

Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994)

Address of Senator Nixon to the American People: The "Checkers Speech"

given on September 23, 1952

My Fellow Americans:

I come before you tonight as a candidate for the Vice Presidency and as a man whose honesty and integrity has been questioned.

Now, the usual political thing to do when charges are made against you is to either ignore them or to deny them without giving details. I believe we've had enough of that in the United States, particularly with the present Administration in Washington, D.C. To me the office of the Vice Presidency of the United States is a great office, and I feel that the people have got to have confidence in the integrity of the men who run for that office and who might obtain it.

I have a theory, too, that the best and only answer to a smear or to an honest misunderstanding of the facts is to tell the truth. And that's why I am here tonight. I want to tell you my side of the case. I'm sure that you have read the charge, and you've heard it, that I, Senator Nixon, took \$18,000 from a group of my supporters.

Now, was that wrong? And let me say that it was wrong. I am saying it, incidentally, that it was wrong, just not illegal, because it isn't a question of whether it was legal or illegal, that isn't enough. The question is, was it morally wrong? I say that it was morally wrong -- if any of that \$18,000 went to Senator Nixon, for my personal use. I say that it was morally wrong if it was secretly given, and secretly handled. And I say that it was morally wrong if any of the contributors got special favors for the contributions that they made.

And now to answer those questions let me say this: not one cent of the \$18,000 or any other money of that type ever went to me for my personal use. Every penny of it was used to pay for political expenses that I did not think should be charged to the taxpayers of the United States. It was not a secret fund. As a matter of fact, when I was on "Meet the Press"-- some of you may have seen it last Sunday -- Peter Edson came up to me after the program, and he said, "Dick, what about this fund we hear about?" And I said, "Well, there is no secret about it. Go out and see Dana Smith who was the administrator of the fund." And I gave him [Edson] his [Smith's] address. And I said you will find that the purpose of the fund simply was to defray political expenses that I did not feel should be charged to the Government. And third, let me point out -- and I want to make this particularly clear -- that no contributor to this fund, no contributor to any of my campaigns, has ever received any consideration that he would not have received as an ordinary constituent.

I just don't believe in that, and I can say that never, while I have been in the Senate of the United States, as far as the people that contributed to this fund are concerned, have I made a telephone call for them to an agency, or have I gone down to an agency on their behalf. And the records will show that, the records which are in the hands of the administration.

Well, then, some of you will say, and rightly, "Well, what did you use the fund for, Senator? Why did you have to have it?" Let me tell you in just a word how a Senate office operates. First of all, a Senator gets \$15,000 a year in salary. He gets enough money to pay for one trip a year, a round trip, that is, for himself, and his family between his home and Washington, D.C. And then he gets an allowance to handle the people that work in his office to handle his mail. And the allowance for my State of California, is enough to hire 13 people. And let me say, incidentally, that that allowance is not paid to the Senator. It is paid directly to the individuals that the Senator puts on his pay roll. But all of these people and all of these allowances are for strictly official business; business, for example, when a constituent writes in and wants you to go down to the Veteran's Administration and get some information about his GI policy -- items of that type, for example. But there are other expenses that are not covered by the Government. And I think I can best discuss those expenses by asking you some questions.

Do you think that when I or any other senator makes a political speech, has it printed, should charge the printing of that speech and the mailing of that speech to the taxpayers? Do you think, for example, when I or any other Senator makes a trip to his home State to make a purely political speech that the cost of that trip should be charged to the taxpayers? Do you think when a Senator makes political broadcasts or political television broadcasts, radio or television, that the expense of those broadcasts should be charged to the taxpayers? Well I know what your answer is. It's the same answer that audiences give me whenever I discuss this particular problem: The answer is no. The taxpayers shouldn't be required to finance items which are not official business but which are primarily political

business.

Well, then the question arises, you say, "Well, how do you pay for these and how can you do it legally?" And there are
50 several ways that it can be done, incidentally, and it is done legally in the United States Senate and in the Congress.
The first way is to be a rich man. I don't happen to be a rich man, so I couldn't use that one. Another way that is used
is to put your wife on the pay roll. Let me say, incidentally, that my opponent, my opposite number for the Vice
Presidency on the Democratic ticket, does have his wife on the pay roll and has had her on his pay roll for the past ten
years. Now let me just say this: That's his business, and I'm not critical of him for doing that. You will have to pass
55 judgment on that particular point.

But I have never done that for this reason: I have found that there are so many deserving stenographers and secretaries
in Washington that needed the work that I just didn't feel it was right to put my wife on the pay roll. My wife's sitting
over here. She is a wonderful stenographer. She used to teach stenography and she used to teach shorthand in high
school. That was when I met her. And I can tell you folks that she's worked many hours at night and many hours on
60 Saturdays and Sundays in my office, and she's done a fine job, and I am proud to say tonight that in the six years I
have been in the House and the Senate of the United States, Pat Nixon has never been on the Government pay roll.

What are other ways that these finances can be taken care of? Some who are lawyers, and I happen to be a lawyer,
continue to practice law, but I haven't been able to do that. I am so far away from California that I have been so busy
with my senatorial work that I have not engaged in any legal practice, and, also, as far as law practice is concerned, it
65 seemed to me that the relationship between an attorney and the client was so personal that you couldn't possibly
represent a man as an attorney and then have an unbiased view when he presented his case to you in the event that he
had one before Government.

And so I felt that the best way to handle these necessary political expenses of getting my message to the American
people and the speeches I made -- the speeches I had printed for the most part concerned this one message of exposing
70 this Administration, the Communism in it, the corruption in it -- the only way that I could do that was to accept the aid
which people in my home State of California, who contributed to my campaign and who continued to make these
contributions after I was elected, were glad to make.

And let me say I am proud of the fact that not one of them has ever asked me for a special favor. I am proud of the fact
that not one of them has ever asked me to vote on a bill other than my own conscience would dictate. And I am proud
75 of the fact that the taxpayers by subterfuge or otherwise have never paid one dime for expenses which I thought were
political and shouldn't be charged to the taxpayers.

Let me say, incidentally, that some of you may say, "Well, that is all right, Senator, that's your explanation, but have
you got any proof?" And I'd like to tell you this evening that just an hour ago we received an independent audit of this
entire fund. I suggested to Governor Sherman Adams, who is the chief of staff of the Dwight Eisenhower campaign,
80 that an independent audit and legal report be obtained, and I have that audit in my hands. It's an audit made by the
Price Waterhouse & Co. firm, and the legal opinion by Gibson, Dunn, & Crutcher, lawyers in Los Angeles, the
biggest law firm, and incidentally, one of the best ones in Los Angeles.

I am proud to be able to report to you tonight that this audit and this legal opinion is being forwarded to General
Eisenhower. And I'd like to read to you the opinion that was prepared by Gibson, Dunn, & Crutcher, and based on all
85 the pertinent laws and statutes, together with the audit report prepared by the certified public accountants:

"It is our conclusion that Senator Nixon did not obtain any financial gain from the collection and disbursement of the
fund by Dana Smith; that Senator Nixon did not violate any federal or state law by reason of the operation of the fund;
and that neither the portion of the fund paid by Dana Smith directly to third persons, nor the portion paid to Senator
Nixon, to reimburse him for designated office expenses, constituted income to the Senator which was either reportable
90 or taxable as income under applicable tax laws."

(signed)

Gibson, Dunn, & Crutcher,

by Elmo H. Conley

Now that, my friends, is not Nixon speaking, but that's an independent audit which was requested, because I want the
95 American people to know all the facts, and I am not afraid of having independent people go in and check the facts, and

that is exactly what they did. But then I realized that there are still some who may say, and rightly so -- and let me say that I recognize that some will continue to smear regardless of what the truth may be -- but that there has been understandably, some honest misunderstanding on this matter, and there are some that will say, "Well, maybe you were able, Senator, to fake the thing. How can we believe what you say? After all, is there a possibility that maybe
100 you got some sums in cash? Is there a possibility that you might have feathered your own nest?" And so now, that I am going to do -- and incidentally this is unprecedented in the history of American politics -- I am going at this time to give to this television and radio audience, a complete financial history, everything I've earned, everything I've spent, everything I own. And I want you to know the facts.

I'll have to start early. I was born in 1913. Our family was one of modest circumstances, and most of my early life was
105 spent in a store out in East Whittier. It was a grocery store, one of those family enterprises. The only reason we were able to make it go was because my mother and dad had five boys, and we all worked in the store. I worked my way through college, and, to a great extent, through law school. And then in 1940, probably the best thing that ever happened to me happened. I married Pat who is sitting over here. We had a rather difficult time after we were married, like so many of the young couples who may be listening to us. I practiced law. She continued to teach school.

110 Then, in 1942, I went into the service. Let me say that my service record was not a particularly unusual one. I went to the South Pacific. I guess I'm entitled to a couple of battle stars. I got a couple of letters of commendation. But I was just there when the bombs were falling. And then I returned -- returned to the United States, and in 1946, I ran for the Congress. When we came out of the war -- Pat and I -- Pat during the war had worked as a stenographer, and in a bank, and as an economist for a Government agency -- and when we came out, the total of our savings, from both my
115 law practice, her teaching and all the time I was in the war, the total for that entire period was just a little less than \$10,000 -- every cent of that, incidentally, was in Government bonds. Well that's where we start, when I go into politics.

Now, what have I earned since I went into politics? Well, here it is. I've jotted it down. Let me read the notes. First of all, I have had my salary as a Congressman and as a Senator. Second, I have received a total in this past six years of
120 \$1,600 from estates which were in my law firm at the time that I severed my connection with it. And, incidentally, as I said before, I have not engaged in any legal practice and have not accepted any fees from business that came into the firm after I went into politics. I have made an average of approximately \$1,500 a year from nonpolitical speaking engagements and lectures.

And then, fortunately, we have inherited little money. Pat sold her interest in her father's estate for \$3,000, and I
125 inherited \$1,500 from my grandfather. We lived rather modestly. For four years we lived in an apartment in Parkfairfax, in Alexandria Virginia. The rent was \$80.00 a month. And we saved for the time that we could buy a house. Now, that was what we took in. What did we do with this money? What do we have today to show for it? This will surprise you because it is so little, I suppose, as standards generally go of people in public life.

First of all, we've got a house in Washington, which cost \$41,000 and on which we owe \$20,000. We have a house in
130 Whittier, California which cost \$13,000 and on which we owe \$3,000. My folks are living there at the present time. I have just \$4,000 in life insurance, plus my GI policy which I've never been able to convert, and which will run out in two years. I have no life insurance whatever on Pat. I have no life insurance on our two youngsters Tricia and Julie. I own a 1950 Oldsmobile car. We have our furniture. We have no stocks and bonds of any type. We have no interest of any kind, direct or indirect, in any business. Now, that's what we have. What do we owe?

135 Well in addition to the mortgage, the \$20,000 mortgage on the house in Washington, the \$10,000 one on the house in Whittier, I owe \$4500 to the Riggs Bank in Washington, D.C., with interest 4 and 1/2 percent. I owe \$3,500 to my parents, and the interest on that loan, which I pay regularly, because it's a part of the savings they made through the years they were working so hard -- I pay regularly 4 percent interest. And then I have a \$500 loan, which I have on my life insurance.

140 Well, that's about it. That's what we have. And that's what we owe. It isn't very much. But Pat and I have the satisfaction that every dime that we've got is honestly ours. I should say this, that Pat doesn't have a mink coat. But she does have a respectable Republican cloth coat, and I always tell her she'd look good in anything.

One other thing I probably should tell you, because if I don't they'll probably be saying this about me, too. We did get something, a gift, after the election. A man down in Texas heard Pat on the radio mention the fact that our two
145 youngsters would like to have a dog. And believe it or not, the day before we left on this campaign trip we got a message from Union Station in Baltimore, saying they had a package for us. We went down to get it. You know what it was? It was a little cocker spaniel dog, in a crate that he had sent all the way from Texas, black and white, spotted,

and our little girl Tricia, the six year old, named it Checkers. And you know, the kids, like all kids, love the dog, and I just want to say this, right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it.

150 It isn't easy to come before a nationwide audience and bare your life, as I've done. But I want to say some things before I conclude, that I think most of you will agree on. Mr. Mitchell, the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, made this statement that if a man couldn't afford to be in the United States Senate, he shouldn't run for the Senate. And I just want to make my position clear. I don't agree with Mr. Mitchell when he says that only a rich man should serve his Government in the United States Senate or in the Congress. I don't believe that represents the
155 thinking of the Democratic Party, and I know that it doesn't represent the thinking of the Republican Party.

I believe that it's fine that a man like Governor Stevenson, who inherited a fortune from his father, can run for President. But I also feel that it's essential in this country of ours that a man of modest means can also run for President, because, you know, remember Abraham Lincoln, you remember what he said: "God must have loved the common people -- he made so many of them."

160 And now I'm going to suggest some courses of conduct. First of all, you have read in the papers about other funds, now, Mr. Stevenson apparently had a couple. One of them in which a group of business people paid and helped to supplement the salaries of State employees. Here is where the money went directly into their pockets, and I think that what Mr. Stevenson should do should be to come before the American people, as I have, give the names of the people that contributed to that fund, give the names of the people who put this money into their pockets at the same time that
165 they were receiving money from their State government and see what favors, if any, they gave out for that.

I don't condemn Mr. Stevenson for what he did, but until the facts are in there is a doubt that will be raised. And as far as Mr. Sparkman is concerned, I would suggest the same thing. He's had his wife on the pay roll. I don't condemn him for that, but I think that he should come before the American people and indicate what outside sources of income he has had. I would suggest that under the circumstances both Mr. Sparkman and Mr. Stevenson should come before the
170 American people, as I have, and make a complete financial statement as to their financial history, and if they don't it will be an admission that they have something to hide. And I think you will agree with me -- because, folks, remember, a man that's to be President of the United States, a man that's to be Vice President of the United States, must have the confidence of all the people. And that's why I'm doing what I'm doing. And that's why I suggest that Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Sparkman, since they are under attack, should do what they're doing.

175 Now let me say this: I know that this is not the last of the smears. In spite of my explanation tonight, other smears will be made. Others have been made in the past. And the purpose of the smears, I know, is this, to silence me, to make me let up. Well, they just don't know who they're dealing with. I'm going to tell you this: I remember in the dark days of the Hiss case some of the same columnists, some of the same radio commentators who are attacking me now and misrepresenting my position, were violently opposing me at the time I was after Alger Hiss. But I continued to fight
180 because I knew I was right, and I can say to this great television and radio audience that I have no apologies to the American people for my part in putting Alger Hiss where he is today. And as far as this is concerned, I intend to continue to fight.

Why do I feel so deeply? Why do I feel that in spite of the smears, the misunderstanding, the necessity for a man to come up here and bare his soul as I have? Why is it necessary for me to continue this fight? And I want to tell you
185 why. Because, you see, I love my country. And I think my country is in danger. And I think the only man that can save America at this time is the man that's running for President, on my ticket -- Dwight Eisenhower. You say, "Why do I think it is in danger?" And I say, look at the record. Seven years of the Truman-Acheson Administration, and what's happened? Six hundred million people lost to Communists. And a war in Korea in which we have lost 117,000 American casualties, and I say to all of you that a policy that results in the loss of 600 million people to the
190 Communists, and a war that cost us 117,000 American casualties isn't good enough for America. And I say that those in the State Department that made the mistakes which caused that war and which resulted in those losses should be kicked out of the State Department just as fast as we get them out of there.

And let me say that I know Mr. Stevenson won't do that because he defends the Truman policy, and I know that Dwight Eisenhower will do that, and that he will give America the leadership that it needs. Take the problem of
195 corruption. You've read about the mess in Washington. Mr. Stevenson can't clean it up because he was picked by the man, Truman, under whose Administration the mess was made.

You wouldn't trust the man who made the mess to clean it up. That's Truman. And by the same token you can't trust the man who was picked by the man who made the mess to clean it up and that's Stevenson. And so I say, Eisenhower, who owes nothing to Truman, nothing to the big city bosses -- he is the man that can clean up the mess in Washington.

200 Take Communism. I say that as far as that subject is concerned the danger is great to America. In the Hiss case they got the secrets which enabled them to break the American secret State Department code. They got secrets in the atomic bomb case which enabled them to get the secret of the atomic bomb five years before they would have gotten it by their own devices. And I say that any man who called the Alger Hiss case a red herring isn't fit to be President of the United States.

205 I say that a man who, like Mr. Stevenson, has pooh-poohed and ridiculed the Communist threat in the United States -- he said that they are phantoms among ourselves. He has accused us that have attempted to expose the Communists, of looking for Communists in the Bureau of Fisheries and Wildlife. I say that a man who says that isn't qualified to be President of the United States. And I say that the only man who can lead us in this fight to rid the Government of both those who are Communists and those who have corrupted this Government is Eisenhower, because Eisenhower, you
210 can be sure, recognizes the problem, and he knows how to deal with it.

Now let me that finally, this evening, I want to read to you just briefly excerpts from a letter which I received, a letter which after all this is over no one can take away from us. It reads as follows:

Dear Senator Nixon,

"Since I am only 19 years of age, I can't vote in this presidential election, but believe me if I could you and General
215 Eisenhower would certainly get my vote. My husband is in the Fleet Marines in Korea. He's a corpsman on the front lines and we have a two month old son he's never seen. And I feel confident that with great Americans like you and General Eisenhower in the White House, lonely Americans like myself will be united with their loved ones now in Korea. I only pray to God that you won't be too late. Enclosed is a small check to help you in your campaign. Living on \$85 a month it is all I can afford at present, but let me know what else I can do."

220 Folks, it's a check for \$10, and it's one that I will never cash. And just let me say this: We hear a lot about prosperity these days, but I say why can't we have prosperity built on peace, rather than prosperity built on war? Why can't we have prosperity and an honest Government in Washington, D.C., at the same time? Believe me, we can. And Eisenhower is the man that can lead this crusade to bring us that kind of prosperity.

And now, finally, I know that you wonder whether or not I am going to stay on the Republican ticket or resign. Let me
225 say this: I don't believe that I ought to quit, because I'm not a quitter. And, incidentally, Pat's not a quitter. After all, her name was Patricia Ryan and she was born on St. Patrick's day, and you know the Irish never quit. But the decision, my friends, is not mine. I would do nothing that would harm the possibilities of Dwight Eisenhower to become President of the United States. And for that reason I am submitting to the Republican National Committee tonight through this television broadcast the decision which it is theirs to make. Let them decide whether my position on the
230 ticket will help or hurt. And I am going to ask you to help them decide. Wire and write the Republican National Committee whether you think I should stay on or whether I should get off. And whatever their decision is, I will abide by it.

But just let me say this last word. Regardless of what happens, I'm going to continue this fight. I'm going to campaign up and down in America until we drive the crooks and the Communists and those that defend them out of Washington.
235 And remember folks, Eisenhower is a great man, believe me. He's a great man. And a vote for Eisenhower is a vote for what's good for America.

(4677 words)

Quelle: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=24485>