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ALIEN REGISTRATION AND DEMOCRACY

Address of

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A year-end inventory of assets is a customary procedure of sound business.

Five days from today the United States of America will complete an inventory of those persons within its borders who are not citizens. They are not American citizens but, with relatively few exceptions, these foreign-born among us are American assets--precious human assets. At this critical period of our history an accounting of our assets is more than just sound practice; it is absolutely essential to our national defense.

On next Thursday, December 26--the day after Christmas--there ends the four-month period during which the Department of Justice has been engaged in the registering of our alien population. Today, five days before the deadline, more than 4,200,000 non-citizens have appeared at Post Offices throughout the country and filled our registration forms. This number is substantially in excess of the 3,600,000 aliens previously estimated within our borders, a fact which in itself should emphasize the importance and the need of an accurate count,

I am happy to report that the four-month registration period is drawing to a close with a minimum of misunderstanding, inconvenience and embarrassment. As one who advocated alien registration before enactment of the law, I felt under high responsibility to see to it that the program was carried through in a friendly fashion and without indignity or embarrassment to those who live among us but are not yet citizens.

That, I believe, has been the case. We have met with unsparing cooperation on all sides and almost universal support for the spirit of the registration program. Citizens and non-citizens alike have gone out of their way to help us. This is largely because they have understood the advantages to both citizens and non-citizens in the fact that every registered alien has a certificate which identifies him and demonstrates his compliance to the registration law.

Such identification is of great usefulness to the alien in a time of unsettled and excitable public opinion. I know that many native-born Americans, for example, who find it difficult or impossible to obtain birth certificates, would be happy to have some similar identification which would attest their citizenship. Alien registration, therefore, has contributed immeasurably to the security, the dignity and the self-respect of our non-citizen population who have registered in compliance with the law.

Tonight, however, I am addressing myself primarily to those who have not yet registered.

December 26 is the dead-line. The day after Christmas is the last day on which non-citizens can register and avoid the penalties of the law. This is final. The Department of Justice can not--even the President can not--extend the time.

The responsibility for registering before the dead-line rests entirely with the alien. It is his duty--one which is too important to him to delay or to neglect. Moreover, those who have even the slightest doubt as to their citizenship status should register.

Registration does not affect citizenship, so that citizens lose no rights or incur no penalties by registering. On the other hand, for

the non-citizen to fail to register means serious trouble for him. Everybody who is not a citizen should register. This means even persons who have taken out first or second citizenship papers but have not yet taken the oath of allegiance. Unless they have taken the oath of allegiance to the United States they are still non-citizens! I want also to remind parents or guardians that even though they have registered themselves they must also register alien children who are under 14 years of age.

And so I urge all non-citizens to let nothing delay them in doing their duty under the registration act. These are troubled and uncertain times, and no one can tell how important it may be some day for a non-citizen to be able to prove that he complied with the law and did his duty when the United States asked him to register.

Then too, we all hope that the majority of aliens in this country will want to become citizens. It is important to remember that failure to register now will stand in the way of citizenship later on.

I also want to speak to those who may hesitate to register because of some real or imagined irregularity connected with their entrance into the United States. We know that there have been many illegal entries in years gone by--some because they were brought here to labor by employers who did not make lawful entry for them; some because administration may have been lax and the immigrant misinformed; and some, of course, because of deliberate evasion of the law.

But whatever the illegality or irregularity connected with their entry into this country, aliens should not be so foolish as to add a second violation of the law by failing to register. They should not risk a deliberate law violation to cover an unintentional one.

Needless to say, the government must and will take thorough measures to locate and apprehend non-citizens who fail to register. The machinery for this program is now being assembled, and I can promise that a complete investigation will be carried out. Non-citizens who fail to conform with the registration law may rest assured that they have forfeited any right to sympathetic consideration for their old delinquencies.

But if non-citizens have registered, they will receive all consideration their cases warrant. Congress has provided by law for hardship cases by authorizing the Attorney General--subject to reversal by Congress itself--to relieve many of the penalties of illegal entry. Such relief is limited to those who can show good moral character for five years and whose deportation would cause serious hardship to wife, husband, father, mother, or minor child, who is either an American citizen or is legally resident here. The government must protect the national welfare, but it has no desire to break up families or homes needlessly.

Such leniency can not be extended, of course, to convicted or admitted criminals or to those who have engaged in subversive or disloyal activities or are affiliated with organizations engaged in such activities. And of course leniency can not and will not be extended to non-citizens who do not register by December 26!

Already many non-citizens have come forward, admitted their illegal entry, and requested suspension of deportation under this leniency provision. We will act in such cases only after careful investigation of the facts to determine that the case is within the law. My certification to the Congress that such cases are worthy is, in effect, a pledge of good faith that all the facts have been investigated and that, in my opinion,

the aliens merit consideration. By registering under the Alien Registration Act, non-citizens pass the first test of merit, and make themselves at least eligible for further consideration for lenient treatment.

Let me make this clear: I am not making any promise to any individual or any guarantee to any class that the penalties for illegal entry will be withheld. But I am pledging that every alien who registers and confesses his fault will have a square deal from the Department of Justice in applying to his case the relief which Congress has authorized. And I say to loyal and deserving non-citizens who entered this country illegally that we have a genuine desire to avoid hardships and that there will be no negligent or ruthless treatment of appeals for leniency and no indiscriminate rejection of claims.

I am particularly grateful to the many social agencies, foreign language associations, the broadcasting companies and both the American and foreign-language newspapers for the cooperation they have shown in explaining the registration program to our non-citizen population. The American Legion and other organizations have been unusually helpful, understanding and sympathetic and have been of very material assistance in the program. The smooth functioning of the registration law has been due in large part to the cooperation of these public spirited citizens.

Non-citizens themselves, by their loyal and willing response, have made the registration seem almost a voluntary process. Many of them have expressed pride in registration in order to show their devotion and gratitude to their adopted land and to help in its defense efforts. Others have gone to places of registration and expressed, through their prompt and willing registration, their love for America.

And to the many Americans who like myself whose forebears have been here for so many generations that all sense of foreign origin is lost, let me say this: The great number of our alien population has not come here to menace our institutions but to prosper under them. They have come with the same hopes that brought our ancestors.

There are among our non-citizens some disloyal and undesirable aliens just as we have bred some disloyal and undesirable Americans. These undesirables among aliens we are weeding out and dealing with.

But let us not, in the process, descend to hateful treatment of the aliens as a class. Let us not deprive them of employment, but let them take whatever place in our society that their individual work and worth may win. Let them be hurt by no persecutions. There are many in our midst. We must keep their loyalty and respect.

It is our duty to "fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues".

At this Christmas time no better support for national defense could come from our citizens than this spirit.