

Exchange With Reporters at the Great Wall of China.

February 24, 1972

THE PRESIDENT. I can only say to the media, who, like myself, have never seen the Great Wall before, that it exceeds all expectations. When one stands there and sees the Wall going to the peak of this mountain and realizes that it runs for hundreds of miles, as a matter of fact thousands of miles, over the mountains and through the valleys of this country, that it was built over 2,000 years ago, I think that you would have to conclude that this is a great wall and that it had to be built by a great people.

Many lives, of course, were lost in building it because there was no machinery or equipment at the time. It had to all be done by hand. But under the circumstances, it is certainly a symbol of what China in the past has been and of what China in the future can become. A people who could build a wall like this certainly have a great past to be proud of and a people who have this kind of a past must also have a great future.

My hope is that in the future, perhaps as a result of the beginning that we have made on this journey, that many, many Americans, particularly the young Americans who like to travel so much, will have an opportunity to come here as I have come here today with Mrs. Nixon and the others in our party, that they will be able to see this Wall, that they will think back as I think back to the history of this great people, and that they will have an opportunity, as we have had an opportunity, to know the Chinese people, and know them better.

What is most important is that we have an open world. As we look at this Wall, we do not want walls of any kind between peoples. I think one of the results of our trip, we hope, may be that the walls that are erected, whether they are physical walls like this or whether they are other walls, ideology or philosophy, will not divide peoples in the world; that peoples, regardless of their differences and backgrounds and their philosophies, will have an opportunity to communicate with each other, to know each other, and to share with each other those particular endeavors that will mean peaceful progress in the years ahead.

So, all in all, I would say, finally, we have come a long way to be here today, 16,000 miles. Many things that have occurred on this trip have made me realize that it was worth coming, but I would say, as I look at the Wall, it is worth coming 16,000 miles just to stand here and see the Wall.

Do you agree, Mr. Secretary?

SECRETARY ROGERS. I certainly do, Mr. President. It really is a tremendous privilege we have all had to be here today.

THE PRESIDENT. And I really didn't need the coat.

TRANSLATOR. No, this is great weather.

THE PRESIDENT. It's marvelous. And nobody is ever going to see the hat that I brought. I didn't need it. And my ears are not nearly as cold as they get when I walk sometimes on the streets of New York--in those side streets that go, you know, through the middle of Manhattan and down through those tall buildings--and the wind blows. It's much colder than this.

TRANSLATOR. The Vice Premier says that Mr. President has given a very good speech. [Laughter]

THE PRESIDENT. I was supposed to just say a word. The Vice Premier has climbed to the top. But we both decided that this was a job really for Foreign Ministers and not for the Vice Premier and myself.

But I would simply conclude, because I know we have to go on, that while we will not climb to the top today, we are already meeting at the summit in Peking.

Let me ask the members of the press, do you think it was worth coming?

REPORTERS. Yes, sir.

THE PRESIDENT. You know, you are lucky, and my wife is lucky: You get out to see the great points of interest. She gives me a report every night. of course, I would not trade. My talks are very interesting, too.

Q. Are you finding, Mr. President, the after-hours events as entertaining as we are, such as the athletic events?

THE PRESIDENT. Fantastic. I thought not only the ballet was great, Tom [Jarriel, ABC News], but I also thought that the athletic event last night was just superb. As you know, I have a rather casual interest in athletics, and it has been so reported. But the gymnastic events--I have never seen a tumbler like the last one. I have never seen that move made by a tumbler before. I didn't think it was possible to make that move. Then, of course, the ping pong players, unbelievable, particularly the young ones, those little girls, those teenaged boys! I used to play a little ping pong years ago--I thought I played it. Now I realize I was playing another game, except for the score.

Then too, the ballet, of course, as we all know, had its message and that was one of its purposes but also, while it was a powerful message and intended for that, it was also very dramatic and excellent theater, excellent dancing, excellent music, and really superb acting. I was very impressed.

I have seen ballets all over the world, including the Soviet Union and the United States. This is certainly the equal of any ballet that I have seen, in terms of production. I thought some of the production effects were very dramatic, too--the scene where they showed the guerrilla forces going across the stage at the end at great speed in the dark. I can't describe it, but certainly people who had a chance to see it on television will remember it. And I thought another thing was the vivid effect, when they had the rifle fire, of having

the gunpowder smoke float back into the audience so that we could smell it. You had a feel there of realism that was quite vivid.

REPORTER. Thank you very much.