

51 **Remarks to a Joint Session of the South Carolina
General Assembly. February 20, 1973**

Governor West, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Senator Thurmond, Senator Hollings, my colleagues from the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., all of the distinguished members of the Senate and the House of Representatives of the State of South Carolina:

I had not realized until the Governor had introduced me so eloquently that this is the first time that a President of the United States has stood in this place. I am honored to be here for that reason, and I am also honored to be here because this is the first State legislature in the Nation which passed a resolution supporting the peace settlement in Vietnam.

Before speaking of that settlement, I would like to refer briefly to some of the distinguished people who are here in this chamber today, and first, to one of the truly great First Ladies of America, Mrs. James Byrnes.

All of you know of the friendship that I was privileged to have with Governor Byrnes. You will remember that I mentioned the fact on his death that no man in the whole history of this country had held more offices and more high offices at both the State and Federal level than he had held during his long and distinguished career. He was also a very wise and farsighted man who was willing to

give good counsel on occasion when he was asked.

I remember when I was defeated when I ran for President in 1960, I asked Governor Byrnes whether I should run for Governor of California. He thought a moment and said, "Yes, you should." I ran for Governor. I lost, but the advice was very farsighted because if I had not run for Governor and had not lost, I wouldn't be standing here today.

I also want to pay tribute on this occasion to Speaker Blatt. It was interesting for me to note, and I note it now for the whole Nation, that he has been Speaker in this House longer than any man has held that position in the whole history of America, and I pay a tribute to him for having that high position today.

I am also very proud today that Secretary Dent, Secretary of Commerce, is present with us. He is the first man from South Carolina to serve in a President's Cabinet since James Byrnes was Secretary of State.

And then, too, I wish to pay my respects on this occasion to the delegation from Washington, D.C. I could say much about them in terms of their very strong support of policies that we believe are best for America. I will simply say that on this occasion, under the very strong leader-

ship of Senator Strom Thurmond, there is no delegation from any State in the Union that has given more firm support to the policies that made the achievement of a peace settlement possible.

It is interesting to note that the delegation in the Senate is half and half, Republican and Democratic. The delegation in the House of Representatives is about half and half, Republican and Democrat. But as the late Mendel Rivers used to say, when the defense of America and the honor of America is involved, we are not Republicans, we are not Democrats, we are Americans, and that is the spirit which has motivated the delegation from South Carolina always in the House of Representatives and the United States Senate.

Now I would like to turn to the settlement which has been discussed at considerable length, probably, on the floor of this chamber when the resolution was passed, and also throughout the country since that settlement was announced. I should like to speak to you quite candidly about the settlement in terms of what it really means—what it means to America, what it means to the people of South Vietnam, and what it means to the world.

In referring to that settlement, I think it is important for us to note that I have often used the term "peace with honor." What does peace with honor mean? And here we go back into the long history of this terribly difficult war, the longest in this Nation's history.

Because the war has been so long and because it has been so difficult, there is a tendency for us to forget how the United States became involved, and why. It would be very easy now, looking back, to point out the mistakes that were made in the conduct of the war, to even question whether or not the United States should

have become involved in the first place. But let us get one thing very clear: When, during the course of President Kennedy's Administration, the first men were sent to Vietnam for combat, when, during the course of President Johnson's Administration others were sent there to continue the activities in the military area, they were sent there for the most selfless purpose that any nation has ever fought a war.

We did not go to South Vietnam, and our men did not go there, for the purpose of conquering North Vietnam. Our men did not go to South Vietnam for the purpose of getting bases in South Vietnam or acquiring territory or domination over that part of the world. They went for a very high purpose, and that purpose can never be taken away from them or this country. It was, very simply, to prevent the imposition by force of a Communist government on the 17 million people of South Vietnam. That was our goal, and we achieved that goal, and we can be proud that we stuck it out until we did reach that goal.

Now the question, of course, will be raised by historians—the instant historians of the present and those who look at it in the future and attempt to evaluate this long and difficult war—was the purpose worth it? Was the sacrifice worth it?

Only historians in the future, perhaps, will be able to judge that accurately, but we, at this time, and, I know, you, as you passed your resolution, must have considered the alternatives.

We had alternatives. I recall when I first became President there were those of my own party who suggested that, after all, I had not made the decision that involved the United States with combat troops in Vietnam in the first place and,

therefore, from a political and partisan standpoint, the better course of action and the easy course of action was to get out of Vietnam, to bring our men home, and to bring them home and to get our prisoners of war back regardless of what happened to South Vietnam.

That would have been a rather easy position, politically, to take. On the other hand, when we examine it for what it really meant and could have meant to the United States, we can see why I had to reject it and why the people of the United States have supported that rejection during the 4 years which finally ended with the peace settlement.

If, for example, the North Vietnamese would have accepted the proposition of returning our prisoners of war simply for our getting out our own troops from Vietnam—and that is a highly doubtful proposition—but if they had, let us see what it would have meant.

We would have fought a long war. We would have lost tens of thousands of Americans who were killed in action, and we would have fought it for what purpose? Only to get our prisoners of war back. If you wonder whether or not that purpose would have been adequate, let me say that a letter that I received from a mother in California perhaps will answer the question:

"As a mother of a young man who gave his life in this war, I felt very strongly about wanting an honorable peace agreement. Had you agreed to anything less, you would have let down not only the boys remaining in Vietnam, but also, those who died in this war. It was difficult enough to accept our son's death, but to know it was all in vain would have been even more a tragedy. We feel that our son James would have felt as we do, and

would have supported your policy."

I say to the members of this Assembly gathered here that James did not die in vain, that the men who went to Vietnam and have served there with honor did not serve in vain, and that our POW's, as they return, did not make the sacrifices that they made in vain, and I say it because of what we did in Vietnam.

It is my firm conviction that the United States can now exercise more effective leadership in the cause of world peace which the Governor has so eloquently described a moment ago. On this occasion, I think it is well for us to think of a number of people whom we should honor today. We, of course, should honor our prisoners of war who have come back after their great ordeal standing tall, proud of their country, proud of their service.

We should honor, also, those who have died, and in honoring them, let's honor some of the bravest women this Nation has ever seen, the wives, the mothers, not only of the POW's but of those who died, the mother of a boy like James.

And finally, let us honor the 2½ million men who served, who did not desert America, but who served, served in a difficult war, came back, often not with honor in terms of what they found from their neighbors and friends, but came back to what could have been a rather discouraging reception.

Now that we have brought an end to the war, let us honor them all, and the way to honor them, I say, is for us to work together to build a lasting peace in the world, a peace that can last not only in Southeast Asia, but a peace that the United States can help to build for this whole world in which we live.

Fading a war is not unusual for the

United States. After all, in this century we ended World War I, we ended World War II, we ended Korea, and now we have ended the American involvement in Vietnam. The critical question is: How do we end a war and then go from there to build a peace? And I address that question in relationship to this war for just a moment.

The year 1972 saw some historic breakthroughs in terms of America's search for peace, along with other nations: the opening of the dialog with the People's Republic of China, with leaders who represent one-fourth of all the people who live on the face of the globe; the discussions that took place in Moscow last May and early June, discussions which led to a number of agreements, but particularly an agreement between the two super powers to limit nuclear arms, the first step toward arms limitation, and of course, more talks will take place this year with the leaders of the Soviet Union.

Now, when we consider those great events, the opening to China, which we are already beginning to develop, as you have noted in your papers recently, the opening with the Soviet Union of the discussions that can lead eventually, we trust, to arms control and perhaps further down the line to reduction of the nuclear arms that burdens us, burdens them, and threatens the whole world with destruction—as we look at those great events, combined with the end of the war in Vietnam, there could be a tendency for us to sit back and assume that we are going to have peace, instant peace, because of these new developments.

What we must recognize is that we would not have had the kind of fruitful and constructive discussions that we had with the Soviet Union, and in my view we

would not have had the opening of the dialog with the People's Republic of China unless the United States had been strong—strong not only in its arms, but also unless the United States had been strong in terms of its will, its determination.

A nation which is strong militarily and yet is not respected is not a nation that is worth talking to. America is strong militarily, and America has demonstrated, by its willingness to stand by a small, weak country until we achieved an honorable peace, that we deserve, first, the trust of our allies and the respect of our potential adversaries in the world. And that, again, gives us a reason why we can look back on this long and difficult war and say that American men sacrificed—some their lives, some long imprisonment, and some away from home in a land which most of them did not know—that Americans have made that sacrifice in a cause that was important, not just for Vietnam but for America's position of leadership in the whole world, because America comes out of this long and difficult struggle strong militarily and respected in the world.

Had we taken another course, had we, for example, followed the advice of some of the well intentioned people who said, "Peace at any price. Get our prisoners of war back in exchange for withdrawing," had we taken that course, then respect for America, not only among our allies but particularly among those who might be our potential adversaries, would have been eroded, perhaps fatally.

And so I say to you here today as we look to the future, the chances for us to build a peace that will last are better than they have been at any time since the end of World War II. We will continue the dialog with the Soviet lead-

ers. We will continue the dialog with the People's Republic of China. And, in this year ahead, we will renew discussions that we have been having in the past with our friends in Europe and in other parts of the world, because as we talk to those who have been our adversaries in the past, we must not overlook the vital necessity of strengthening the bonds we have with our allies and our friends around the world.

But as we conduct those discussions, I would urge upon this legislative body what I have often urged upon the Congress of the United States: Let us be sure that as the President of the United States and his representatives negotiate with great powers in the world, let us be sure that he never goes to the negotiating table representing the second strongest nation in the world.

Because America is strong and has been strong, we have been able to negotiate successfully. We must maintain our strength and, of course, we will reduce it, but it must be on a mutual basis and not on a unilateral basis, because reducing unilaterally would remove any incentive for others in the world to reduce their strength at the same time.

Having spoken of military strength, let me also speak briefly of other kinds of strength that we need if we are going to build a world of peace and if America is going to continue the great role that we are destined to play as we near our 200th birthday as a nation.

It is essential that government—and here in this legislative chamber all of us are participants in the role of government—it is essential that government in America be strengthened in terms of being more responsive to the people.

By that I mean that government must

get closer to the grassroots, and by getting closer to the grassroots, what I am very simply suggesting is this: For much too long, power has been flowing from the people, from the cities, from the counties, from the States to Washington, D.C. And that is why, beginning with an historic move on revenue sharing, and in other areas, I feel firmly we must turn it around and that power should flow away from the concentration in Washington back to the States and the people. That is where it belongs, and that is where it is staying.

Let us also remember that if America is to play the kind of a role that it must play and we want it to play, we need to be a united country. By being a united country, that doesn't mean that we agree on everything. It means that we have disagreements between parties, disagreements on a number of issues. That is the very essence of a free society.

But let the time be gone when this country is divided region against region, North versus South, race against race, black versus white, one economic group against another, labor versus management, simply because they are members of different groups. Let the time be gone when we divide Americans by age, the old against the young—in terms of what they produce—the city against the farm.

It does not mean that we all have the same interest. It does not mean that we do not have areas where we disagree. But what it does mean is that this Nation, when the great issues are involved—the security of America, the honor of America—let us speak of those issues and speak to those issues as one united people.

In that connection, as I speak for the first time as President of the United States to a legislature in the South, one of the

things I am most proud of during the time I have served as President, and during the three times I have had the great honor to run for President, is that I have never divided this country North against South, East against West, one region against the other.

I believe this is one country, and let us all work to make it one country, because it is one United States of America that can lead the world to peace, the kind of peace that all of us want in the years ahead.

Finally, today, if we are to play the role that we are destined to play, we need faith. I think that the faith of all Americans was restored by what we have seen in the past few days as our prisoners of war came down the ramp of those planes and set foot for the first time on American soil, some of them after 6, 7 years of imprisonment.

You wonder how this Nation, or any nation, could have brought into life men who would be so strong, men who could endure so much. And the important thing is, as we saw them come down those stairs, they came down with their heads high,

proud of their country, proud of what they had done, and that is another reason why peace with honor was so vitally important. Because if this war, long and difficult as it was, had been ended solely for the basis of obtaining their release, you can see that for them it would have been the greatest disappointment.

I close with a message from one of them. When he sent this cable to me a few days ago, he did not know, and could not have known, that I would be addressing the South Carolina State Legislature today. The cable was to me, but as you can see as I read it, it is to all of you as well.

It is from Robert N. Daughtrey, major, United States Air Force:

"My faith in our fellow Americans never faltered. Thank you for returning us with honor. I assure you we returned filled with pride and faith in the future.

"God bless you. God bless America."

NOTES: The President spoke at 12:46 p.m. at the State Capitol in Columbia, S.C.

Lt. Gov. Earle E. Morris, Jr., was president of the South Carolina State Senate, and Solomon Blatt was speaker of the State House of Representatives.