improve the efficiency of our autos - guaranteeing mobility for workers and families regardless of the cost or availability of OPEC oil.

* And we can invest in the production of new forms of energy that we control here at home - solar, geothermal, coal, natural gas, hydro and synfuels.

What this says to me is that America has the natural resources we need to pass the energy-inflation test.

And we are marshalling the political will we need to pass the test - in fact, in this country's response to the Iranian situation I see us already beginning to pass the test. We are demonstrating the firm resolve and resolute intensity that has characterized our country's response to threats from abroad since the first days of this nation.

We are going to win this battle.

But what we must ask ourselves - as Americans and as Jews - is who we will be, what kind of country we will be, once the battle is won.

What values will we be embracing?

What beliefs will we hold dear?

What vision of America will we describe to our children and our grandchildren as the time-tested measures of this nation's purpose and its promise?

What will we say is permanent and fixed about ourselves and our country, even as we choose to adjust and adapt to our own future?

Listen to the words of Hillel:

"If I am not for me, who will be? But if I am for myself alone, who are we?"

If not now, when?"

For American Jews, the message is clear; for those of us who are committed to the survival - and more than the survival, the blossoming - of Israel, we are necessarily committed to upholding the promise of America that brought our forebearers here and found expression in the words of Emma Lazarus;

"Give me your tired, your poor...I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

We cannot accept a solution to the energy crisis that ends our excess import of oil, but allows the continued export of jobs.

We cannot uphold our struggle to see Israel gain full recognition in the council of nations, and let fall the banner of equal rights and full opportunity for all citizens of this nation.

We cannot call for increased spending to assure Americans safety in the world, and be silent on the need for more money to assure all American children a good education in the classroom.

These are the values our religion and our culture has taught; these are the values our traditions have supported; this is what we're stood for as a people: jobs and opportunity for all Americans, the offer of advancement gained through education, the importance of home and family and community, the basic dignity of man.

In pursuit of these values we've registered voters in Mississippi side-by-side with black Americans; given time and energy and money to local school systems; participated in precedent-setting legal cases; donated medical services and made business investments that were guided more by the heart than by any market; marched, and fought and, yes, some have even died.

Now these values face the test anew. For the combination of the passage of time and the current squeeze of the economy makes indifferences and forgetfulness the cheapest course.

It is a course we cannot afford. We cannot forget our values and tradition's and remember who we are.

We cannot forget where we have come from in the past if we wish to choose where we are going in the future.

As one American and one Jew, I can look at the record of the past 3 years of this administration and find reflected the values which I believe still must guide our course in the 80's; a course:

* toward an America of jobs, for all Americans, young and old, male and female, black, brown, white and yellow, skilled and unskilled. Over 8 million more people have jobs than when this President took office; and substantial gains have been made in the toughest and most neglected areas - women, black teen-agers, and the structurally unemployed.

* An America of educational equality and quality. This president has increased funding for education by 60 percent - the greatest increase in a comparable period in our history.

* An America committed to civil rights and civil liberties -- including religious freedom free from fear -- at home and human rights in the world.

* An America where a balanced federal budget and a leaner federal government mean a stronger dollar and less waste. In less than 3 years, the President has reduced the federal deficit by more than 50 percent.

And make no mistake on this point. This President and his Administration have placed the civil rights issue back at the top of the national docket, where it belongs. By hiring qualified blacks and women into the highest levels of government; by using the purchasing power of the Federal dollar to assure minority businesses a fair deal; by appointing women and minorities to the benches of our nation's courts and by pursuing equal justice for all in those courts, this Administration had led by action and by example. And it has not been without its political costs - this course of action - even to the point of having one of the mayors of a major city in this country attack the Administration and threaten to support the President's opponent because of his commitment to uphold the law of the land regarding school desegregation.

* An America where a balanced Federal budget and a leaner Federal government mean a stronger dollar and less waste. In less than three years the President has reduced the Federal deficit by more than 50 percent.

* An America where our cities are once again clean, safe and livable, with stable neighborhoods. And the urban policy of this President has done more to revitalize our cities than any President in this country's history.

* An America where self-restraint and self-reliance see us emerge from the energy and inflation test stronger in our commitment to freedom, more productive in our work, and more caring in our homes and communities.

Finally, history will judge us not on whether we pass the tests that face us - for pass them we will - but rather on how we pass them.

It is not enough that we support the political leadership that promises to stand firm beside Israel - if that same leadership asks us to pay the price in promises unkept and values compromised here at home. For as Demosthenes told the Athenians 2,000 years ago, "Our peril comes from those who seek to please us, rather than serve us."

Nor can we expect America to be strong in the world if we are weak at home.

Our history, our traditions demands of us a re-commitment to the values that have guided us. We do not need to re-invent our vision of America - it is a vision written into our Constitution, embodied in our values. What is required of us is the re-kindling of our spirit of compassion and our sense of sacrifice. What is required of us is written in the words of by prophet Michah:

"It hath been told of thee, O man, what is good,
And what the Lord doth require of thee:
Only to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy
God."

Thank you.