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New York Rally Speech

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Luskin Draft

REMARKS OF GERALDINE A. FERRARO

TEMPLE KEHILATH JESHRUN

MONDAY, OCTOBER 29, 1984

Thank you, Mayor Koch, for that fine introduction.

We are now just a little more than a week away from an election that will decide our future not just for the next few years, but for the rest of the century. Mr. Reagan says this election presents the American people with the clearest choice they've had in fifty years. And for once, he's absolutely right.

In eight days, we will decide the nature and shape of our economy. Walter Mondale and I have outlined a plan to bring down the massive budget deficits and do it fairly, without violating our covenant with the elderly, the sick, and the poor.

The President says the deficit is big enough to take care of itself, and that's also his answer to those who need our help.

In eight days, we will decide whether to help our children meet the challenges of the next century. Where we see a need to invest in the promise of our youth, Ronald Reagan has dramatically cut school aid and slashed public school funding.

Ronald Reagan wants to send a teacher into space, but I say we have to help our students and teachers here on earth.

Above all, in eight days, we will decide whether to end the arms race. President Reagan is the first President since Hoover not to meet with the Soviet leader. He is the first President since the dawn of the nuclear age not to sign an arms control agreement. Instead of progress on ending the arms race, we have heard dark speculation about Armageddon and hints that conflict with the Soviets is pre-ordained and inevitable.

I say we need negotiations, not excuses. We need a President who will talk with the Soviet leader on his first day in office, not on the first day of his re-election campaign.

And we need a President who will stop the arms race before it spings into space. It's time to say, the sky's the limit. Rather than extending the arms race into space, let's stop it here on earth.

Nothing could be more important than these issues. But the fact is we have the opportunity in America of focussing on these questions and others because, by and large, year in and year out, we don't have to debate the basic principles that bind this society together: democracy, pluralism, and unswerving support for the rights of every human being.

That is simply not the case this year. In this election, we stand on opposite sides of questions about which there is usually not a dime's worth of difference. For all his anti-government rhetoric, Ronald

Reagan doesn't understand or respect the principle that in America government has no business in our homes, our churches and our synagogues. And for all the talk about American values, this Administration has done little to support democracies abroad or advance the cause of human rights.

I want to talk about these questions because I know that they concern you deeply. They are important as principles. But they have a particular importance for Jews. For more than two thousand years, when governments have interfered with religious freedom or persecuted a minority, Jews have suffered fearfully and disproportionately.

And the same is true now. If our government cannot successfully articulate a human rights policy, then Jews in the Soviet Union will continue to pay a heavy price. And if right-wing ideologues screen nominees for federal judgeships, write prayers for schoolchildren, and impose their views on our private choices, we will all suffer. But Jews and other religious minorities will be singled out.

The message I have though is one for all Americans who cherish the principles of individual freedom and the unfettered expression of religious belief.

Let me tell you why I am concerned.

This Administration has embraced people who believe they are the sole possessors of moral and religious truth and whose mission is to

impose those views on others.

Jerry Falwell, who delivered the benediction at the Republican Convention, has said "The idea that religion and politics don't mix was invented by the devil to keep Christians from running their own country."

James Robison, who delivered the invocation, has said "Neither our Founding Fathers nor Jesus Christ initiated the current God-less interpretation of the doctrine of Church-State separation. . . .We must commit ourselves to the principles of God, then demand that both parties and politicians uphold these eternal biblical values or be voted out."

The Reverend Jimmy Swaggert, who insists that Catholicism is a "false religion," and that Jews are damned to go to hell, is a welcome policy advisor at the White House.

Both Walter Mondale and I have been rated by right-wing religious groups and our morality and Christianity have been found wanting.

Now there have always been people who would use government to impose their moral and religious views on others. The difference this time is that the President and his Party have welcomed the mantle of religious authority.

Senator Laxalt, the chairman of Mr. Reagan's campaign, sent a letter to 45,000 ministers before the Convention and defined President

Reagan's supporters as "leaders under God's authority."

President Reagan himself has proclaimed that anyone who opposes the constitutional amendment permitting prayer in public schools is intolerant of religion. And he told a prayer breakfast in Dallas that religion needs defenders against those who care only for the interests of the state.

Jerry Falwell has boasted that he will get two appointments to the Supreme Court.

These events are ominous to anyone who values the principles of pluralism, religious tolerance, and the separation of church and state.

America has always flourished not just by tolerating differences but by celebrating them. We remain the most religious nation on earth not because our government supports religious observance, but because it has no role in it. Since the first colonists set foot on this continent, we have been a home to all peoples of all faiths because our nation never became the special province of one people or one faith.

Religious tolerance and the separation of church and state have been good for religion, good for tolerance, and good for our nation. For the love of the principles that made this nation what it is, we cannot forget that. For the love of God, we should not.

Let me make clear what that means.

This is a religious nation, but it is not a Christian one, any more than it is Catholic or Jewish or Moslem. Americans should bring their religious values to the basic moral questions that face government. But government does not have to be religious to be moral. And its leaders can have faith without imposing it on others.

This is a prayerful nation. But we pray according to the dictates of our faith and our conscience, and not the dictates of our politicians. We must keep government in our public buildings and out of our homes, our churches and our synagogues.

The question is not whether we should put God back in our schools. We never put him there in the first place and we never took him out. It is whether we should put politicians in the business of writing our prayers. And to that we say no.

This is a devout nation. But it is also a nation of laws. And we must appoint judges who are committed to upholding our laws and our Constitution and not the moral or religious views of the President and his party. That's why I want Walter Mondale picking our Supreme Court justices, and not Jerry Falwell.

This is a nation that demands much of its leaders. But what it asks for above all is a Commander in Chief, not a Keeper of the Faith. We need a President who worries about the state of our air and our water, and not our state of grace. We need a President who will learn the difference between a submarine launched missile and a kite, not one

who tests the religious views of judges.

As you all know, last Friday, President Reagan visited a synagogue near here for a speech. And two things he said trouble me deeply.

First, he claimed that the leadership of the Democratic Party lacked the "moral courage" to denounce anti-Semitism. That was a disgraceful remark.

You know and the President knows -- since he claims once to have been a Democrat himself -- that the Democratic Party and its leadership have always been in the front lines of the fight against bigotry, intolerance and racism. The party of Harry Truman, Hubert Humphrey, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson has always loathed bigotry with its heart and soul. And Ronald Reagan knows it.

This year is no different. Walter Mondale and every other Democratic leader promptly denounced the shameful statements of Louis Farrakhan and called on Jesse Jackson to repudiate Farrakhan's support. And on August 8, the Democratic National Committee adopted a resolution repudiating and disassociating itself from people who promote all forms of bigotry, racism, and anti-Semitism.

But what bothers me as much as that slander is the President's failure to understand that putting on a yarmulke and denouncing anti-Semitism is not the same as actually fighting against bigotry and for equal opportunity.

The fact is that throughout his career, Walter Mondale has been a champion of civil rights and social justice. He has been with you for as long as Ronald Reagan has been against you.

Walter Mondale was working for equal justice and against discrimination when Ronald Reagan was Richard Nixon's pen pal, comparing John F. Kennedy to Adolf Hitler and Karl Marx. And he'll keep working for those goals after Ronald Reagan has cozied up again to the Falwells, the Robisons and the Swaggerts.

The second thing President Reagan said was that he sent American troops into Beirut in 1983 to prevent another Holocaust of Jews. He said the Jewish battle cry "never again," should be (QUOTE) "impressed on those who question why we went on a peacekeeping mission to Lebanon."

I don't know which is more troubling: the President's ignorance of the facts or his cynical exploitation of the Holocaust. The plain fact is that Marines were sent to Beirut the first time not to protect Israel, but to oversee and protect the safe withdrawal of the PLO from that city.

Can it be that the President doesn't know that? Is it that he knew once and has now forgotten? Or is it simply that he has never understood or been able to explain what our brave Marines were doing in that country and is willing to use their sacrifice for whatever he can make of it.

I don't need to have the battle cry "never again" impressed on me simply because I questioned -- and I still question -- why our Marines were sent on a mission that was never defined, for a purpose that was never explained, to a position that they could not defend.

We all understand what "never again" means. What we have waited in vain for during the last four years has been the vision and the leadership to make that promise real.

For nearly four years, we awaited support for ratification of the Genocide Treaty. Harry Truman and every President since John F. Kennedy has supported it. The Democratic Party Platform promises a fight for ratification. But the Republicans have been silent, and Ronald Reagan waited until the day before Walter Mondale spoke to the B'nai Brith in September to endorse the treaty.

I say we have waited long enough.

For nearly four years, we have waited for a response to the plight of Soviet Jews. In 1979, 51,000 Jews were permitted to leave the Soviet Union. So far this year, only 750 have been let free, and official anti-Semitism within the Soviet Union has intensified. The fact is that this Administration has put human rights everywhere -- for Soviet Jews as well as South African blacks -- on the back burner. And the cause of human dignity everywhere has suffered.

I say we have waited long enough. Under President Mondale, we will

support the cause of human rights not just in the Soviet Union and Poland, but also in El Salvador, South Africa, and the Philippines.

For nearly four years, we have waited and watched as the promise of Camp David was squandered. The best insurance against the destruction of Israel is lasting peace in the Middle East, not arms sales to the Arab states and ill-conceived efforts to pressure Israeli leaders.

I say we have waited long enough. President Mondale will re-capture the spirit of Camp David and once again make America's relationship with Israel the cornerstone of our Middle East policy. He will prove that strong personal leadership, understanding, and commitment can bring peace.

We have waited four years for firm action against terrorism, so that never again will we have to witness the slaughter of innocents. But this Administration's incredible failure to protect Americans abroad or take firm action against those who harm them has encouraged terrorists everywhere.

Even now, the Administration cannot speak with one voice. In the last few days, the Vice-President, the Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor have publicly squabbled over what our policy towards terrorism should be, while the President has stood by passively.

The intra-mural debate is shocking and it is disturbing. The Administration's arguing and uncertainty weakens America just when the

President's failures have heartened our enemies.

I say we have waited long enough. We need a President who protects Americans and who resolutely deals with terrorism. We need a President who takes charge.

I say it's time for Walter Mondale. He will bring strength where now there is confusion, principles instead of indifference, understanding instead of ignorance, and tolerance instead of narrow ideology.

He will keep government out of religion at home, and put concern for human rights back into our policies abroad. He will stand up for the rights of Soviet Jews and he will stand up against terrorists and their patrons. He will work ardently for peace in the Middle East and against those who would interfere with our most private thoughts and choices.

All his life, Walter Mondale has been as consistent and steady in his support of Israel as he has been in fighting anti-Semitism and all forms of racism here at home.

You know where he's going, because you know where he's been.

Think about what you're doing on election day. I know what I'm doing. I'm voting for you, for my children, and for my children's children.