

Address by
Senator Lyndon B. Johnson
Before the Annual Banquet of the
American GI Forum
Texas Hotel, Ft. Worth, Texas
7 P.M., August 1, 1953

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY

I appreciate the opportunity of addressing this annual banquet of the American GI Forum. It was good of you to invite me, and I am grateful.

You know -- when I am with you, I have the sure-and-certain feeling that I am among friends. That is a marvelous feeling to have on an occasion such as this.

It is true, I am flattered to believe, that there is a reciprocal feeling of friendship between us -- between you and me. I derive a great deal of pleasure from thinking back on the personal contacts I have had through the years with the Latin-American people of Texas.

Many of you here at this banquet are my friends of years' standing. I am honored by your friendship.

My first job, after I reached young manhood, was teaching in a Latin-American school. It was an experience that has stayed with me all the years since then. I thoroughly enjoyed the work, and I think that in many respects I learned as much as my pupils. I am proud to say I still have friends I made among my students in that school.

Since I am in the business of politics, I am aware that people have wondered sometimes why we always stick together, the Latin-American people and me. It is true I always have the comforting feeling that I can depend on you. I sincerely hope I have never given you, and will never give you, any reason to doubt that you can depend on me.

We do stay with one another, but there is no mystery about it. I have always respected the accomplishments of the Spanish-speaking people of Texas. I have always liked them personally. So far, I am very happy to say, you seem to have reciprocated that feeling.

I see nothing mysterious about it. That's how friendships are made -- true, enduring friendships.

I have watched with great interest the progress of the G. I. Forum. You have accomplished much of which you have a right to be proud. As an organization, you have served your membership well. You have led the way to continued progress by the Latin-American citizens of Texas.

Very earnestly, very sincerely, I congratulate you on all that you have accomplished in the past.

I know you are not willing to rest on laurels already won. I know you are determined that the future shall bring accomplishments even greater, even more far-reaching, than those of the past.

Such ~~determination~~ does you credit. I have no doubt that you will attain the goals you have set up for yourselves.

Sometimes there is talk in political circles here in Texas about special programs designed to appeal to the Latin-American people. I have no such talk to offer you.

So far as I am concerned, the Latin-Americans are not a special group requiring a special program. I believe you expect from any level of government no more -- and no less -- than is accorded to the citizenship in general.

I cannot believe that any responsible group in or out of government desires that our Nation should be made up of any categories except the single one of first class citizens -- citizens who, all alike, shall have access to the best educational and cultural facilities available in this great country of ours -- citizens who shall have open to them equal opportunities for economic advancement -- citizens who shall enjoy equally those guarantees of individual freedom laid down in our Constitution.

I know that is how I feel. I tell you frankly I would be ashamed of feeling any other way.

I know, as you do, that at times Latin-Americans have not had access to adequate educational facilities and equal economic opportunities. To the extent that this condition has been overcome, I rejoice. To the extent that it still exists, I am the more determined to do everything I can in working with groups like the GI Forum to bring about the needed changes.

Let me add to this an expression of my earnest conviction that, in our way of life, assumption of the obligations and responsibilities of citizenship is perhaps even more important than the enforcement of rights and privileges.

It is true that the rights and privileges of minority groups are sometimes threatened. But it is true, also, that we always find responsible leaders in government, in education, in the judiciary, who will secure these rights and privileges. These leaders will do so even more readily when the group whose rights are threatened is conscious of, and willing to assume, its corollary obligations and responsibilities.

The history of your organization shows that you recognize these facts. That is perhaps the source of your greatest strength.

Let me make it clear that I do not consider the responsibilities in this connection are yours alone. In the face of worldwide unrest, we need -- must have -- unity in this country. Now, as much as ever in our history, it is the patriotic duty of every citizen to conduct himself in such a way that unity shall not be undermined -- to do his part to see to it that no particular group is deprived of the rights and privileges of American citizenship.

The GI Forum, an influence for great good in Texas, is composed of representative groups of Latin-Americans in the United States. This means -- and you know it better than I -- that you have certain definite responsibilities toward our own Government and toward Latin-Americans generally.

There is no fear in my mind that you will ever shirk the meeting of those obligations.

I know that you will meet them with intelligence, tenacity, and tolerance.

I know you will bring to the discharge of these responsibilities the same high standards of patriotism and courage so gloriously demonstrated on the battlefields of World War Two -- and demonstrated again during the recent fighting in Korea.

I remember what a high percentage of Latin-Americans have received the Congressional Medal of Honor. In my office in Washington, I saw the casualty lists of Texas fighting men in Korea. Always they bore evidence that our Latin-American citizens were doing their full duty, and more.

In war as in peace, you serve your country ably and bravely.

The need for your best services is as great in peacetime as when we are involved in war.

Our Nation today faces problems of the utmost urgency -- both at home and abroad. The unified help of all American citizens is needed to meet those problems without flinching.

In the field of international relationships, we must realize that the recent silencing of the guns in Korea does not necessarily bring us closer to peace in the world.

We hope desperately for peace -- we pray earnestly for peace -- but we cannot escape the conclusion that the Korean truce does not actually settle any basic issue. There is no sign that the Communist aggressors have undergone a change of heart. We see no indication that they have abandoned their plans for worldwide conquest.

We must not in any way relax our vigilance. We must stand ready to meet future threats of Communist aggression against the free nations of the world. We must maintain our military strength and our readiness to defend our free institutions.

In dealing as best we can with the international situation, we must not neglect our problems here at home.

That greatest of those problems, in my opinion, is the maintenance of economic stability.

In other and simpler words, we have to try to make sure that we do not fall into an economic depression.

I remember, as I am sure many of you do, the terrible depression of the early 1930's. I recall the effect it had on the lives of all Americans -- the bread lines in the cities -- the foreclosing of farm mortgages -- strong men walking the streets in search of jobs that were not to be had -- lines of frantic people standing in front of banks which no longer had the money with which to pay off their depositors.

That depression was an awful, soul-scarring experience. It was an experience we cannot afford to repeat.

I am not an alarmist. I am not telling you that we are on the verge of another serious economic depression.

But, in all honesty, I call your attention to certain disturbing signs.

Here in Texas, retail business is off in most areas -- not alarmingly so as yet, to be sure, but showing a decline in recent months.

Interest rates have jumped, under the "hard money" policy of the present Administration -- making it harder for the small businessman and the farmer to get along.

In the sections of Texas that were hit so hard this year by the devastating drought, the decline in the purchasing power of farmers and ranchers has been severely felt.

Home builders tell me their sales have fallen off alarmingly. Automobile dealers tell me they are finding it harder and harder to move their stocks.

Just a few days ago, I had a talk in Washington with Bernard Baruch, our Nation's respected elder statesman and one of the wisest men of our time. Mr. Baruch expressed alarm over

declining farm prices and over the heavy inventories being stacked up by many manufacturers and distributors. He is a man of wide experience and great sagacity. His words carry weight with me and, I think, with many other Americans.

The situation is one which must be watched very carefully. It is of the utmost importance that, in case a depression threatens to engulf us, the full force of the Government immediately be lined up in an effort to avert it.

Thanks to past experience, the machinery for dealing effectively with a depression is known to us. What we must do is to make sure that, in case of need, this machinery is promptly called into action.

I hardly need say that this could become a matter of deep personal importance to every one of us....

War or depression -- these are the great evils that could bring disaster to our Nation and wreck our free institutions. It is against their threat that we must be constantly on guard.

This necessary vigilance is well worth the trouble required to exercise it.

What we have built in these United States -- working together, all of us, as American citizens -- must not be allowed to fall before the destructive onslaughts of an armed enemy.... must not be permitted to wither away in the blighting grip of an economic depression.

On that, I know, we are all in agreement.

As citizens of the United States of America, we have much to save -- much to preserve.

I see no limit to the future of America other than the heart and will of our people.

Ours is a nation based upon a deep belief in ever-expanding horizons of freedom and prosperity. That belief has carried us through the trials of one hundred and seventy-five years. It will not betray us in the future, if we but hold steadfastly to it.

We have refused to accept the boundaries set for the mind and the soul by tyranny. We have rejected the concept that mankind is doomed to destruction.

Instead, we have proclaimed the doctrine of liberty as an enduring way of life, which must and shall triumph.

Upon that solid foundation we have erected a national structure which is the envy of the world. It is a structure that will stand so long as we have courage and confidence equal to our strength.

Our responsibilities are enormous. But responsibility is only one side of a coin. The other side is opportunity -- the ability to determine our own destiny.

This, I firmly believe, is the destiny of America -- to lead the world, not by coercion but by example, into the age of universal freedom.

My friends, I know you have seen it -- this vision of America that has sustained us through the years.

It is a vision of a land from which tyrants -- both petty and great -- have been banished.

It is a vision of a land whose people are prosperous.

It is a vision of a land which does not fear the future.

It is a vision of a land where authority is granted by -- not imposed upon -- its citizens ... all first-class citizens, all working together to preserve this vision.

The vision is a reality -- a reality that will strengthen us always, no matter how great and overwhelming seem to be the problems we face.

With faith in our God and the religion of our fathers -- with unswerving adherence to the cause of freedom -- we shall march forward into a future of an ever greater and stronger America.

That is the faith in this country of ours that I know we share together.

Thank you.

#