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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSEREMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS DINNER

WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL

9:12 P.M. EDT

Thank you very much.

I am very grateful at the invitation that was extended to me to be here tonight. The invitation did say "Live Television". (Laughter)

But in any case, I am glad I came because my heart was moved a few moments ago to see the transfer of command. I know that Paul Healy has done a good job, and Larry O'Rourke will be a fine, new president. Sometimes it is hard to understand who is president and who is not. (Laughter)

I know what it means to have a former president to give you sound advice and quiet encouragement and firm support. As a matter of fact, the recent stories about my relationship with President Ford have been taken completely out of context. I think the Vice President was quite presumptuous in making comments about ex-Presidents. I have a complete determination when I go out of office to say what I damned well please (Laughter) about my successor. I knew that if I gave Fritz an inch, he would try to take a mile. (Laughter)

I have been to seven or eight news conferences and I never knew there were so many White House correspondents before. (Laughter) You have my own White House staff outnumbered ten to one -- using the campaign figures for the White House staff, of course. (Laughter) The way it has turned out, on a temporary basis, this is just about one for one. (Applause)

We do have a lot in common, though. I understand that everybody on the White House staff and among the White House correspondents has had about a tripling in their salary since I came in office. I know you all appreciate the new arrangement that I have brought to the White House.

I have appreciated, too, the remarks that were made about the new policy that we tried to implement throughout the Government in bringing women and blacks into the Government. We have got a long way to go. I have derived a lot of inspiration from looking at the head table. (Laughter) If my black friends from Archer could just see this assemblage up here, they would be sure that their struggles over a long period of time were well worthwhile.

It is difficult to separate in a White House environment fact from fiction, which reminds me of my good friend, Jim Wooten, here -- (Laughter) -- the Erica Jong of the New York Times. (Laughter) As a matter of fact, the fiction and fact relationship is not what hurt me so much. It was the use of the phrase "cruel recluse". I have asked Jody Powell to find out who first used that phrase. He has interrogated all the White House correspondents and 23 White House staff members. If I find

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out who said it, I will let you know. And if I am not there, my new Press Secretary will be, to let you know. (Laughter)

It is always good to have an experienced person at your side who can extricate you from one of those discussions.

I have thought that I knew my key supporters very well, who have been with me eight or ten years, but I have learned a lot about them since we have been in the White House.

I read a story not too long ago about Hamilton Jordan's (laughter) -- about Hamilton Jordan's (laughter)-- underwear. Of course, I don't have any way to know about the veracity of the story. I really didn't, until the other afternoon someone hit a very hard tennis ball over the net and it missed Hamilton's racket and I found out that the story was true. (Laughter)

We all have to accommodate changing times. I have tried to bring to the White House the campaign commitments that I made, and carry them out. Obviously, when circumstances do change, you have to change with them.

I noticed that Paul mentioned the \$50 rebate. This was a firm commitment of mine, as you know, and my economists, though, discovered that so many people spent the \$50 before they got it that we didn't have to give it to them. (Laughter) I can't understand why everybody else can't understand something like that.

Hamilton is in charge of appointments, as you know. And the other day a story got out that we were considering three people for Ambassador to Nantucket. We want to be ready when the new nations are formed.

My brother, Billy, found out we were considering an Ambassador to Martha's Vineyard. (Laughter) We had to explain to him that the name was derived a long time ago.

One of the things that the press has been very good about is to correct mistakes we have made and also to explain difficult questions. I know that all of you realize the complexity of the energy question. I knew it was complicated and confused. But I didn't realize how complicated and confused until I read the newspapers the next morning.

We are planning, Jody and I, to give an award to the news person who can best explain our energy policy in clear and concise language. We have a cogeneration trophy to award as soon as the retrofitting of it is completed. (Laughter)

I have had a lot of setbacks and a lot of troubles, as you know, and you have been kind enough to make those clear -- (laughter) -- to the American people, which is legitimate and expected, and I don't have any reason to think that objecting to it would help. (Laughter)

I was quite at ease with the criticisms that were derived from the Republican leadership. I expected that and I also expected to drop 10 percent in the polls, and I was not disappointed with that prediction. What did upset me, though, was the other day Jody called and said that he had arranged for a series of television interviews. I was quite pleased, until I found out that it was with David Frost. (Laughter)

It is difficult for me to describe the relationship that I have with you. I tried to get it clear in my mind tonight. There is a great responsibility that we share, to understand one another as best we can, to tell the American people the truth as best we can, to realize the tremendous joint responsibility that we have, and the eagerness among the people of our Nation to know about their own government, how decisions are made, the options that we have, the successes and the failures, the hopes and the dreams, the deep concerns, and to reveal the prejudices that still remain as a major responsibility.

Sometimes we feel a sense of antagonism and disharmony and a lack of adequate communication. But to a major degree, we serve together.

I am very deeply grateful that you have given me a chance to come here tonight to meet with you.

In closing, let me say that Rosalynn and I appreciate very much the silver centerpiece, and I would also like to express my deep thanks to you for -- I would like to express my appreciation to the White House correspondents for -- (laughter) -- the sense of gratitude that I have for -- (laughter) --

(Applause)

END

(AT 9:25 P.M. EDT)