

Remarks on Presenting the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Awards March 6, 1996

Thank you. Let me say how delighted I am to be here today to be a part of this again. I want to begin by thanking a few people. First I'd like to thank Secretary Brown and all the others who are here from the Commerce Department for, I think, giving this country the best Commerce Department it has had in many, many decades, and I thank them for that. Mr. Houghton and Mr. Bradshaw, I thank you and all your team for coming here today. And we want to especially welcome Mr. Houghton's brother, Congress' most prominent musician—[laughter]—Congressman Amo Houghton from New York. I thank the Baldrige Foundation; its Chair, Bob Allen, is here. Thank you, sir, for your work. I want to thank the people in the White House who are my eyes and ears in outreach to the American business community, Mack McLarty and Alexis Herman.

Let me say, I have some remarks here I decided not to give because I want to just tell you a little bit from the heart what this means to me. When I became President I had worked for 12 years as a Governor, starting in a State with an unemployment rate that was 3 percent above the national average and that never got down to the national average but one month until 1992, the last year I served. We decided that we had to build a partnership with business. We decided that America would not do well unless manufacturing came back. And we decided to put a special emphasis on the whole quality management approach, to make people who were committed to that feel welcome in our State. In the 1980's when there was a dramatic drop in manufacturing employment nationwide, it went up in our State. And we were proud of it, and we worked on it.

So I am very familiar with the Baldrige Award, with the memory of Secretary Baldrige and all those in both parties who have supported this award since its inception. And I just want to say a few words about what the significance of this is.

There's a lot of discussion today about whether things are good or bad in the American economy. The truth is, there's a lot of good, and there's some bad, because, as all of you know who are working in this arena, we are going

through a period of breathtaking change, the most dramatic change in a hundred years, since we became an industrial society from an agricultural one. And that is forming great changes in the nature of work—there's more mind and less muscle in it—great changes in the nature of the workplace—there's not a person to waste, there has to be very high levels of productivity—great changes in the market—all the markets for money products and services are global now, either directly or indirectly. And that has put great new challenges on our society.

We should not underestimate, first of all, the importance of a commitment to productivity and to quality. It is the revolution which has occurred in American manufacturing, I am convinced, that has led the way to giving us the kind of economy, with declining deficits and lower interest rates, which has permitted the United States to create 7.7 million new jobs in the last 3 years, when the other 6 big economies in the G-7, together, have netted out at zero. It is not easy to create new jobs in the beginning of this technological revolution. So I cannot tell you how important that is.

The second thing I want to say is that that has been a model for me for what we should do in Government. Our State, when I was a Governor, had the first quality management program of any State government. And the Vice President's reinventing Government operation here has obviously had a significant impact on not only reducing the size of Government to its lowest in 30 years, getting rid of 16,000 pages of regulation but, more important, raising the performance level in many, many agencies.

The third thing I want to say is that one of the ways we have to manage this transition is to continue to create more good high-wage jobs. And we can do that through the passage of specific legislation, as we did with the telecommunications bill, which passed with virtually the unanimous support of the Congress, Members of both parties, and which I believe and Secretary Brown believes will create millions of new jobs. That directly affects, obviously, Corning and this specific division, but it will indirectly affect all of America if we can create 3 to 3½ million more high-wage jobs. It will

help people undergoing transitions in other companies to move to those new jobs.

The third point I want to make is that both of these companies have proved that you can have the right sort of partnership with the Government. The Secretary mentioned that both of them had done work with NIST, which is our technology division within the Commerce Department. The Commerce Department has done two things better than any predecessor, I believe, thanks to Secretary Brown and the others who work there. First of all, they've done a better job in opening the doors around the world for American businesses and American products. And secondly, they have tried to help, in a very effective way, manage the transition by investing in partnership with the private sector in important emerging areas of technology. And that is very important. That's the sort of thing Government ought to do, not deciding exactly how this economy will grow, not picking winners and losers but working with the private sector to provide that extra added measure of cooperation in the new technologies that will enable us to win.

The final thing I want to say is this. These two companies—and I want to say a special word here about Armstrong. Henry said that, well, Armstrong was not—it was a traditional manufacturing company, not a high-tech company. All manufacturing operations that are going to succeed have to be high performance companies. And they have to get the most out of their people. And they are managing this transition in the same way I'm convinced we

have to manage it here: teamwork. The people who aren't here whose names we'll never know are just as important as the people who are here in the fact that these two companies won these awards today.

And that's something we need to keep in mind here in Washington. If we had more teamwork we would be more successful at giving the American people a higher return on their tax dollar and in moving more quickly through this transition. That is what works. And in a time of transition you simply don't have the luxury of engaging in politics as usual, just like you can't engage in business as usual.

So that's the significance of this day to me. It's the validation of years and years of effort by people who believe in quality management. It's the validation of the proposition that we can create new opportunities for Americans if we work together to move into the future instead of running away from it. It proves that there is a proper role for the Nation's Government in a limited supportive way to help to create new economic opportunities. And most important, it shows that when we work together, we never lose.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:10 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to James R. Houghton, chairman and chief executive officer, Corning, Inc., and Henry A. Bradshaw, president, Armstrong World Industries' Building Products Operations.

Statement on the Report of the White House Conference on Aging *March 6, 1996*

I was gratified today to receive the final report of the White House Conference on Aging, a comprehensive look at aging policy in America developed over 2 years with the input of more than 125,000 men and women. My deep thanks and appreciation go out to all of those Americans who contributed to this incredible grass-roots effort.

These recommendations, which demonstrate strong support for many of the priorities I have been fighting for, including the preservation and protection of Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, will be given every serious consideration by my administration.