

Remarks at the Heritage Foundation Anniversary Dinner

April 22, 1986

Thank you very much. Clare, I must have been doing something wrong. I'm kind of enjoying it. [Laughter]

It's wonderful to be with you again. Some of you may remember that when the ``Heritage 10" drive was inaugurated a few years ago, I had the privilege of coming over and saying a few words. I mentioned the things that were on the minds of conservatives at the moment: the place of ideas in politics, the importance of the Heritage Foundation, the remarkable work of Ed Feulner, Joe and Holly Coors, Frank Shakespeare, and so many of you in this room in bringing to Washington the political revolution that had already occurred in the American heartland. The Capital, as you know, is frequently the last place to experience or even hear about such developments. [Laughter]

But some of you may remember that on that wonderful evening I did make a terrible faux pas. When I arrived at the reception before dinner, I saw Joe and Holly, and I mentioned how good it was to be among friends. And then I added: ``Joe, it's been a long hard day in the Oval Office, but now it's Miller time." [Laughter] Some of you may also remember that's when Joe showed me his Mondale button. [Laughter] So, when I arrived at the reception tonight -- and you can well imagine that I was very careful about what I said -- I complimented Joe on his tremendous work with Heritage and mentioned to him how, from a little seed, such a great organization had flowered. ``There's no doubt about it, Joe and Holly," I said, ``this bud's from you." [Laughter] Well, I felt pretty bad until somebody told me that Joe and Holly had expected tonight's speaker to be an actor from California who had dedicated his life to public service. And when I walked in, Holly said to Joe, ``Hey, that's not Clint Eastwood." [Laughter]

But I do want to thank Clare Luce for that wonderful introduction. I can't say enough about Clare, and I certainly can't say anything more than I used to in all those telegrams I sent her years ago when she was a successful playwright and I was an actor looking for work. [Laughter] But to be serious, I quoted Clare Luce in a recent address to the Nation, and I suspect I won't be the last President to do that. Clare, it's no exaggeration to say that you've more than made your mark in American history. Tonight I thank you, Heritage thanks you, and so does the conservative movement.

But I can't help reflecting tonight on the fact that ``Heritage 10" actually exceeded its fundraising goal by \$2 million. Ed Feulner says he's thinking of using the extra money to set up a first-aid station for Washington liberals -- [laughter] -- which just goes to show the conservative movement has come of age: We've gone from hope to charity. [Laughter] Tonight is special for Heritage. It marks the culmination of an extraordinary project. What boldness it took to suggest that Heritage, whose operating budget only a few years ago was \$3 million, could raise 10 times that amount in just 2 years. But you've done it and then some.

Yet it isn't really the money, nor even the tremendously valuable work that will be done with it, that needs to be talked about tonight. After all, I could stand here most of the evening and recite all the newspaper accounts of Heritage's success, with the adjectives ranging from ``stunning" to ``amazing." But on this point, the record speaks for itself. So, I think the time is better spent explaining the causes of Heritage's success, causes that lie deeper than a good many people realize, causes that teach us something about the nature of historical change itself.

One of the most valuable lessons that history has to teach us is that after the most terrible frustration and discouragement sometimes change can come so quickly and so unexpectedly, it surprises even those who have made it happen. This is particularly true in Washington. One Cabinet member in a former administration put it very well: "The toughest job in Washington," he said, "is being able to tell the difference between the tides, the waves, and the ripples." Well, actually that's been the problem with the perceptions of many of the experts and the pundits; they concentrate so much on the ripples, they can't see the waves and the tides.

An analogy that I've used before on this point has to do with March of 1943. In that terrible month it became clear that the allies were losing the battle of the Atlantic. It was the only development, Churchill said, that ever really frightened him during the war. More than 500,000 tons of allied shipping went down; thousands of merchant seamen lost their lives. England was left with only a 2-month supply of food and material, and the experts in the British Admiralty seriously doubted that England's lifeline across the Atlantic could be kept open. But then suddenly -- only a month later -- it all changed. Innovations in the convoy system, escort training, radio and radar use, long-range aircraft had a sudden cumulative weight. Suddenly the U-boat wolfpacks sustained enormous losses. Hitler's admirals were conceding the defeat in the Atlantic, and by June it had all turned around. The experts were confounded. In a little over 60 days, the looming catastrophe had turned to decisive victory. Allied convoys crossed the ocean without the loss of a single ship.

I first used that analogy back in 1982, when the same people who said the oil shortage would last for decades were talking gloom and doom about America's economy. They claimed that huge, new tax increases were the only way to get the economy moving again. Back then, they used the term "Reaganomics." And maybe you haven't noticed -- they're not using that anymore. [Laughter] But the larger point is this: Being too close to the data can sometimes mean missing its significance and the chance to change it for the better.

There were many people who thought you were being unwise in setting out on such ambitious goals at your 10th anniversary dinner; just as a few years ago there were those who told Clare Luce that cochairing Citizens for Goldwater would hurt her reputation. [Laughter] There were even those who warned me that a certain TV broadcast I did for the Senator in '64 would certainly end my career. And you know, come to think of it, they were right -- [laughter] -- it did end my career, at least one of them. [Laughter]

But as one American intellectual and religious leader of the last century, William Channing, said: "There are seasons, in human affairs, of inward and outward revolution, when new depths seem to be broken up in the soul, when new wants are unfolded in multitudes, and a new and undefined good is thirsted for. There are periods when in truth to dare is the highest wisdom." And that's the story of Heritage's success. Joe and Holly Coors and a young man named Ed Feulner wouldn't listen to the experts. They knew the experts lacked vision, that they were too close to the data, that they only saw the ripples. And they knew, too, that the best way to ride the wave of history is to make a few waves of your own.

Ed Feulner, you're a combination of many things: intellectual, administrator, politician, diplomat, but most of all, dreamer and darer. And for that, and for Heritage, all of us salute you.

Joe and Holly, I won't even mention the personal debt that I owe each of you. Let me just say that no one has been more important to Heritage's success and that of the conservative movement than the two of you. So, let me also say, as President, on behalf of the present generation of Americans and many more to come, your devotion to country, your selflessness and patriotism, put all of us in your permanent debt.

I think we should keep in mind the example of people like Joe, Holly, and Ed when we try to grasp the significance of what's happening in the world today. Heritage -- with its quiet promotion of ideas, its

seminars, its research papers, its conferences, and, yes, occasionally its buttonholing of Congressmen - for informational purposes only, of course -- [laughter] -- is a reflection, as well as a cause, of the revolution in ideas occurring throughout the world, a revolution whose significance may only be appreciated long after it has brought about startling, unexpected change.

Recently I've asked a few conservative audiences to reflect on that change, to think back to 1980 and ask themselves: Who would have thought that in a few short years even our political opposition would be calling for an end to deficit spending and voting for a de facto balanced budget amendment, known as Gramm-Rudman? Or who could have predicted that a House of Representatives supposedly under liberal leadership would spontaneously repeal the Clark amendment, the amendment which prevented us from helping the freedom fighters in Angola?

But these changes in American domestic politics reflect a wider international trend. Since our first days in office, our administration has tried to defend our way of life not just by increasing the defense budget, but by pointing to the world of ideas and the revolution now going on there. We've talked about the decadence of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Early in 1981 I mentioned to Mrs. Thatcher [Prime Minister of the United Kingdom] that totalitarian ideology had lost its force and energy and perhaps the time had come for the democracies to plan for a world where that ideology was no longer a dominant force. A little later at Notre Dame, we called communism a spent force, a sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages even now are being written. And in Westminster, I noted that statism had lost the intellectuals. Our call was for a forward strategy for freedom, a crusade to promote and foster democratic values throughout the world.

Much of this at the time was viewed skeptically. But here we are a few years later; democracy is prospering in many nations where it's never before been seen. In Latin America and the Caribbean alone more than 50 -- or 90 percent of the people live in nations that are democracies or headed in that direction. What a change from a few years ago. And we've seen the insurgencies in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Angola, and elsewhere, vivid evidence that the romance of revolution is no longer on the side of the totalitarians. It's telling proof that the eighties is a break with the past, that the eighties is truly the decade of the freedom fighters.

There are those, of course, who are a little slow to catch on to all this. And it probably won't surprise you that a good many of them reside here in Washington. [Laughter] But even this is changing. The old politics, the post-Vietnam syndrome, the partisans of "Blame America First," are fading fast.

So, let me make a prediction. I think there's a growing recognition that the idea of self-government and the commitment to democratic rights is on the march everywhere in the world, and especially in Central America. Those who've been naïve about the dangers of communism in the past, those who've been wrong about the nature of Communist regimes in Vietnam, Cambodia, Grenada, and El Salvador are uneasy now with their views on the Sandinistas and the freedom fighters. So, here is my prophecy: We're going to get the freedom fighters the help they need, and we're going to get it to them soon. But it's going to happen because I know you and I are going to redouble our efforts over the next few weeks.

And let me make one other prediction: We must never forget that totalitarian regimes are as fragile as they are powerful. Time magazine recently did a story on scholar Robert Leiken, who went to Nicaragua and, much to the distress of some of his liberal colleagues, concluded that opposition to the Sandinistas is very deep and very strong in that nation. So, let's remember this, too: The vast majority of the people in Nicaragua want nothing to do with communism or the militarism it engenders. The day is coming when the democratic promises of the revolution of 1979 will be fulfilled and Nicaragua will be free.

The only point I'm making here is this: We've been talking about the idea of freedom, about expanding its frontiers, since the beginning of this administration. So no one should be surprised that our policies

and programs have followed suit. Freedom is on the march; we pledge solidarity to those who seek to make it their own.

In much the same way, no nation -- friend or foe, ally or adversary -- should be surprised by the events of last week and the United States Government's determination to protect American lives and the world from terrorism. I could recite here a long list of speeches and statements by myself and Cabinet officers outlining the terrorist danger, presenting the evidence of collaboration among certain terrorist States and making clear to those States that we would not tolerate what amounts to acts of war against the American people. Only last summer, in an address to the American Bar Association, I outlined the terrorist network, citing evidence the United States Government had accumulated as well as private scholars in the field such as Dr. Avigdor Haselkorn. I carefully outlined the interconnection among those terrorist States and issued the most solemn warnings to their leaders.

And yet, even at the start of the administration, people like Jeane Kirkpatrick were offering some pretty broad hints that things would be different. ``How will the Reagan administration change American foreign policy?" she was asked early in 1981 at the United Nations. She answered correctly. She said, ``Well, we've taken down our `Kick Me' sign." And then someone said, ``Well, does this mean that if the United States is kicked it will kick back?" ``Not necessarily," she said. ``But it does mean we won't apologize." [Laughter] Well, we haven't been apologizing. Things are different. And perhaps you've noticed. I know Colonel Qadhafi has.

And by the way, these two issues we've discussed here this evening -- the march of freedom, especially in Central America, and the fight against terrorism -- are directly related. In that American Bar Association address, I pointed out the strong ties of the Sandinistas to the international terror network. The Sandinistas have provided refuge for all sorts of international terrorists. Members of the Italian Government have openly charged that Nicaragua is harboring some of Italy's worst terrorists. And we have evidence that in addition to Italy's Red Brigades, other elements of the world's most vicious terrorists groups -- West Germany's Baader-Meinhof gang, the Basque ETA, the PLO, and the Tupamaros -- have found a haven in Nicaragua. They have actively supported the Salvadoran rebels and have frequently used terror, including the killing of four of our marines in a cafe last summer. And these are the same rebels who celebrated the Challenger explosion and said our astronauts were war criminals and deserved what they got.

That picture making the rounds showing Daniel Ortega standing with Mu` ammar Qadhafi and raising his fist in a gesture of solidarity is very much to the point. I hope every Member of Congress will reflect on the fact that the Sandinistas have been training, supporting, and directing, as well as sheltering terrorists; and in this sense, they're trying to build a Libya on our doorstep. And it's the contras, the freedom fighters, who are stopping them. So, you see it goes back to what Richard Weaver has said and what Heritage is all about: Ideas do have consequences, rhetoric is policy, and words are action.

And just in case the meaning of last week's events are still unclear to those who would terrorize and murder Americans, let me explain once more, and, believe me, far from being belligerent or warlike -- clearing up misunderstanding on this point is precisely the way to avoid conflict, not cause it.

Yes, we Americans have our disagreements, sometimes noisy ones, almost always in public -- that's the nature of an open society. But no foreign power should mistake disagreement for disunity or disputes for decadence. Those who are tempted to do so should reflect on our national character, on our record of littering history with the wreckage of regimes who've made the mistake of underestimating the will of the American people, their love for freedom, and their national valor. ``The American people are slow to wrath," Teddy Roosevelt once said, ``but when their wrath is once kindled it burns like a consuming flame."

So, tonight I speak for a united people. Let me say simply to those who wish us ill: We are Americans. We love our country, we love what she stands for, we will always defend her. We live for freedom --

our own and our children's -- and we stand ready always to protect our birthright and guard our patrimony, as our fathers did before us.

Thank you. God bless you.

Note: The President spoke at 7:51 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the Shoreham Hotel. He was introduced by Clare Boothe Luce. In his opening remarks, he responded to Ms. Luce's quotations of former Presidents on the "splendid misery" of the office. Prior to the dinner, the President attended a reception for a group of the guests.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/42286f.htm>