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**Remarks before  
National Association of Federal Credit Unions  
Congressional Caucus**

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Thank you, Dan. It is a pleasure to address the NAFCU Congressional Caucus today. As I have in the past, I want to again recognize and thank Fred Becker, Michael Parsons, Dan Berger, Brad Thaler, Carrie Hunt, Steve Van Beek, and Katie Marisic for the outstanding job they do representing and advocating for credit unions across this country every day in our nation's capital. Your efforts and actions make NAFCU the respected association it is. I commend and thank you for all you do.

I am pleased to be speaking to you again here at the Mayflower Hotel. You have a very important few days ahead of you and I wish you the very best as you meet with lawmakers on Capitol Hill and as you work to achieve the goals you have set for yourselves. Defending the future of credit unions is very serious business and it requires very serious effort on your part.

You may remember when I spoke to you last year I recalled that it was on the seventh floor of this hotel—in the suite where he stayed before moving into the White House the next afternoon—that President Franklin Roosevelt polished his first inaugural address in March of 1933. It was probably the most important speech of his life and it is remembered for one of his first sentences: “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” Roosevelt was trying to get the country moving again after three years of a crushing depression. Banks were failing so fast that in the days leading up to his address 32 states declared banks temporarily closed.

Much of Roosevelt's speech that he worked on six floors above us had a kind of credit union ring to it, a kind of “we have to think more about helping one another than about profits.” In one part Roosevelt said, “We now realize as we have never realized before our interdependence on each other, that we cannot merely take but we must give as well.”

Roosevelt's predecessor in the White House, Herbert Hoover was a smart man, a good business man, a humanitarian, and a hard worker. But he did not have the right kind of temperament needed for the bad circumstances that were thrown at him. Franklin Roosevelt did not cure the Depression but he had a temperament and an attitude that gave people greater hope than they had before.

One thing Roosevelt did was demonstrate energy and action. The day after delivering his inauguration speech, his first day in the White House, Roosevelt called for an immediate special session of Congress, with its first requirement to do something about the crumbling banking system.

For the next week, Republican holdovers from the Hoover Administration worked around the clock with fresh Roosevelt Democrats to craft the Emergency Banking Act of 1933. The new Secretary of the Treasury, William Woodin, who had been working at the Treasury Department during the transition, and the old Secretary of the Treasury, Ogden Mills, on inauguration day merely changed sides on the Secretary's desk in the Treasury Building and kept on working. One participant of that hectic week said, "We had forgotten to be Republicans and Democrats. We were just a bunch of men trying to save the banking system." The Emergency Banking Act of 1933 was passed after only 38 minutes of debate and with only seven dissenting votes.

This banking act was essentially a Republican bill. Its main features were crafted late in the Hoover administration, then amended by Democrats after Roosevelt was sworn in. "Capitalism was saved in eight days," an exhausted participant wrote. The men and women who worked on the Emergency Banking Act understood they had a job to do. It was not political posturing, not playing for votes, not saying my party's ideas are better than yours, but governing, crafting workable solutions to existing problems. The Emergency Banking Act set the course for deposit insurance and restored confidence in the banking system.

Those persons in early 1933 were realists and they worked hard at solving problems. It's very important to get the right men and women at the right time. Often that takes looking for character and a commitment to solving problems rather than looking for insult and ideology. If you walk out of the door of this hotel, turn left and walk two and a half blocks you reach a very unusual place, Lafayette Square in front of the White House. Lafayette Square I think is unusual, perhaps unique, among the world's capitals because it honors not persons native to the country but foreigners. The persons honored are French, Polish and German: the Marquis de Lafayette, Jean de Rochambeau, Thaddeus Kosciuszko, and Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben.

American colonialists chafed under British rule. They had legitimate grievances, the most important being they felt they could and should rule themselves. The four foreigners honored in Lafayette Square came to the colonies at great personal risk to themselves in order to help. They saw something in the American rebellion worth fighting for, a principle that could be applied universally: self-government. Not allegiance to a king, not a country of commoners serving aristocratic families, but a country of free citizens who could speak openly without fear and elect their own representatives to operate a government.

After a struggle of eight years Americans won independence from the British kingdom. But as we know, that was really only half the battle. They next had to create a government that was going to work. Their first attempt was the Articles of Confederation, a cooperation among the 13 new states that was a kind of extension of the cooperation the states had worked out during the war for independence. But by 1786 the government under the Articles of Confederation was strained to the breaking point, and the free citizens of the new country called for the writing of a new compact in 1787. We call this the Constitutional Convention.

The new country worried that the Articles of Confederation did not make for a national government that was strong enough or had enough power to run a large and expanding nation. After four months of squabbling, debate, dead ends, and compromise among 59 persons, the Constitution of the United States emerged. But it was a contentious document. Only 39 delegates

who helped craft the Constitution signed it. Some dissenters thought the Constitution set up a national government that was too strong; some thought it too weak. Some did not sign because their pet projects were neglected. Benjamin Franklin was not wild about the final product but thought it was the best that could be accomplished.

“I consent to this Constitution,” he said, “because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best.”

George Washington also supported the Constitution, but its acceptance by the country was far from assured. All sorts of people were against it, not the least very staunch patriots who had started the revolt against Great Britain in 1775. Patrick Henry thought the Constitution took away too many liberties. John Hancock and Samuel Adams had strong misgivings. Debate raged for months. When put to a vote of people’s representatives, it passed by a very narrow margin.

Through all this controversy and the trials of setting up a new government, the persons who supported the Constitution were the realists, the ones who understood that however painful compromise might be, the Constitution was the way to govern and get things done. No one could like everything all the time. Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton all at one time or another had political disagreements one against another and in some instances sharply disliked one another. But all of them understood that governing meant compromise, meant working with other people, meant working with others’ ideas as well as their own.

If they were to make their country work, they would have to work with the Constitution, which itself was a series of compromises, and work with contending factions. Patrick Henry famously disliked the entire Constitution, but he was not trying to run a country. Fortunately, he understood that and he courteously left governing to others.

Those others worked with one another even though they might have had severe personal and political differences. About Congress John Adams cautioned that without the spirit of respect, cooperation, and tolerance, decisions would be dictated “by noise, not sense; by meanness, not greatness; by ignorance, not learning; in contracted hearts; not large souls.” He cautioned that “there must be decency and respect and veneration introduced for persons in authority, of every rank, or we are undone. In a popular government, this is the only way of supporting order.”

History has shown all too often that the persons with the passion to start and conduct a revolution have not been the persons who could then rebuild a workable representative government that delivered peace and prosperity to its people. People with the kind of passion to start a revolution often ended squabbling over ideology rather than delivering solutions to people’s problems. Indeed, the Sam Adams and Patrick Henrys of the American Revolution fell by the wayside when it came to organizing a competent government. One of the intriguing questions of the birth of our nation is why enough of the persons who helped start the Revolution were also capable of writing such a realistic document as the Constitution.

I think it was because people like Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Hamilton, despite their differences, put the long-term good of the country above what each felt individually. Like the

four foreigners honored in Lafayette Square, they saw universal principles that transcended their own interests and were willing to compromise those interests for a larger good.

And so, under persons who put their country above their personal preferences, who put good government above narrow interests, the country grew and prospered under a self-government that they had created. The world was astonished that the new nation did not collapse into intractable squabbles resulting in the demise of their attempt at democracy. Many thought the new nation would soon enough appeal to Great Britain to take it back, or to the French monarchy, or set up its own monarchy. None of this happened. The new nation continued to govern itself with representatives who came together in Congress, debated, and passed laws that were willingly accepted by the citizens.

The National Association of Federal Credit Unions was established in 1967 to look after the interest of federal credit unions, themselves somewhat fragile and small cooperatives established not for profit but for service. Through 45 years NAFCU has carried out that mission with energy and effectiveness. Without NAFCU's work, it is hard to imagine that credit unions would now boast 93 million members in a system that saves American families billions of dollars a year when compared to other financial services options.

This has been vital work. You should be proud of it and you should continue it. You should remind Congressmen of the great work credit unions do for establishing sensible credit and spreading financial literacy in your states and communities, and urge new laws raising the Member Business Loan cap and allowing alternative capital.

But there is more. We have a national election coming up in less than two months. You and the more than 93 million account holders in federal and state-chartered credit unions can help elect Congressmen and Senators all across the country. Work to elect realists, men and women like Washington, Jefferson, Adams, and Hamilton who can reach across the aisle and work with all sorts of other persons, men and women who put their country above their personal agendas, persons who work to solve problems rather than chase rainbows.

We need Washingtons, Adamases, Jeffersons, and Hamiltons, persons who despite their own opinions of others or even theories of government are willing to set aside differences to pass laws that support thrift and industry, creating a proper environment for trade and business.

We need to get the country back to work. We need for our people to have jobs. We need lawmakers who understand the country wants action, not blockage and posturing for the sake of political theory. We need lawmakers who listen not to political essayists but to Americans across Congressional districts. We need lawmakers who can reach across the aisle, who can build majorities. We need lawmakers who are respectful of other lawmakers and who can find places for hammering out compromise.

Americans in the 1770s fought for independence and self-rule. That was the first step. Practical Americans in the 1780s then sustained and fostered that independence by hammering out a Constitution which was full of compromise, which balanced person liberty with national power. NAFCU has stood up for credit unions for 45 years. Now I urge it to take another step, to fully

engage itself in the election of Congressmen who not only champion credit unions but also are willing to be realists in the same mold as the Washingtons and Jeffersons, who look far into the future rather than into the next political rally or the next election.

NAFCU established itself to help credit unions, to be leaders in pressing the case for non-profit financial cooperatives. It has done an outstanding job. But there is more to do. If you believe that this nation rose to greatness because people wanted to help the greater community, then lead the way by showing that credit unions build strong communities and by electing Congressmen who are both respectful and put aside differences to build community.

If you believe that this country can put everyone back to work, then lead the way by supporting businesses in your communities, by helping those businesses create jobs, and by helping elect persons who can champion the credit union philosophy of raising up communities in common effort.

If you believe in the cooperative principles, then show them in your own work and help to elect persons who cooperate in the effort to rebuild our economy.

There are never any times where everything is good. All times have their struggles. This was true of the generation that began a new nation. This was true of the generation that faced the Great Depression. This is true of the persons who against long odds started credit unions. This is true now. Don't shrink from the struggles and challenges of our times. Face them head on. Find men and women who in Congress can face them head on. In our nation's past hard-working practical people built a better future. We call it the present. Now it is your turn to build a better future. Do it here in Washington. Do it when you go home. Do it on November 6<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you for listening. God bless you in your work, and God bless the United States of America.