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MARCH OF DIMES ANNUAL DINNER
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS
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Tonight, I am honored to join with the people of Arkansas in paying in commemorating a "decade of excellence," the March of Dimes Foundation has chosen to bestow its Arkansas Citizen of the Year Award on one who combines, I'm told, the heart of a saint, with the head of a shrewd businesswoman. A healer of the sick, a modern day Angel of Mercy.

More than four hundred years have passed since a Spanish explorer named De Soto stumbled upon Arkansas while in search of a fabled city of gold. By then, the great Dutch monastic, Thomas a Kempis, was already celebrated for his majestic "Imitation of Christ," after the Bible itself perhaps the best loved book in all of Christendom. The words are ancient, but the sentiments they convey are as relevant as medical practices carried on in this city's infirmary named for St. Vincent . . .

"Whoever loves much, does much," wrote Thomas a Kempis. "Whoever does a thing well, does much. And he does well, who serves the community before his own interests."

For nearly half a century, sister Margaret Vincent has loved much, done much, and served the whole community of God's children. She has inspired countless individuals. Thanks to her, many lives have been prolonged. And an entire state has had its public life enhanced. Fortunately, her example is not alone in kindling hope for the future of this nation, which was founded in faith and which endures under the benevolent watch of a generous God.

Think for a moment about who we are, and where we came from. Before there was an American government, there were Americans drawn together in

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voluntary associations. From our earliest days, we have been prone to organize for the betterment of the community. Prior to independence, there were Sons of Liberty and committees of correspondence to raise the flag of our nation. Government arose to defend our territory, promote our enterprise, and embody the charitable attitudes of the people themselves. Over the years, the volunteer tradition continued: on western prairies and in urban slums, at church suppers and community chests. For much of our history, Americans relied on the voluntary efforts of business, churches, foundations and other civic organizations to provide jobs, income, health care, food and housing to those most in need. When disaster struck, the Red Cross arrived before Federal loans. Over 40 years ago when American servicemen lacked recreational facilities, the U.S.O. stepped in to fill the void. And for much of this century, the National Foundation of the March of Dimes has waged war against polio and other birth defects.

Throughout our history, we drew much of our strength as a nation from our moral commitment to one another. When the problems grew too large for the private sector to address, government inevitably succeeded to the challenge. But government, it has been conclusively demonstrated, cannot by itself provide the full range of social services to all who are in need. Equally important, government can rarely summon the enthusiasm or the imagination that aroused private citizens can bring to bear on a stubborn problem. Nor can any law match the love of a Sister Margaret Vincent.

Historically, we Americans have never needed government to instill in us compassion for our neighbors. For in no other land does philanthropy rest on as broad a base as here, where a Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, found it flourishing a hundred and fifty years ago. While visiting the shores of our infant republic in 1826, the great French philosopher discerned something uniquely American. "If I were asked ... to what the prosperity and growing strength of that people ought mainly to be attributed," he wrote, "I should reply: to the superiority of its women ... and the voluntary association --that unique American institution whereby people associate to strengthen their cause as well as their voice."

In truth, we are still what we were at our nation's beginning -- a philanthropic family: one million voluntary organizations -- including the March of Dimes -- rolling up their sleeves instead of twiddling their thumbs; millions of individuals who gave billions of dollars in charitable donations last year alone; thousands of corporations and foundations, who chipped in billions more on top of that amount. And in America, generosity is not measured by economic attainments: half of all the giving in this country comes from families with annual incomes of less than \$20,000.

One of the prime objectives of this administration has been to put more dollars in the hands of such generous citizens, to enable individuals to retain and use for charitable purposes more of their hard earned dollars. We do not intend to replace government's social conscience. We will not

retreat from social responsibility. We are, however, rediscovering a national sense of community, tapping the roots of private giving and scaling the heights of private ingenuity. Since he first came to office the President has had a very active partnership with free enterprise to find alternative ways of helping those in genuine need. Not in lieu of Federal efforts, but in addition to them. The first order of business was to restore our economy to good health. The most compassionate action that government can now take, the President believes, is to maintain our strong economy by reducing federal deficits and providing opportunity for individual growth. It will allow all of us to continue to generate the millions of individual miracles that happen when men and women are given the chance to make their own lives, harness their own ambitions, create their own futures and strengthen their own families.

More than any administration in recent memory, this one relies on the marketplace to provide justice as well as jobs. And we are reducing Federal spending, Federal taxation and the burden of excessive Federal regulation. We have enjoyed, beginning in 1982, 38 consecutive months of economic growth. Productivity has risen. Inflation remains subdued at less than 4 percent. We've created more than 9.8 million jobs in the last 3½ years and with the prime interest rate below 10 percent for the first time in recent memory, more young people here in Arkansas can dream the truly American dream of home ownership --and realistically expect to accomplish it.

Since 1981 we have witnessed all across America a tremendous reawakening; a resurgence of those fundamental principles that gave character to our land and reality to our dreams. We are renewing the proven ideals of hard work, pride of family, love of freedom and -- yes -- trust in God. When Ronald Reagan was governor of California he recalls how he first learned to deal with enormous challenge and stress as a newly-elected governor of California. "Each morning began," he says, "with someone standing before my desk describing yet another disaster. The feeling of stress became unbearable. I had the urge to look over my shoulder for someone I could pass the problem to. One day it came to me that I was looking in the wrong direction. I looked up instead of back. I'm still looking up. I couldn't face one day in this office if I didn't know I could ask God's help!" Let us never forget the source of our strength and courage. I think of a brilliant woman who knew great adversity, yet her spirit and her example inspired millions. Helen Keller summed up her philosophy in a single sentence "One can never consent to creep," she wrote, "when one feels an impulse to soar." Today, half a century after Helen Keller spoke out Americans in voluntary organizations such as this one, are soaring to new heights. And we have just begun.

A few years ago in Newport Beach, California, there were some lovely beachfront homes that were threatened by an abnormally high tide and heavy surf --homes in danger of total destruction. And all through a cold winter day and night, volunteers worked filling and piling sandbags in an effort to save the homes. About 2 o'clock in the morning a newscaster grabbed a young

fellow in his teens, attired only in wet trunks. Along with several hundred other young people, he'd been working day and night. No, he told the reporter, he didn't live in one of those homes they were trying to save. Yes, he was cold and tired. Why then, were he and his friends doing this, the reporter wanted to know. The young man stopped for a minute and then he answered, "Well, I guess it's the first time we ever felt like we were needed."

You are needed. I am needed. We may serve in some official capacity. We may also serve effectively as volunteers.

For example, those who first spoke out against drunk driving were volunteers. Most of them, like so many members of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), suffered the loss of a child or loved one. They stepped forward. They made themselves heard. They labeled drunk driving a crime against humanity, unacceptable in a society that reveres life. I am privileged to be working closely with them and other volunteer groups and we will fight until we get every last drunk driver off the roads and highways of this country. And it's been most gratifying to me to see the commitment of so many people. We have SADD, Students Against Drunk Driving, and even BADD, Bartenders Against Drunk Driving as well as dozens of other organizations working in this campaign.

As Secretary of Transportation, I have no higher priority than safety across all modes. And I am glad to have dedicated people like your own Judy Petty working with me. In 1984, we strongly supported legislation encouraging states to set 21 as their legal minimum drinking age. A uniform drinking age will do away with "blood borders" --where teenagers have a positive incentive to drink and drive, to cross state lines to take advantage of a lower drinking age. I'm proud that Arkansas passed an age 21 drinking law in the early 1920s.

Of course, the best defense against drunk drivers is to buckle that safety belt. The requirements that I put into effect a year ago July have spawned safety belt laws in 19 states and the District of Columbia. For the first time in the 15 year history of the debate on passive restraints lives are being saved now.

And, we are rehabilitating our highways and bridges to make them safer. Safety features in the design of cars provides the third focus in my highway safety triad. New cars are required to have a new rear stop lamp. You may have seen them on the highways already. Once all the vehicles are equipped with a third lamp at the bottom of the rear window. It will cut the number of rear-end collisions significantly, eliminate 40,000 injuries, save \$434 million in property damage and prevent 900,000 accidents. I was flattered that someone called it the Dole light, it's an honor to be associated with such a positive safety device.

The results we are achieving in this safety campaign have been one of my most gratifying ways of making a difference -- a positive difference -- in people's lives. I urge you to join me, to ensure that the momentum for these crucial changes does not die, but becomes increasingly stronger. For one life lost on our highways is one too many.

There are so many ways to serve, whether in public office or in a volunteer capacity. For example, there are no limits on the good you can do. You know who is in need, and you know them as human beings, not statistics. What Washington calls a social problem, individual Americans see for themselves as a breadwinner without a job, or an elderly woman alone with her memories.

In the end, a society is judged by how it acts on its deepest convictions. One American who gave eloquent voice to our national credo of independence entwined with generosity was the great novelist of the American frontier, Willa Cather. She was born in Virginia, raised in Nebraska, and had her artistic flowering in a crowded corner of New York city. She never abandoned her adherence to a way of life that was individually strong because it was socially compassionate.

Cather's heroes and heroines were ordinary Americans: cowboys and bohemian immigrants, southwestern missionaries and rural clerks. Most were poor: many suffered from being strangers in a strange land. Yet, all obtained a kind of nobility by working hard and caring deeply. And when Miss Cather died, she was buried, at her request, on a New Hampshire hillside, behind a white-steepled meetinghouse that was itself raised by a congregation of yankee carpenters and laborers. On her tombstone, she had inscribed words from her classic novel "My Antonia."

"That is happiness," it says. "To be dissolved into something complete and great."

There is another line, less poetic but no less valid. You only begin to live when you begin to give. God has given to us freely out of his abundance. We honor him when we give of ourselves and our resources to others. As Americans, it is our tradition.

Ours is neither the time nor is this the place for men or women with faint hearts, feeble courage, weak commitment or selfish motives. All of you associated with this great cause have proven your strength and demonstrated your commitment.

I'm so pleased to be able to personally thank you and Sister Margaret Vincent tonight. May you continue to soar as you serve God and mankind in such a powerful way.