

# "Talking Sense to the People," Washington, D.C., May 17, 1979

## The State of the Party, The State of the Presidency

### Address to the Women's National Democratic Club

**NOTE: The following text has been edited from the original notes used for this speech; some handwritten notations have been enclosed in brackets for clarity**

My first visit to the Woman's National Democratic Club was just four years ago, when we Democrats were getting ready to slug it out in the snows of New Hampshire. They will find, as I did, that it is a test of stamina. Now the Republicans seem to have the dubious honor of having a dozen or so candidates, while we sit back and watch our Democratic President fend off **only** one, two, or three primary opponents.

You know, it's one of the great political myths of this country that all incumbent presidents have a free ride to a second term. The last president who did not have a serious primary opponent was Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Some traditionalists say this is a negative and divisive turn. Jimmy Carter would prefer a free ride. As for me, I don't think it is necessarily harmful to the nation or to the institution of the presidency.

And so, when we await the upcoming election, let's pause and study where this nation and its people are today -- in a period when some very important chapters are coming to an end, and new tests, new issues, and new solutions seem to dominate our politics.

Well, I want to talk basic politics today -- and that means examining some old evils, some new evils and where I think we are at.

The history and life of a country has significant **eras** that subtly begin and come to sudden twists, turns, and ends. America has had a rich variety.

We've had eras of good feeling like the 20's when unbounded prosperity was at hand. We have had eras of **drift** like the 50's when the country slept as the cities decayed and we turned our backs on our minorities and when the seeds of our economic troubles were first apparent. And we have seen **shattering** times like the depression. And we have had times of war -- when excitement and tragedy, shared grief and hope brought us together.

Each of these chapters had their special characteristics, rewards and their penalties. In looking over all those peaks and valleys of experience, I am inclined to believe that the toughest chapters for our country and our people to endure and master were those times, like today, when we were confronted with a major and fundamental transition in a peace time setting. [Remember 1870's was one.]

My thesis today is that our troubled country is in the early stages of another wrenching transition -- from a heady time of unbounded growth and prosperity built on cheap and seemingly unlimited energy, into a time of ubiquitous shortage which has drastically changed our lives and impacted our national purpose. And this transition, I think, is going to dominate our lives and our politics for at least the next decade. It will test our political institutions -- the Congress, the Presidency, and our parties. It is going to test our national unity in the toughest kinds of ways.

When Americans know they are in an emergency -- they are good -- very good. The day after Pearl Harbor we rolled up our sleeves, got behind our President, and began to do our toughest job. Nobody argued that the Japanese attack was an oil company hoax--we knew our ships were on the bottom and that our nation was in direct and immediate peril.

But when crisis occurs in a time of quiet and the perils, though insidious, are subtle, a confusion clouds our judgment, we get divided and we are not so good.

We want to balance our budget -- but we don't want to cut our favorite programs. I took a poll of my own district. I asked if a \$30 billion deficit was about right or should we balance the budget this year. The answer: balance the budget now, quick, immediately. I asked if we should increase taxes to fund the deficit? Answer: no. Do we cut the defense budget? My Arizona friends said no -- increase it. Do we cut education? No -- but educate. Do we cut aid to the farmers? No. Do we cut assistance to the elderly and the sick? No. This is not just an Arizona phenomenon, either. A recent Gallup poll confirms that it is nationwide. [Shoot in pants.]

The polls also tell us that a sizable number of Americans just do not believe there is a shortage of oil -- believing instead that the big oil companies are the villains of the piece. They distrust oil companies more than any other segment of our society -- even the Congress.

\* \* \*

The fact is -- these well intentioned people are wrong about the oil shortage and those lengthening lines at the gas pumps are starting to drive home the idea. Though we are already hearing the various conspiracy theories alleging oil company collusion in

holding back crude oil until the price is right -- and working hand-in-hand with certain federal officials to maximize their profiteering -- but I think these charges are the venting of frustration by consumers and politicians who feel they have to scapegoat someone -- and the oil companies, with their records of huge profits and somewhat cavalier attitude to consumers are convenient targets -- and maybe there is more than a little truth to some of the accusations. [Steal you blind in a crisis, doesn't mean they deliberately created the crisis or that it is a hoax.]

But all this only serves to obfuscate the elemental fact -- this nation, with its declining oil reserves -- even with Alaska -- is the world champion waster of energy.

The number of drill rigs has nearly tripled in recent years, but last year for every two barrels we burn, we have only added one additional barrel to our reserves. So with three shifts at work in the oil fields around the clock and with all the rigs available at work -- we're losing ground.

Let me tell you straight, the hard fact and the hard truth is that our domestic oil production peaked in 1971. This peak will not be exceeded if we have \$20 a barrel oil or \$120 a barrel oil. [Born in 1930's] Until we face up to the grim reality of our oil situation and make the hard decisions about alternative sources and energy conservation, we will continue to be engaged in a bitter and fruitless stalemate dividing the Congress and the people while the energy policies of the nation are marked by uncertainty, timidity, and frustration.

The Opec Cartel will continue to call the shots, subjecting our economy and our currency to unspeakably difficult pressures outside our sphere of influence. Adding to this cruel dilemma is the mood of distrust and doubt about nuclear energy -- a non-fossil fuel source that only a few short years ago was the panacea.

Everyone knows the President is dead right in describing the desperate need for conservation, but, as evidenced by the recent actions in the Congress, no single remedy can get a majority acceptance -- not the well-head tax, five cent gas tax, decontrol, nor an excess profits tax; not even a standby gasoline rationing plan could survive. And the public has even rejected the President's call for a voluntary 15 mile a week reduction in driving.

Let me cite a couple of examples of this suicidal paralysis; [peacetime transit is worst]

- The soho pipeline -- with unions and farmers and conservationists divided. [Fairy godmother]
- Rationing -- on shelf -- avoid 8 months delay. Saudis could shut down tomorrow.

- Coal slurry--pitting the self-serving unions against consumers.
- Nuclear waste

What is going on here? What is happening to a nation of people who are good and fair and generous? Why can't we reach consensus on issues of extreme importance to each and every one of us? Not only can we not reason together -- we can't even come together for the opportunity.

Again I reach the conclusion that this time of awkward transition has taken its toll as the era of incredible economic growth sadly comes to a close. With the end of the era of surplus and the beginning of the era of shortage, the American people are looking for the cause, and are distrustful and suspicious of all the basic institutions.

And who seems to be the likely candidate for blame? Well, a recent poll conducted by *Time* magazine indicated that even though only 17% of those polled think that any President, Republican or Democrat, can stop the inflationary spiral, the President in the White House today still is the prime candidate for the scapegoat award.

And who are the candidates for sacrifice? Regrettably, it appears that those nominated are generally the poor, the old, the minorities, and those young Americans looking for work.

What a cruel dilemma indeed. And unfortunately, a dilemma that has proven to be attractive to the demagogues and snake oil salesmen preaching quick fixes to end inflation, cut taxes, and bring back the good old days. And in so doing, they add to the divisions among our people creating hostile factions and embittered groups with little to bring them together.

There is an old Spanish expression, "yo primero" or Me First. It wasn't so very long ago that people spoke of "our children" and "our neighborhood" and "our schools." Now they talk about "my child" and "my taxes," "my tax break" and so on.

As for me, let's put the symbols and the buzz words aside and talk straight and start anew --

Why do we have big government? It's not just because we in the Congress sit back and think up new programs. It is because there are problems to be solved and government -- especially the Federal government, has inherited many of these problems by default ... As my good friend John Culver recently said -- "the same people who rail against big government are the first with their hands out when they themselves have problems they want government to solve."

I'm a little weary, and have diminishing patience for some of our friends in the states who are busily ratifying a call for a constitutional convention to balance the budget while at the same time they are sitting on fattening surpluses while showing some reluctance to reduce taxes -- thus adding to the confusion and bitterness of those Americans who are mad as hell -- and who are not going to take it any more. *Time* magazine recently polled a sizable group of Americans to determine the mood of the nation. One finding is worth noting -- 55% of those polled agreed with the statement -- "people who work hard and live by the rules are not getting a fair deal these days."

And they are right. We see in California, for example, the state that kicked off the Proposition 13 syndrome, the state coffers are bulging with a \$2.7 billion surplus, yet the state administration is proposing a very modest increase in aid to schools, the aged, mentally ill, and other social programs -- a situation that is dividing the Democrats in the state and giving the Republicans a wonderful opportunity to sit back and gloat.

Here in Washington we see a similar situation. The President has been all but hamstrung on a number of key issues by the divisions within his own party -- and the rock-ribbed unity of the opposition on Capital Hill.

The paralysis gripping the Congress is one bred not entirely by partisanship, but by regionalism and me firstism--that old "yo primero."

Is the old Democratic coalition a thing of the past? Is the Democratic agenda forged by the depression and implemented by great Democratic Presidents out of date? Are we willing to abandon those principles and let President Carter -- a man of known integrity and demonstrable courage -- left foundering while his party's office holders abandon their party and its heritage?

I think not.

Political parties ought to stand for something -- or else they ought to go out of business. In the past our political parties were the structures by which we synthesized ideas and ideals into workable programs. The parties were social -- as well as philosophical institutions -- and they bred a fierce loyalty somewhat akin to a religious fervor. Anything wrong about the Baptist church or the Democratic party? The major parties each reflected a consensus and operated as a voice of a family that might have shades of difference, but unified and coalesced during the elections. Today, we don't see that unity and it is enfeebling us.

The Democratic party that has dominated the Congress and the Presidency and led the country during most of my life has done so because it is the party of change -- and has stood for two essential things.

One is for hope and change in depressions and in wars. It was the New Deal and FDR; it was the Marshall plan and Harry Truman; it was Jack Kennedy reviving a national spirit, and it was Lyndon Johnson who was determined to make war on poverty.

And two, the Democratic party has always been the friend of the poor, and the old, and the sick, the disadvantaged, and the small businessman.

And those young Americans who are trying to find a decent job. This was -- and is -- the Democratic party. If we give up these characteristics and these aspirations -- and fall over each other trying to out-Jarvis Jarvis or out-Reagan Reagan -- we will lose our primacy and maybe our soul -- and we will deserve what happens.

The administration's planners have said that we can have a balanced budget -- maybe even a surplus -- by 1981. Let us hope that this can and will be done -- but let me also sound the hope that this can be done without forgetting what we have accomplished and what we Democrats stand for.

We ought to make it clear that we are steadfast in our demand for clean air, schools, and the best National Park system in the world.

We are inflexible in our demand for basic justice for our old people, our handicapped citizens, and for the school drop-outs standing on street corners within a half-mile of where I speak and who are without work and without hope.

My point is this -- these things are not incompatible. We can be tough, hard managers and yet compassionate administrators who care about the dollar and who can make war on waste -- yet we can remain the political party with a heart.

This is not the time for Democrats to sink in despair. We see our Congressional progressives and moderates joining to combat waste, to give intensive oversight to ongoing functions of government with a zeal to improve and sharpen programs.

We have a good and decent man as our President. This nation is grateful to him for his leadership and courage, especially in international events -- even as it is confused and troubled by the apparent paralysis that has gripped the country and the Congress in such matters as inflation and energy.

But we have a strong foundation for hope -- and that is the Democratic party and its diversity and dedication in troubled times.

The years ahead will not be easy. The 1980 election will be tough and bitter. The challenge to the Democrats will be to be true to our history and our heritage; to fight for those who need our help; to insist that the big belts are going to be tightened along with the little ones.

And let me suggest one more thing -- when times are tough and money is short. We are always told it isn't time for bold new initiatives. But sometimes those very conditions are the best occasions to find needs and fill them. Social security was started in 1938, when the nation was still afflicted by the ravages of the depression.

It is my opinion, for example [-- not wrong time -- wait next year] that this is the right time for a national health program -- a major undertaking that will show the depth of commitment of the Democratic party and will unify the nation by the sheer size of the objective. [Public education -- 150 years ago]

If belts are going to be tightened, and we are not going to have the kind of economic growth of the past, then this is the time to put a floor under all of us so that families are not wiped out by huge medical bills and torn apart by the pressures of catastrophic illness.

President Roosevelt was told the country couldn't afford his ambitious social security program -- he started it anyway.

President Carter has been told that the cost of really implementing Humphrey-Hawkins is too expensive -- perhaps the time has come to go to the last resort and guarantee our people a little hope and a meaningful job while they are productive -- and thus ease the fiscal burden caused by welfare.

Maybe this is the time when our resources, monetary and scientific, can undertake a bold program to make solar energy a full partner in energy production.

Surely this is the time to make the tough decisions on nuclear power, we are engaged in a rousing debate on the issue -- but debating is one thing -- and coming up with a fair and workable plan is another. [work way out of swamp]

You know it is often possible in your life to make the tough times can be the good times -- and this is such a time when we can galvanize programs for fairness and effect needed changes.

Maybe we need to get back the spirit of 1933, when FDR told us we had nothing to fear but fear --- maybe we should strive to revive the spirit of 1964-65. A time when "... bold initiatives were staked out under Democratic leadership, there was electricity in the air, hope in the people's hearts, and prodigious ground work was being done."

And so -- let us approach the 1980's with this kind of spirit tempered with the admonition of another Democrat who kindled a unique flame in all Americans -- Adlai Stevenson -- who told us in 1952:

"let's talk sense to the American people. Let's tell them the truth, that there are no gains without pains, that we are now on the eve of great decisions -- not easy decisions -- like resistance when you are attacked. But a long, patient, costly struggle which alone can assure triumph over the great enemies of man -- war, poverty, and tyranny.

Yes, let's talk sense to the American people about energy consumption. Let's talk sense about waste and inefficiency. Let's talk sense about both national security and controlling weapons that threaten our civilization.

\* \* \*

And let we Democrats talk sense to each other. Let us not abandon what we have started, let us not become so divided that we hand our hard fought for achievements to those who would strangle hope and a budgetary surplus on paper -- and a shattering deficit in morality and courage.

[I believe in the Democratic party -- Will Rogers -- no organization.]

Just before the Civil War a Republican legislator in the state of Minnesota said, "the Democratic party is like a mule -- it has neither pride of ancestry -- nor hope of posterity.

Now, nearly 110 years later, we can recall Sir Winston Churchill's stirring words about his beloved England at a time of crisis and say of our own embattled Democratic party --

Some ancestry ..... Some posterity ..... Some mule.