

REMARKS OF
VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
MEETING WITH NEGRO LEADERSHIP

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Empire Room
Chase Park Plaza Hotel
St. Louis, Missouri
Tuesday, October 15, 1968

Just before I came here, one of my good, very competent aides gave me a stack of cards and said I want you to know everybody that is going to be there, and I have been running through those cards that quick but I am going to put them in my pocket because, first of all, I don't really need to know you by first name. I just need to know that we are in a common cause and that we have work to do and that is what is most important.

I am going to take a very little of your time but the time that we can have together here can have a great deal to do about time from here on out. I spoke this morning in Kansas City to a college, Rockhurst College, and I talked as plainly as I could about some of the difficulties, the problems that confront this nation. And I am going to tell you just what I told them because I am going to tell the labor movement when I go to them tonight just what I told these young people. I have resolved that I will give one message and when it comes to human relations to all people no matter where I go.

There are a number of white Americans that say this fellow Hubert Humphrey is just so interested in the black man that all he is going to do is see that every privilege and every opportunity in this country goes to the black man at the expense of the white man. There are some black men that say that is not true. And they say to the contrary. There are some workers who say, well, this fellow Hubert Humphrey, is so interested in getting a job for some young man or young woman that lives in a ghetto or in a slum that by getting that fellow this job, frequently it is a member of a minority group, both white and/or black man or Mexican-American, someone that hasn't had a break, hasn't had a chance. By getting that person a job he threatens my job. And that is what we call the gossip.

You and I know that there is some of that gossip. That is what George Wallace feeds on. Make no mistake about it.

Now, how do we answer that? The answer to it is that we don't need to have an economy in this country in which we fight over jobs. We need to have an economy in this country in which we are looking for people for work.

(Applause)

And as I said to a man that was telling me what the talk was, he said, here is why you are in trouble, Mr. Humphrey. I said, well, listen, I want to tell you what -- if you help me, here is what is going to happen. You are a blue collar white worker. Now, if a few more people get a job right behind you, that gives you more seniority. Instead of hurting you it helps you.

And then, every time we add another man on the job list that pushes you up the ladder. And what this country has to get down to understand is that we have never even tapped the potential of this nation.

We have got a lot of small thinkers in this country. We have people here that believe that, you know, it is never going to get any bigger, never going to get any better, there is never anything going to happen any different and we have got a lot of people that are angry that it has happened as much as it has.

Now, I want it very clear as I told this group of students today, and there were many others besides students there, I was asked a question, Mr. Humphrey, your opposition says that you are going to spend more on education, you are going to spend more on these programs to combat poverty, you are going to spend more on these programs and cities, you are going to spend more and more, is that right? I said, that is right. That is right. And I will tell you what is going to happen. I will tell you what has happened.

First of all, in the last five years, ten million Americans have walked out of poverty, being self-respecting, self-sustaining, taxpaying reliable citizens. Those ten million before were on relief, on welfare. They were a burden to themselves, a burden to their communities, a burden to their nation. They were unhappy.

Now, are we better off or not? If we invest monies in education, if we invest money into job training -- most of the people we are talking about need a basic education. We aren't even talking higher education yet. We are talking about basics. They need skills. They need attention. They need counseling. A man that has never had a job in his life doesn't know how to hold a job. A man that has never had any industrial experience doesn't know how to work in a plant.

It is going to take time. But I tell you that for every dollar that we put into training and job placement, we will get it back again and again in that little old system that we call the withholding tax. Time after time. It comes back clip, clip, clip, clip, clip, clip, clip, clip. You and I know it.

Now, what we have got to do is to take a message to everybody. I want to say to you today that I need your help, not just with the members of your community. I need your help in the total community. You have got to go on out as you have and just talk to some people who today are frightened. You know what they are really frightened about? It isn't just law and order. They are just frightened about a job, they are frightened about can they pay their mortgage? Is somebody going to push them out and so on.

How ridiculous.

This country is going to have a trillion dollar economy in four years. You are going to be looking for people to work, that is, unless like the Republicans.

(Applause)

And I mean just that. I saw the other day where Mr. Nixon's economic adviser said that he thought that in order to get some more price stability, that we ought to have a little higher rate of unemployment.

Now, whose job is he talking about? Just go on out now and just take that.

Now, this same man once said that until you reach the figure of 4-1/2 million unemployed, there wasn't really any danger. Now, if you are one of the 4-1/2 million there is a lot of danger.

Now, what figure do you mean that, Mr. Nixon, you ought to have a little higher? Five and a half million? In 1961 there were seven million unemployed in this country. There were a lot of them in St. Louis, too. Since 1961, 12 million people have walked out of poverty. Since 1964, five million have, I mean, ten million have. We have nine million new jobs. No, wait a minute. We have 12 million new jobs over and above that.

Now, much of our problem that we talk about today is essentially economic, competition. Now, there is a lot of -- there are two ways to live. You can either -- you know, when the family gets bigger, you have got more children, if you just continue to make the same size pie, mother, the kids are going to get mad. They are going to fight over the size of the pie. So, when you start -- when you have three children, then you get six, you have got to get a bigger pie tin. You make a bigger pie. So that each child gets the

same piece of pie that he would have gotten if there had only been three.

What we are trying to do is build a bigger America, bigger, better schools, more teachers, more schools, more hospitals, more doctors, more nurses, and what does that mean? That means we have got to look for people to fill those positions.

I am here to tell you that the best is yet to be found in this country. I believe this as my name is Hubert Humphrey. I think the greatest talent in America is yet to be discovered.

Do you realize that some of the greatest talent in this country today are the children of the poor? And I mean real poor. I am a child of a poor family but I am not that poor. I know that.

(Applause)

I am going to talk very frankly to you. I say that some of the greatest literary genius today came from the black community of the ghetto, right out of there.

(Applause)

Some of the greatest dramatic talent, some of the greatest athletic talent, some of the greatest architectural talent, some of the greatest educator talent, came from families that were abjectly poor, poverty ridden.

Ladies and gentlemen, that only tells you that there is a gold mine there. What we need to do is to develop it. We have millions of people in this country that have never had a chance. And once we give them a chance, this country is going to hum, and instead of having people afraid, it is like the fellow, you know, when the automobile came in, the man that had the livery stable, he was opposed to the automobile. He said it will ruin my business instead of knowing that he could own a garage and sell cars.

This is true all the time. When automation came in the plants, many workers said it will take my job. It didn't take his job at all. It eased his job, improved his wages and it made more money for management. And what we need to do is get a sense of vision. I am going to be the President of all the people if I have a chance, of all of the people in this country.

(Applause)

And I want you to know something else. I do not intend in order to win this election to compromise a lifetime of dedication to the cause of human rights. That has been my life.

(Applause)

I know there are some people that say I am not militant enough. It isn't a question of being militant. It is a question of being effective. That is what is important. Anybody can be militant. What is important is what do you do? What do you accomplish? A good idea is no good unless it works. You can go out and wave your arms and you can scream and holler and you can denounce people, black or white, it doesn't prove you amount to a thing until you are able to change things.

(Applause)

That is what counts.

I don't have any different message for you than I am going to give to this dinner in this hotel tonight. If I have got to go down and figure it out, what did I say to the last group -- you know what Abraham Lincoln once said? He said one of the reasons you should always tell the truth is it is so difficult to remember the last lie.

(Laughter)

And it is true. If you are trying to tailormake a speech for an audience in St. Louis and then another one down in Memphis and then another one down in Jacksonville, Florida -- I made a civil rights speech in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the likes of which nobody ever heard before in Baton Rouge, Louisiana/ Why? Why? Because it is a part of America.

Now, what we need to have in this country today is a great sense of both humility and pride. It sounds like a contradiction. Be humble for our blessings, for our chances, be humble for the privileges that we have, be humble even for the tasks that are before us but a great sense of pride, pride in our country, pride in ourselves.

I hear people today talk about, you know, black pride. White pride. Ethnical pride. That is great. But the greatest thing that we can have in the pride -- one thing we ought to be prouder of than anything else, as I told the children at Central High School in Kansas City, I said be proud of your citizenship, be proud that you are an American. That is the kind of pride that you really want to have in this country.

(Applause)

I want you to elect this man Clay.

(Applause)

I know he is going to win. I wish I was as sure of my future as he.

VOICE: You are a winner. You're a winner.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: We are in the fight of our life.

Let's just lay it on the line. I need you.

VOICE: You have us.

We need you. We need you now.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: And we are going to fight and we are going to win. Listen, we have got something that the other fellow hasn't got. We have got people. He has got the money.

Listen, I just heard tonight that he is buying four hours of nationwide television on Saturday before the election. That will be more nationwide television than I have in the total campaign. He has got the money. But he is afraid to stand up and debate me.

VOICE: That is right.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: And he is afraid to come out --

(Applause)

VOICE: Tell it like it is.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: There is only one way that I know how to take care of this sort of a situation. I want you to make up your minds that you are going to fight harder than you ever fought before in your life.

(Applause)

I want you to talk to people that you have never talked to before in your life. I want you to talk not just to the members of your own community. I want you to talk to other people and I want you to tell them that all you are asking for is the same chance that the other guy got. That is all. That is all anybody is entitled to.

VOICE: That is right. We'll buy that.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: You give us a chance, you give me a chance with your help, and we will take on this George Wallace and his Richard Nixon and we will give them the whipping of their life. Make no mistake about it.

(Applause)

Now, I am going to over to the labor movement and I am going to tell them just what I told you, only more so, because I keep hearing that there is somebody over there who is a worker, a worker, mind you, that would vote for Wallace.

VOICE: Oh, yeah.

VOICE: He has got a loaf of bread now. He didn't have it yesterday.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: But I will tell you this much, that I know what to tell the worker. I am one. I had to do it all my life. I know -- nobody handed me a thing. And you know it and I know it and I have been a member of the union and they know it. And George Wallace never helped a union man get a job, he never helped a union, never organized -- never helped a single one of them and any worker that will vote for George Wallace just doesn't love

his family. That is all I can say.

(Applause)

So, I want you to know what I am going to say to them and there are some reporters around; they will follow me and when I leave here they are going to come over and they are going to hear the same speech. I don't memorize them but they come from here, and I am going over there and talk to them and I want you to make sure that St. Louis and that Missouri is in my column.

I want you to work as you have never worked. This is your fight. This is my fight. This is our nation's fight.

The question to be decided in this country is, are we going to trust each other? Are we going to have a country in which we can live together and trust each other or are we going to have a country in which we despise each other, in which hate is preached, in which segregation is preached, in which discrimination is preached? Or are we going to have a country in which we can learn how to live alongside of each other and work with each other and work alongside of each other as fellow citizens. That is what it is all about.

(Applause)

We are going to decide it on November five. That is when it is going to be. November five, and if we make the wrong decision, God bless you. And if we make the right decision, God will bless you.

Thank you very much.

(Applause)

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