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Providence Rally Speech

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INAL

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

SEPTEMBER 29, 1984

Thank you, Anthony, for your kind introduction. In Anthony Solomon, Rhode Island Democrats have a candidate who can guide this state confidently into the future ... Governor Solomon. I think that's got a great ring to it.

I want to thank tutimi paisani for coming out here this evening ... Bonnie Cimino (sa-MEE-no), who will bring competence and honesty to the Secretary of State's office ... Mayor Joe Paolino (pay-oh-LEE-no) ... former Senator John Pastore, a man who proved to the people of Rhode Island that Italian-Americans could provide the kind of leadership that we can all be proud of ... and Claiborne Pello, whose Pell Grants have sent so many children to college.

Let me ask a question: anybody out there proud to be an Italian-American? I thought so. Now let me tell you something...

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I can't think of any place I'd rather be than on the steps of your magnificent state capitol. Well, maybe one place ... it looks a lot like this building behind me, but it's called the U.S. Capitol. On January 21st, I'll stand on those steps and take the oath of office as this nation's first woman Vice President.

And when I take the oath of office for my second term as Vice President, I want to swear to uphold a Constitution that includes the Equal Rights Amendment.

The pollsters and pundits say we can't win. But I want to take my own scientific, objective survey right here.

Are we going to win in November?

Are we going to send Walter Mondale to the White House and Ronald Reagan back to the ranch?

A few days ago, George Bush asked a crowd in Ohio: "Do you know what wins elections?" And he answered that question by pulling out his wallet and saying: "It's who puts money into this and who takes money out."

That says it all. That single gesture of selfishness tells us more about the true character of this Administration than all their apple pie rhetoric. Of course we care about money. But let's get something straight: this is an election, not an auction. And the United States government is not up for sale to the highest bidder.

You also care about war and peace. I want a President who will negotiate a mutual, verifiable nuclear freeze, and bring an end to the arms race.

You care about leadership that knows when to use force, but also knows when it should not be used. In Central America, we're militarizing a conflict that should be solved by peaceful means, and we're Americanizing a conflict that is primarily local. It's time to stop the covert war in Nicaragua.

You care about your fellow Americans who are defending this nation overseas. And lately, you have reason to be worried for their safety.

More Marines have been killed in Lebanon in the last 17 months than anywhere else since Vietnam. There have been three bombings. The first time, the gate was open. The second time, the gate was unguarded. The third time, the gate wasn't even there.

The first incident was a tragedy; the second showed neglect; and the third is a disgrace.

What has been just as disgraceful is the President's handling of this disaster. Leaders are tested in moments of crisis, not in prepaid commercials. And at this moment, President Reagan is failing the critical test.

He is casting blame, not accepting responsibility. He is running from his mistakes, not learning from them. He is repenting his errors, not correcting them.

I want a President who admits his mistakes and learns from them. I want a President who protects American lives first, and not his own image.

You also care about an educational system that helps our children meet the challenges of the world. Ronald Reagan wants to cut education funds, and he wants to launch a teacher into space. But I say it's time to help students and teachers here on earth.

You care about equal opportunity. Ronald Reagan has dragged his feet on the Voting Rights Act and tried to subvert the Civil Rights Commission.

I say we should support our civil rights laws, not segregated academies.

You care about the environment. There's nothing in George Bush's wallet that says you want to save Narragansett Bay. But you do, and so do I.

Let's elect a President who takes polluters to court, not to lunch.

Finally, you care about those who live in the shadows of life: the disadvantaged and the sick.

I suspect that most people here were raised in strong families where you were taught, as I was, to care for your siblings. You would no sooner let a brother or sister suffer without coming to his or her aid than you would betray this country or break the law. And yet, on a national scale, that is exactly what this Administration is doing.

First, the President has added to the suffering of the elderly by cutting Social Security and raising the costs of health care for Medicare recipients. I know that Reagan's deficits must come down. And the budget must be squeezed. But I'd be ashamed of myself if the first people I cut, and the ones I repeatedly cut, were senior citizens.

They have a right to live in dignity. And Walter Mondale and I will protect that right by preserving Social Security.

Second, the Reagan Administration's Social Security disability policy sentenced almost half a million people to poverty. When those disabled people said "help us," Reagan said "sue us," and then he cut the legal aid programs that would have helped them to do it. I'm glad we have judges and a Congress with compassion, because this Administration has a calculator where its heart should be.

Third, when it comes to veterans, that calculator only knows how to subtract. If you're a veteran suffering from Agent Orange poisoning, this Administration fought your compensation. If you're a young veteran in need of counselling, this President said we can't afford it. And if you're one of almost one million veterans who need a job, he said try the want ads.

I want a government that relies on soldiers in war and is grateful to soldiers in peace.

And when the fighting ends, let's remember that veterans do not have a narrow outlook. This President goes to veterans' groups and talks to them only about increasing the military budget -- as if veterans didn't have children, whose education mattered; as if they didn't believe in controlling the arms race; as if they didn't depend on Social Security.

Leaders should tell people not just what people want to hear, but also what they need to know. Veterans as well as others need to know that we cannot continue this massive military build-up and also support education, preserve Social Security, and pay for Medicare. And to say we can do all that at once is not levelling with the American people.

The people of Providence want the truth, not a commercial. You want a President who puts his cards on the table, not up his sleeve. You want straight talk and strong leadership, and that's what you'll get from Fritz Mondale.

That kind of leadership will make a difference. There are many ways to serve this country, not just one. There are many forms of patriotism, not just one. And the least worthy kind of patriotism is a commercial of swelling music and sweeping vistas made on Madison Avenue.

No one is more proud of this country than I am; no one is more patriotic than an immigrant's daughter nominated by her party to be Vice President of the United States.

When Walter Mondale made the decision to put me on the ticket, an old barrier came crashing down -- and tearing down barriers of prejudice is a patriotic act.

When we educate our children, we build our country's future -- and that's a patriotic act.

When we help our elderly and our veterans, we repay them for their contributions -- and that's a patriotic act.

When we keep the peace, young men don't die -- that's a patriotic act.

When we pass the Equal Rights Amendment, we open doors everywhere -- and that's a patriotic act.

When we finally stop the arms race, we'll enhance our safety -- and that will be a patriotic act.

The time to begin that work is not later. It's now.

The time to register new voters is not later. It's now.

The time to clean up our environment is not later. It's now.

The time to freeze the arms race and stop the covert war in Nicaragua is not later. It's now.

The time for Fritz Mondale to become President and Gerry Ferraro to become Vice President is not later. It's now.