

## 2 **Remarks to Workers at the National Steel and Shipbuilding Company in San Diego, California.**

*January 4, 1972*

*Mr. Banks, Secretary Gibson, Mayor Wilson, and men and women of National:*

It is a very great privilege for me to be here today. I just flew in from Washington last night, and it is good to be here on this beautiful California day, right here in San Diego. And it is particularly good to be here because of the reason that I am coming here.

I am not going to bore you with the statistics and with a lot of history about how it came about that these ships are going to be built here in this yard, but I think just to give you a feeling of what it means, of how important this moment is to you, to those of you who have jobs, to this yard and its future, and to this country, I think it is well perhaps to spend just a moment on what this occasion is and how it came about.

In 1968, when I was speaking in Seattle at a yard—a pretty empty yard, as a matter of fact—I spoke about the U.S. merchant marine and, you know, when you make a speech, you do a little studying to find out a little about the subject, because you figure the people you are talking to know more about it than you do, and they usually do.

What I found was that at that particular time, the United States merchant marine was in very great trouble. I found, for example, that three-fourths of all American-built ships then in use were more than 20 years of age, whereas, only one-fourth of all ships in the world then in use were more than 20 years of age.

In that kind of competition, we were a born loser, because our ships were too old,

they were too inefficient, and new nations—as a matter of fact, some of the nations with whom we had been allies in World War II and who had been our enemies in World War II—had built these ships that were now driving us into a second-class position around the world.

I felt that we ought to do something about it. When I was elected I made a proposal in 1969 about the American merchant marine. In 1970, the Congress in a bipartisan action, Republicans and Democrats joining together because they could see that this was bigger than any partisanship, overwhelmingly approved that proposal.

In 1971, the plans went forward under men like Mr. Gibson, Secretary Stans, and all the others in Government interested in this, until we are now beginning to let the contracts. As a matter of fact, some have already been let.

Today, \$54 million in contracts will be signed by Mr. Gibson for here, the Todd Shipyards in Long Beach will have \$60 million worth of contracts, and others will follow in other parts of the country.

Now, just let me say a word about what this all means, and why it is important. I know that it is kind of fashionable sometimes these days to say, "What difference does it make whether the United States is number one in air transport, or number one in the merchant marine," or what have you.

The answer is: It makes a good deal of difference. We don't have to be number one in everything, but we have to try to be. Because whenever a nation or a person

quits trying to be number one, he ceases, or that nation ceases, to be a great nation. We want America to try to be number one, and that is one of the reasons we are doing this in this area.

Now, the second point I would like to make is that this comes as we are ending a very long and difficult war, and as we enter what we hope will be a period of negotiation and peace for the United States.

But even that shows the importance of what we are doing today because the peacetime competition is going to be even more difficult than the kind of competition we had in war.

The nations that previously were engaged in war activities now are competing with us, and competing with us very, very hard. We welcome that. We accept competition, but it means we have got to do better. And that, of course, is why we are able to come here for these contracts today.

We are doing better. Costs are being cut down. I have been talking to my old friend Jesse Calhoun [president, National Marine Engineers Beneficial Association] about that problem. I have been talking, of course, to the people in management about that problem.

Costs have come down almost 50 percent, and that means that as the costs come down, as we build more efficient ships, there will be more jobs and America will get back into the position of being the leading maritime nation of the world. We can do it.

We can't do it without your help and we know and I know, as I look at this great group of people here, that we are going to be able to do it, because we Americans are a people who don't like to

be number two. We Americans are a people who like to be the best in anything that we do and that is what we are going to do in this instance.

Finally, I would just like to leave one thought with you. As we go forward on these ships, I think it is interesting for you to know that the three that are built in this yard are the first three of this kind ever to be built in the United States of America, so you are doing something that has never been done before.

The reason they have never been built in the United States of America before is that the United States wasn't able to compete, but now we can. The better job that you do here, now, on these ships, the more opportunities we are going to have to have more jobs like this in the future.

**VOCAL FROM THE CROWD.** We can do it.

**THE PRESIDENT.** You bet you can.

And so, I simply want to conclude with a very old story, one that many of you, I am sure, have heard.

During the Middle Ages, two stonemasons were asked what they were doing as they were working on their jobs. One looked down, and he said, "I'm shaping stones." And the other looked up, and he said, "I'm building a cathedral."

And today, all of the thousands of men and women here are going to be doing jobs, and you can look down at that job—it is important, of course, just for the sake of what it is doing, what it produces in the way of an income and the rest.

But I hope all of you, from time to time, look up, and say, "I'm not just building a ship; I'm building America. I am making sure my country is going to be number one insofar as its merchant marine is concerned."

Thank you.

**NOTE:** The President spoke at 10:36 a.m. at the shipyard of the company. He spoke without referring to notes.

John V. Banks was executive vice president, National Steel and Shipbuilding Company; Andrew E. Gibson was Assistant Secretary of

Commerce for Maritime Affairs; and Pete Wilson was mayor of San Diego.

On the same day, the White House released a fact sheet on the contracts awarded to the company to build three new bulk carriers for the United States merchant marine.