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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT CERTIFICATION OF THE
26TH AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION
ESTABLISHING THE 18-YEAR OLD VOTE

THE EAST ROOM

AT 3:32 P.M. EDT

It is a great privilege to welcome this very exciting group to the White House on the day that we celebrate our national Independence Day. It seems to me that it is particularly appropriate that on this same day we are certifying the 26th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

That amendment, as you know, provides for the right to vote of all of our young people between 18 and 21 -- 11 million new voters as a result of that amendment that you now will see certified by the GSA Administrator.

Now, the custom on certification of an amendment has varied through the history of this country. Always, of course, the certification is provided, but as far as witnesses are concerned, sometimes the President witnesses it, usually he has in recent years, but I understand a President has a prerogative to ask for additional witnesses if he likes.

Therefore, on this occasion I am going to ask that three of the representatives of this group who are 18 years of age or older -- and I understand you range from 15 to 20, so we picked three 18-year-olds. We have worked this out by lot, through checking with Mr. Ramsey, your Choir Director. They cover all parts of the country. If these three would step forward as I call your names and stand beside me on my left, first, Julianne Jones from Memphis, Tennessee; second Joseph Loyd from Detroit, Michigan; and third -- incidentally, I don't think this was an accident -- we have one from California, and it is Paul Larimer from Concord, California.

(The President and the three youths witnessed the certification of the 26th Amendment by Robert Kunzig, Administrator of the General Services Administration.)

If Mr. Ramsey would step forward, I am going to present the pen that I witnessed with to the Director. I wish we had 500 more pens, but that is above our budget.

If I could have your attention for just a moment, this is, of course, a very historic occasion in this famous room, the East Room of the White House. I am sure that as you are here witnessing the signing of the 26th Amendment, its certification, that you must think back about all the things that must have happened in this room from the time of John Adams, the first President to live in the White House.

I think particularly it is significant that this group, young Americans in concert, is here today. You are going to go abroad; you are going to be in Europe, as I understand, for 28 days.

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I have been thinking about what kind of a message you would be taking to Europe, what you will be saying. You will be saying it, of course, in song, but you also will say it by your presence, by how you represent America. I think these are some of the things that we in the United States would like the people of Europe to hear from our young people, those who represent us so well, as you will be representing us in the next 28 days.

Naturally, you all know that America is the richest and strongest nation in the world. But it is not that, the fact that we are strong, the fact that we are rich, that makes America the hope of the world, that made it the hope of the world when it began, and makes it still the hope of the world today.

In other words, when we look at our strength, the thing that you can be proud of is that you can tell anybody in Europe, Asia, Latin America, anyplace in the world, that America in this century has never used its strength to break the peace, only to keep it. We have never used our strength to take away anybody's freedom, only to defend freedom.

You can also assure them that the strength of America in this last third of a century when you will be making the great decisions by your votes, and perhaps in your positions of leadership, that America's strength will be used to bring peace and keep peace in the world.

This is a very important thing, because many other powers, when they reach the pinnacle where we are, the pinnacle of free world leadership, still have designs on conquests. The United States of America doesn't want an acre of territory. We don't want to dominate anybody else. We want other people simply to have the freedom that we enjoy. That is what we believe in and that is what you can say as you go abroad.

Now, let me say a word about our wealth. We are a very rich country, rich by any standard that civilization has ever put for nations. But the fact that a country is rich isn't going to make you very popular abroad, not popular because, after all, people who don't have as much as we have wonder how did we get it and how are we going to use it.

You can be very proud in that respect, too. You can point out that as far as our wealth is concerned, that it is not something that is an end in itself. We are not proud of it because we are rich. We are proud because what we have in the way of wealth enables us to do good things.

For example, there was a terrible flood in Romania, a Communist country, a few months ago. We were able to send \$10 million to the people in that land. You all read about the terrible earthquake in Peru where 50,000 people were killed. We sent millions of American dollars to that country.

Whenever people in other lands have problems, we are able to help them. In fact, since World War II, \$100 billion has come from America to help both our friends and those who have been our enemies. We could not have done that unless we were rich.

Here at home, what does wealth mean? It is not an end in itself; it should never be. If it does become an end in itself, then we are simply a rich country or a rich person living selfishly, thinking only of what is good for us.

The reason that our wealth means something far more than that is that it enables us today to set out goals higher than any people in the history of the world. We can do more in building better education. We can do more, for example, in improving health care in this country. We can do more in campaigning on a program against poverty, in raising the level of all of our people, than any nation in the world, and the reason we can do it is because America is a rich country.

Therefore, we are not proud of the fact that we are rich simply because of that, but we say that in view of the fact that we produce so much, that we are very privileged to be able to do good things, and may it always be that way.

Finally, I would like to leave this thought with you: I think more than conveying to the people of Europe what is the truth, that America is strong and America is rich and that we will use our strength and our wealth for good things, I think what they would like to hear from young Americans is what I know you convey as I see you here today, and that is that we stand for something far more important than wealth and far more important than strength.

We stand for something that made this country the wonder of the world 195 years ago. Just think of it. Three million people then, very poor, very weak by world standards, and yet Thomas Jefferson was able to say, "We act not for ourselves alone, but for the whole human race." He could not have said that and the world would not have believed him, and they did believe him, unless America stood for something other than wealth and strength.

What did it stand for? First, it was a young nation; second, it was an idealistic nation; third, it was a nation that believed in itself, that had faith in God, and also that set very high purposes and very high goals for all people. That is why people came to America when they had the opportunity, because here there was more chance and more opportunity than in any nation in the world.

It is significant, incidentally, that this very desk on which we have certified this amendment was the desk that Thomas Jefferson used at the Continental Congress during the time that that Congress was meeting in Philadelphia. He used to stand up writing at that desk because while he was a relatively young man, not perhaps by your standards, but certainly by mine, only 33 years of age, he had arthritis and he liked to write standing up.

Coming to the basic theme, the reason that I believe that young Americans, you who represent the youth of America at its best, the reason that I believe that you will represent America well abroad, the reason I believe that your generation, the 11 million new voters, will do so much for America at home, is that you will infuse into this country some idealism, some courage, some stamina, some high moral purpose that this

Nation always needs, because a country throughout history, we find, goes through ebbs and flows of idealism. Time after time the country needs an infusion of new spirit, an infusion of youth. You are bringing that.

As I meet with this group today, I sense that we can have confidence, that America's new voters, America's young generation, will provide what America needs as we approach our 200th birthday, not just strength and not just wealth, but the "Spirit of '76," a spirit of moral courage, a spirit of high idealism in which we believe in the American dream, but in which we realize that the American dream can never be fulfilled until every American has an equal chance to fulfill it in his own life.

That is what I believe. That is what you believe. That is why we are so proud to have you in this room today on this historic occasion.

Mr. Ramsey, we have had some great stars perform in this room, of course, some of the great stars in opera and some of the marvelous singing groups, and some from the age of jazz, Duke Ellington, for example, was here, and many others that are perhaps more relevant to the group here. But I think that this room would be honored to have this group that is going to represent us in Europe sing in the White House. Could we have a number from you?

(Singing of Battle Hymn of the Republic.)

Mr. Ramsey, I have heard the Battle Hymn of the Republic at least 700 or 800 times, and I have heard it sung by many fine groups, but I can tell you that after hearing this rendition, that no group has ever sung it better. Believe me, this is a magnificent job.

Now, I want to ask you a question: How many of you have been to Europe before? Just a few.

Now, one thing you are going to find when you are there, it is very exciting to see all these places you read about when you were in school and the rest, and the sight-seeing, in addition to the performance, and the people you will meet, and you are going to get acquainted with some different kinds of food than you have been used to, but it will be fun.

From my own experience, I can tell you that after traveling to about 70 countries in the world that I have always enjoyed it and always enjoyed particularly trying different kinds of food. After I have been gone for about a month, I say, "Gee, I would like to have some home cooking." I told Mrs. Nixon, as I got off the helicopter, that we really ought to provide some home cooking. We don't have quite enough for 500, but we do have refreshments. I checked it out and I find that the punch is very good, and it is made from Florida and California products. But as far as the home cooking is concerned, I found that the cookies were made by a Swiss chef, but they also will be very good.

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I want you to know, though, in a very serious sense, that this house, one that all Presidents have lived in since John Adams was President, really belongs to the whole country.

There is a wonderful Spanish phrase, whenever you go to a Spanish country and somebody welcomes you at an airplane, or as you go into a house, even a very humble house, they will say "Estan ustedes en su casa," which means, "You are in your own house."

I want everyone here, all 500 of you, to feel that for the few moments you are here enjoying the home cooking and also the White House tour, this is your house; you are in your own home. This is your home. We are very proud of you. We hope you have a wonderful trip. We hope you come back to Washington many times and come back to this house many times.

By the way, in checking at the warehouse, we find we do have enough pens for all 500 of you.

Thank you.

END

(3:56 P.M. EDT)