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Portland Speech: Press Release Version

Geraldine Ferraro

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REMARKS OF GERALDINE FERRARO

PORTLAND, OREGON

I am thrilled to be here. But this campaign is doing more than generate excitement. We're trying to open a serious debate. I have learned in the last six weeks that nothing is more fun than giving a speech that draws applause and laughter. But time is short, the stakes are high. We must discuss the critical issues. And the single most important issue -- the one that brings me to Portland today -- is the issue of war and peace.

Yesterday George Bush attacked Walter Mondale's stand on the defense budget, even though he later admitted that he did not know what our position is -- which is for a strong defense.

He also blamed Fritz Mondale for causing the break-down in arms talks with the Soviet Union. Now that's a good one. Mr. Reagan is the first President since Herbert Hoover not to sit down with his counterpart from the Soviet Union. He's the first President since the dawn of the nuclear age not to enter into an arms/control agreement. And his Vice President blames Walter Mondale, who has worked all his public life for controlling nuclear weapons.

Let's get this straight. The responsibility for the stalemate on arms control and the rising risk we face rests on the shoulders of two men -- the leader of the Soviet Union and the President of the United States. And the American people know that. They will not buy the politics of blame. They expect leadership from their leaders. And after three and a half years of continuing the arms race, they want a leader like Fritz Mondale who will negotiate a mutual, verifiable, nuclear freeze.

I don't want to spend the fall correcting the misstatements of Mr. Bush and Mr. Reagan. But that's what I'll do until they start leveling with people. Better yet, if Mr. Bush would agree to a debate with me, I could correct them all at once and get on with the campaign.

At the top of the agenda in the debate would be war and peace. Everyone wants peace. There's no argument there. But to keep the peace a President must work against war. And the question is, are we doing everything we can to strengthen our country, protect our safety, and reduce the risk of war?

I think the answer to that basic question is no.

Right now, the preparedness of our forces is in appalling shape. We should be spending less on strategic weapons and more on conventional forces, especially training, maintenance, and spare parts.

Right now, military procurement is in shambles. This President never saw a weapon he didn't like. At a time of two hundred billion dollar deficits, we need a President who chooses carefully and spends wisely.

We also need one who gets his money's worth. Under Reagan, the Pentagon has paid \$1100 for plastic stool caps that cost 22 cents. It has bought a simple 13 cent nut for two thousand dollars. At this rate, if Ronald Reagan went up to the corner hardware store on a Saturday afternoon, he'd come back with a tool box costing half a million dollars. And then he'd go home and blame his financial problems on the cost of food and housing.

I have ^Wnes for him: Whatever we have lost to the few dishonorable people who take advantage of the food stamp program doesn't hold a candle to the millions ripped off by defense contractors in the name of national security. I want the strongest possible national defense.

I want a President who not only roots out waste, fraud and abuse just in social programs. Let's stop the waste in defense programs too.

Right now, at least thirteen wars and civil wars are being waged around the world. In Kampuchea, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, the Western Sahara, Chad and elsewhere, a total of two million people are fighting and dying as we meet here today. Central America has become an isthmus of instability. Lebanon is a land of distrust, discord, and more violence than since the Crusades. Iran and Iraq are killing a whole generation of youngsters.

Teddy Roosevelt made peace between Russia and Japan, and Jimmy Carter made peace between Israel and Egypt. But Ronald Reagan has done nothing to stop these conflicts. He's not had a single diplomatic success in three and a half years. I want a President who pays attention to the world around him, who defuses tensions, and who brings belligerents to the bargaining table. And that's what we'll get in Fritz Mondale.

Why should we take an active role in resolving conflicts? For two reasons. First, out of plain human decency. As my governor, Mario Cuomo said, peace is better than war because life is better than death. Second, because at any moment one of those thirteen conflicts could drag the United States into conflict as well.

We're not uninvolved just because we're at peace. In every one of the thirteen conflicts now raging, at least one of the Superpowers is sending money, weapons, or both. This Administration has increased its spending on military aid five times as fast as it's spending on development aid.

That is a disgrace. I would like to see us feeding the hungry, not just arming the warriors. I want us to stop spending so much on the worldwide arms race, and start spending more on the human race.

Today, we are deeply involved in world conflict, but not in the effort to stop it. If we really wanted to help prevent wars, the first thing we would do is understand the conditions that breed them.

The Soviet government is a repressive, cynical regime. It tries to exploit and take advantage of conflicts. But the Russians are not the only force at work in these conflicts, nor are they always the original cause. The people of El Salvador and of Lebanon - just like the people of Vietnam, a decade ago -- have their own history, their own culture, their own beliefs, and their own problems. And the best way to keep the Soviets from exploiting regional conflicts is not just by opposing Soviet expansionism, but by understanding and helping to solve people's problems.

Sadly, we're not doing that today. In Central America, we are militarizing a conflict which might be resolved by peaceful negotiation. And we are Americanizing a conflict which is primarily local. Fritz Mondale and I will work with the Contradora nations for a negotiated settlement to the war in El Salvador. We'll condition assistance to that country on progress toward social justice. And we'll stop the covert aid to the Contras in Nicaragua.

The purpose of that support has not been defined, cannot be justified, and should not be continued. And Fritz Mondale and I will end it.

Nor was our mission in Beirut ever adequately explained. Our leaders made a mistake, and over 250 young men paid for it with their lives. It was horrible when those men died: but it was an outrage that they died for no reason.

A President must know where to use force and when, but he must also know where it should not be used. Let's send in the diplomats before the Marines. Let's try negotiation before confrontation. Let's understand the world before we arm it. And let's be sure the next time we send our men into combat we have a good reason to send them.

Hot spots are threats to peace -- and so are two other global time-bombs.

First, our long-term security will be denied so long as freedom is denied to people in other countries.

Today, black South Africans are demanding their rights and yesterday 29 of them died for their rights -- but this Administration doesn't hear them. Three quarters of the world's population lives in poverty -- but this Administration doesn't see them. People in other lands want the same human rights you and I enjoy -- but this Administration doesn't feel for them.

This indifference to the plight of others is short-sighted and it is wrong. As President Kennedy once said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."

Fritz Mondale and I will promote that peaceful revolution by backing human rights. And we'll tell the South African government that if they want long-term, friendly relations with the United States, then at last apartheid must end.

Finally, both peace and safety are threatened by the arms race. Over the last twenty years, both the Soviet Union and the United States have added thousands of new weapons to our arsenals. And both sides are less safe, not more safe, than twenty years ago.

This expensive, lethal madness must end. If Mr. Reagan won't stop exchanging insults with the Soviets, and start exchanging serious negotiating proposals, then it's time to exchange this President for one who will.

That President will be Fritz Mondale. In 1969, Fritz Mondale opposed the development of multiple warhead missiles. He lost the fight, but he was right. Today the world is more dangerous because of MIRVS.

In the 1970s, he worked to strengthen the ban against testing nuclear weapons. He fought proliferation. He pushed SALT TWO. He was the first presidential candidate to endorse the nuclear freeze. And he's leading the fight against extending the arms race to space.

Walter Mondale is a leader for a saner world. When he sits down with the Soviets, they will know that they're up against a man who enjoys the full support of the allies and of Americans -- because of his commitment to arms control.

They'll sit opposite an adversary who has mastered the complexities of nuclear weapons. They'll have to deal with a man who understands the world and knows what he's doing. They'll face a president who has both the capacity and the commitment to negotiate serious arms control.

With that kind of President in the White House, we'll reduce the risk of nuclear war. That's the best reason to vote for Fritz Mondale.

In all these ways, Fritz Mondale will strengthen our country. And that's the goal that unites all Americans. We are a great and powerful country. If we help others less fortunate, we can be even greater.

We have a strong, imposing defense. If we make the right military choices, our defense can be even stronger.

We are more secure than almost any other nation on earth. If we understand other people and help cool hot spots, we can be even safer.

We are a good and decent people -- the best country on earth. If we take the lead and freeze the arms race, we will do a service to ourselves and humanity without parallel.

I ask you to join with Fritz Mondale and me in that quest for a safer world. The time to build it is not later. It's now.

The time to freeze the arms race is not later. It's now.

And the time for Fritz Mondale is not later. It's now.