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**Subject: REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT AT THE MALCOLM BALDRIGE NATIONAL QUALITY AWARDS CEREMONY**

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Press Secretary  
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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE MALCOLM BALDRIGE NATIONAL QUALITY AWARDS CEREMONY

Crystal Gateway Marriott  
Arlington, Virginia

11:00 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Congratulations. Good job. (Applause.) Thank you all very much. Welcome. I'm really glad to be invited back to this annual event to recognize excellence and to bestow an honor named for a great American.

This year, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award goes to seven outstanding recipients. Each set ambitious goals; each organization worked hard to achieve them. You're setting such a good example as a beacon of excellence. You represent the great strength and the entrepreneurial spirit of the American economy. I congratulate you for a job well done. (Applause.)

Malcolm Baldrige served as the Commerce Secretary in the '80s, at a time when many questioned whether America could remain the world's strongest economy. He was an optimistic guy. He dedicated himself to proving the skeptics wrong. That kind of confidence in America's economic strength was justified in his day, and it is justified in our day. (Applause.)

Think about what this economy has been through the last several years. In 2000, the stock market began a steady decline. By early 2001, the nation was in a recession. Then we got attacked on September the 11th. We had to face the consequences of that attack. We saw scandals in corporate boardrooms in which the trust of workers and investors were violated. We took action to face all these challenges, and today our economy is strong, and it is getting stronger. (Applause.)

Think about the economic environment of 2003. Inflation is low; interest rates are low; manufacturing is up. Home ownership is at an all-time high. Stock prices are up. The stock market wealth has risen by more than \$3 trillion since the beginning of 2003. The unemployment rate today is lower than the average rate in the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s. Thanks to our productive workers and the entrepreneurial spirit of this country, the fastest growing, major industrialized economy in the world is the United States of America. (Applause.)

As our economy moves forward and new jobs are added, some are questioning whether American companies and American workers are up to the challenge of foreign competition. There are economic isolationists in our country who believe we should separate ourselves from the rest of the world by raising up barriers and closing off markets. They're wrong. If we are to continue growing this economy and creating new jobs, America must remain confident and strong about our ability to trade in the world. Given a level playing field, America will out-perform the competition, and America will continue to be a world leader.

We've got great advantages here in this country. We've got the world's hardest-working people. We've got the most productive work force in the world. We have an attractive climate for our businesses to expand. We have innovative, dynamic companies which are producing world-class products and services. America's best companies are emphasizing quality and service, and developing world-class methods for production. By selling good ideas and good products in markets not only here, but across the world, we're creating jobs -- good, high-paying jobs for the American citizen.

Each recipient of today's award earned it. When I say we need to be confident about our future, I'm confident because I just heard the stories of great success. (Applause.) They got their best ideas from all kinds of places, whether it be from their workers, or their customers. They listened.

In manufacturing, we have Medrad Incorporated, of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. (Applause.) A maker of medical imaging devices, Medrad's commitment to excellence runs from the top, from the CEO, John Friel, who, by the way, said we -- I put my knee under one of his devices. (Laughter.) I said, "I appreciate the diagnosis. You just hadn't figured out the cure for old age." (Laughter and applause.)

I'll tell you what I like about John's style; he spends a day each month on a front-line job. Here's a fellow who is the CEO who mops the floors, who's taken phone calls, who's heard customer complaints, who works on the assembly line. He's built a culture where everyone at the company has a voice in the way things are done.

I appreciate the example all the companies here have set, as well. You're now what we call quality experts, which means you're going to get calls from other companies or organizations to find out how you won, what you did to achieve such good success. And I hope you share your knowledge. The country is better off when you're willing to share how you achieved excellence with those who will want to accomplish the same goals.

Anyone looking for an easy answer, though, is going to be disappointed. It may sound easy in the speeches. It's hard to win this award. (Laughter.) This isn't one of these deals where everybody gets a blue ribbon. (Laughter and applause.) You have to work hard. You have to be totally focused and committed to excellence. It has to be a part of your culture, your very being.

A good product, of course, is essential. It's hard to be successful if you don't make something somebody doesn't want to buy. You've got to have a good business plan. But the most important ingredient is a great work force -- people who live and work by the principles of excellence and fairness and teamwork and personal responsibility.

That's really what we're honoring today, isn't it? Great work forces, people who are willing to strive for something greater than themselves. The Baldrige Award winners are showing one of the greatest strengths of this nation and our economy. Whether the challenge comes from a competitor across town, or from a competitor across the ocean, American workers are up to the job. (Applause.)

Just listening to these speeches here confirms what I know: This country can meet any challenge. (Applause.) I want to congratulate the award winners, congratulate the companies. May God bless you and your families. May God continue to bless this great nation. Thank you for coming. (Applause.)

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11:15 A.M. EST