"POVERTY AND THE POLITICS OF GREATNESS"

Remarks by Hon. Jack Kemp

Many years ago the German philosopher Hegel said that America was the land of destiny, the land of the future, where freedom would be revealed in its final form and highest possibility. America is indeed a land of destiny; it is destined for greatness.

What does America's greatness consist of? Let me put it in the simplest way: America's destiny is to prove to the whole world that any nation that commits itself to the idea that all people are created equal can endure, can succeed, and can become a model for people everywhere to follow. America's greatness is to show that when men and women are free to govern themselves, free to follow their dreams, there are no limits to what they can do or what they can be.

For 210 years America has endured, in dedication to the idea of the Declaration of Independence, the standard of equality and liberty and equal opportunity. By no means was that idea a reality at first; in fact it is not a reality even now. No -- for all that time America's greatness has been that it is always trying to take that idea and bring it closer to reality.

Reverend Joseph H. Jackson preached that "The civil rights struggle...is America's struggle to be herself, to fulfill the highest promises of her being, and to build a social order after the pattern and dreams of our founding fathers and in the light of the wisdom of the ages."

I believe the time has come for a "politics of greatness" in
this nation; I believe the American people stand ready to fulfill their destiny. A "politics of greatness" to show the world that freedom is in fact superior to oppression and opportunity for all is in fact a better thing than statism and privilege. We must show it in the Philippines and in Philadelphia -- in Harlem and in Haiti -- we must show it in Miami and Managua, in Peoria and Pretoria, in Grand Rapids and Grenada and Angola and Alabama and in Washington D.C. and, yes, in Moscow itself.

A people of great destiny will support the advance of human rights and the progress of democracy not just with words but with deeds. We will provide active support for freedom fighters against oppressive governments; we will provide active support for free governments against totalitarian revolutionaries. What we will not do is silently accept the permanent oppression of any people anywhere. Our basic principles as well as our highest goals, our roots and our destiny, forbid silence.

But there can be no greatness in a people that neglects any of its own at home. Long ago, one of the greatest black American teachers, Booker T. Washington, put it perfectly: "We are one in this country," he said; "We rise as you rise; when we fall you fall. When you are strong we are strong; when we are weak you are weak. There is no power that can separate our destiny." As the most far sighted American leaders, black and white, have always taught us, in order to move ahead we can't leave anyone behind.

By and large the struggle for political rights for all has been won. America moved far up the road of its destiny when the
promise of the Civil War amendments was fulfilled in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Now we need to complete the revolution. We need to guarantee the greatness of our people by guaranteeing that no American is condemned to a life cycle of poverty and despair. If we ever hope to launch a campaign for freedom around the world, we need to launch a new war on poverty in America. The two go hand in hand.

I'd like to spell out what a second war on poverty would be like. The first war on poverty reflected a deep American concern with poverty as a way of life, but we depended so exclusively on government that the effort foundered on the rock of 1970s austerity politics. We have learned much more since those days. We have learned better ways to mobilize the resources of the private sector, where wealth is created, rather than looking exclusively to government, where wealth is merely redistributed. Above all we have learned that real jobs and real opportunity can only arise from revitalizing democratic capitalism and restoring the possibilities of true entrepreneurship for every man and woman in America.

[core speech section]

The war on poverty which I have proposed can wipe out that poverty that has to do with not having food to eat or clothes to wear, or a real home to live in. But even as we care for the material needs of our people, we cannot forget that there is another kind of poverty as well -- a poverty of the spirit. We must make certain that no human being goes hungry, yet we must...
also remember that according to the Gospel, "Man does not live by bread alone." A great people concern themselves with the needs of the whole human being, but they do it in different ways. Reverend Albert Cleage Jr. said it well in one of his sermons: "If you are going to believe that you are somebody, that you have worth and value, then you must know that that worth and value was built into you...You were created by God with certain inalienable rights. Men could not destroy a dignity which had been given to them by God. [So] don't be afraid to say the word 'God' because this is the 20th century."

And Martin Luther King gave us the best of reasons why Americans need not be afraid to mention God. Writing from Birmingham jail, he said that in demonstrating for their equal rights, black Americans "were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judaeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence."

There have been times when one party has carried the torch of American greatness: the Democratic Party under Jefferson, the Republican Party under Lincoln, the Democrats again under Franklin Roosevelt. Today I believe once again that the torch has passed to the Republican Party. There is an agenda to fight the war against poverty in America, and it is a Republican agenda; just as there is an agenda to campaign for freedom around the world, and that agenda too is a Republican agenda. But the
politics of greatness I have been talking about is not essentially a partisan idea. In the fulfillment of our destiny in the world we are all Republicans, we are all Democrats, we are all -- white, black, Hispanic, men, women -- we are all Americans.