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NEWCASTLE, NEW HAMPSHIRE, May 11 -- U.S. Senator Bob Dole (R-Kans.) today blasted National Democrat Chairman Larry O'Brien for his statement that "Nixon-Agnew-Mitchell inflammatory rhetoric" may have contributed to the deaths of four Kent State University students. He suggested that O'Brien publicly apologize, "or be prepared to accept responsibility for Vietnam and all its consequences."

Dole spoke before the New Hampshire Federation of Republican Women.

The Kansas Senator said, in part:

"The war in Vietnam is a tragic conflict. It has not been in the past and should never become a partisan matter, but regrettably many leading Democrats are intent on making it so. Frankly, I was shocked to read that the National Democrat Chairman, Lawrence J. O'Brien, stated in a meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Saturday evening, 'I can only speculate in sorrow whether these young people (at Kent) would have been killed were it not for the Nixon-Agnew-Mitchell inflammatory rhetoric...'

"I recognize that a chairman of a political party must speak out for his party, but it is incredible that a responsible spokesman for any party would utter such nonsense.

"I believe Mr. O'Brien should publicly apologize to President Nixon, Vice President Agnew and Attorney General Mitchell and to the parents of those young people at Kent State.

"Frankly, I am becoming a little tired of and frustrated at the protestations of O'Brien and other leading Democrats in and out of Congress, who daily seek to divide and frustrate not only America's youth, but all Americans.

(more)

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"By employing such 'speculation' used by Chairman O'Brien, he should, on behalf of his party, announce that if President Kennedy had not moved combat troops into South Vietnam in 1963 and that if President Johnson had not escalated the war which sent some 540,000 young Americans to South Vietnam that some 42,000 Americans might be alive today and that nearly 300,000 would not have been wounded, prisoners, or missing in action.

"So, Mr. O'Brien, first let me caution you to not make tragedy in America or in Vietnam a partisan political issue -- but if you insist and persist, you shall not have it both ways. Admit your indiscretion, apologize to President Nixon, Vice President Agnew and Attorney General Mitchell -- or be prepared to accept responsibility for Vietnam and all its consequences.

"While I share the view that we must lower our voices, this does not mean standing idly by while Democrat peddlers of doom and gloom trample at will on our President or his Administration or the rights, feelings and hopes of a great majority of Americans."

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