

News from Senator

# BOB DOLE



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REMARKS OF SENATOR BOB DOLE

DEDICATION OF V.A. MEDICAL CENTER

TOPEKA, KANSAS

SATURDAY, MAY 16, 1981

There's an old line in army circles that says "The soldiers win the battles, and the generals get the credit". This afternoon, we're disproving that adage. Neither Harry Colmery or Ralph O'Neil were ever generals, but both wear five stars in our memories. Both brought distinction to Kansas. Both knew that armies are composed of G.I.'s as well as generals. Both gave strong and purposeful leadership as national commanders of the American Legion. And both fought tirelessly to promote the rights and provide for the futures of veterans once the guns fall silent and the planes return to the airfields. This hospital will stand as a monument in glass and steel to their example, but even more than that, it will carry on the humane work that they started, ministering to men and women who fight and bleed and risk death itself, all for an ideal we call America.

Belatedly Recognize their Contribution

Harry Colmery has been called the father of the G.I. Bill of Rights. Ralph O'Neil worked hard to persuade Congress to build and equip a string of great V.A. hospitals, of which this stands among the finest. In giving their name to this place of healing, we belatedly recognize their contribution. In a larger sense, we also pay tribute to the American fighting man himself, whom Colmery and O'Neil represented so honorably. He needs no eulogy from me. On a hundred battlefields, around a thousand campfires, I have seen thousands of men like Harry and Ralph, citizen soldiers who left the prairies to fight for freedom in European foxholes and Asian jungles. In defense, they are resolute and determined, in attack swift and sure, in purpose indomitable and in victory decisive.

One of America's greatest warriors, Douglas MacArthur, described the proud tradition of the American fighting man in his famous farewell address at West Point, nearly twenty years ago. "He has written his own history and written it in red on his enemy's breast," said the General. "From one end of the world to the other, he has drained deep the chalice of courage."

Significant Changes in Veteran Care

So this afternoon, in giving this hospital the names of two of America's first soldiers, we acknowledge our debt to all the millions of men and women who sacrificed in order that we might preserve the values and freedoms we cherish. The world has turned over many times since that blustery day in January 1946, when Dr. Karl Menninger unveiled the Winter V.A. Hospital, a temporary collection of clinics and hospital rooms built in a pasture south of Topeka and connected by eight miles of ramps and corridors. Much has changed since, in America and in America's armed forces. The old hospital has given way to a model, 1000-bed facility, serving nearly 100,000 patients each year from Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, as well as Kansas, and justifiably famed as a psychiatric teaching and training center. In rehabilitative services, nuclear medicine, nursing home care and psychiatric treatment, Colmery-O'Neil has come light-years from 1946, setting the pace and advancing the frontiers of hospital care for veterans and their dependents.

Has America Lived Up to Your Sacrifice

But what can we say of the nation and the armed services which your patients served with such distinction? What of the land for which you may have incurred physical or psychological scars, which you upheld against foreign foes? Has it kept faith with your sacrifice? Has it lived up to its responsibilities as a great nation - spending dollars for defense in order that future generations of young men would never have to spill blood in battle?

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The America I came home to after World War II was in the infancy of her status as a world power, just waking up to grasp her true place in the family of nations. We were the strongest country on earth, not only for our weapons but for the ideals those weapons were sworn to protect and preserve. America in 1946 was a nation with her hand outstretched to shattered lands and threatened peoples. We were the bulwark against an international communism that looked upon wartorn Europe with hungry eyes. We were the nation whose economy was strong enough to finance the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, the fight against North Korea's aggression. We stood tall in the world, because we stood up for what we believed, and other people looked to us to stiffen their own faith in freedom.

My generation went to war to prevent the triumph of tyranny. Today's generation recognizes the need to build strength frittered away in recent years - not to win a new war - there can be no victory in the nuclear age - but to prevent the unthinkable. Americans today are willing once more to accept the harsh reality of the time in which we live. But it took us a long while to reach this point.

#### We Have Failed to Face Reality

In recent years, we have found ourselves too often compromising with evil, or vacillating in the face of our enemies. We have failed to give clear signals to friends, and instead we have chosen to overlook the inexorable stockpiling of military might by dangerous men who talked of their desire for peace but prepared for the day when they might dominate a cowed world by sheer overwhelming might. We allowed wishful thinking to supplant cold, hard logic. We deluded ourselves into believing that good intentions alone could insure survival in an overheated age. In the last ten years, according to many experts, the Soviet Union spent \$240 billion more than the United States, most of it on offensive weaponry of increasing sophistication. While they started work on a general purpose submarine once every five weeks, we were content to build one a year. They built up a formidable Navy, while we slashed ours to half its 1968 size. We stood by as the Soviets piled up a huge numerical advantage in men and material, and closed much of the technological gap that once offset the sheer weight of Soviet numbers.

#### America's Forces Stiff in the Joints

After Vietnam, America's conventional forces became stiff in the joints. Last year, six of the Army's sixteen divisions were rated "not combat ready". The Air Force found itself 1,300 pilots short. The Army fell 14,000 short of attracting its manpower needs. The very concept of a volunteer armed force was endangered because pay levels had plummeted by 20 percent since 1972. Last year, 10,000 Air Force families alone became eligible for food stamps. The soaring cost of fuel cut pilots' flying time one-third below what is actually needed to learn how to handle an F-4. Army crews find themselves firing off a single round in training instead of the ten or twelve rounds customarily shot off in my Army days.

The numbers form a depressing litany, which pretty quickly answer my questions about our matching the sacrifice being made by the men and women who come to use this hospital - or their successors to today's armed forces who will come to Colmery-O'Neil in the future. We have learned wisdom, and we have gained scar tissue at the same time. We suffered through the agonizing spectacle of an American rescue mission halted in the Iranian desert because of equipment failures. We saw Soviet forces positioned in Cuba. We watched as Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan and threatened Poland. And, before it was too late, we woke from our long national slumber and threw off the self-delusions to see the world as it really was. To correct the imbalances of a decade will not be something we achieve overnight - but correct them we must and will. The process has already started.

#### Proposed Defense Budget Increases

Last March, Secretary Weinberger came before the Congress with a defense budget calling for increases in virtually every major category of defense spending. President Reagan wants us to increase the last Carter budget by \$26 billion. One of the best pieces of news is the President's request for a 5.3 percent pay raise, on top of an 11 percent increase voted by the last Congress, and scheduled to take effect in July. This will go a long way toward eliminating the humiliation of seeing our fighting men and their families forced to stand in welfare and food stamp lines. It will at last signify that Americans hold their armed forces in high esteem, and are willing to offer a living standard worthy of the sacrifice being asked of those in uniform. The President has also called for improvements in living and working facilities, a cost-of-living allowance for single personnel stationed overseas, and a series of bonuses designed to enhance our chances to attract and keep top-notch men and women in the services.

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#### Increased Spending for Weaponry

In addition to these personnel steps, the President would boost spending on maintenance and procurement of new aircraft, tanks, missiles and other weapons which comprise the modern arsenal - and which in turn forms the only significant deterrent to Soviet aggression. The Air Force would develop a new, long-range aircraft to replace the scuttled B-1. Higher priorities would be given the M-1 tank, Tomahawk missile, F-15 and 16. Eighteen new ships would be added to the Navy, along with fifteen acquired, converted or re-activated. Even more important, a fleet total of 600 vessels would be reinstated as a national priority. New aircraft carrier groups will expand America's capacity to patrol troublespots in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf. Strategic forces would be bolstered as well.

#### Not a Blank Check

This is not to say that military spending will be approved without scrutiny. As the Congress votes significant cuts in other federal programs, we will not sign a blank check for defense increases. New weapons systems must be justified, and waste must be eliminated from the Pentagon in the same way we are striking waste from food stamps and subsidizing housing.

#### Much Debate

In the weeks ahead, there is bound to be much debate over long-range strategy and short-range funding. What kind of Navy do we wish to build - one based on large, nuclear-powered carriers or on greater quantities of smaller ships? Shall we press forward with more nuclear attack submarines or rely more heavily on diesel boats? Should we sink the MX into existing silos, or mount them piggy-back on portable carriers? How shall we face up to the unquestioned advances made by the Soviets in the doomsday vision of chemical warfare? These are not easy questions. The only certainty is that they must be confronted and answered boldly. For to shy away from them is to shirk our responsibility as freedom's last guardian. It would be a mockery of the sacrifice of previous generations, and of the commitment and conscience of today's young.

We know already that we will have to continue to upgrade pay and other incentives if the U.S. is to retain a volunteer fighting force. We know we must restore our margin of strategic safety as a prelude to any discussion of arms limitations. We know that we will have to devote a greater share of our gross national product to defense than the 5 percent we have been allotting these last few years. And that means that it is more crucial than ever before that here at home we move imaginatively to strengthen our own economy. Our standing as a world power, and our ability to defend both peace and freedom, rests upon our ability to produce up to capacity levels, without the double-digit inflation that saps our vitality and undermines the budget for defense.

#### A New President

All of this we know - and on all these fronts we are at last moving ahead. There is in the White House in 1981 a President who points the way to a stronger economy - and the restoration of America's eroded military posture. He sees the world in realistic terms, and understands that America's adversaries respect strength and determination over weakness and uncertainty. He knows that peace can be maintained only so long as America poses a credible deterrent to Soviet aggression, and that all those who argue for stronger defense do so in the realization that anything less is an open invitation to combat. The policies that are now being pursued in Washington mean that we have come full circle since 1946, when this hospital was new, like America's role as an international safeguard for the liberties we have always protected at home.

#### Harry Colmery and Ralph O'Neil

Harry Colmery and Ralph O'Neil would have appreciated that. They would have been the first to applaud the new direction in which we find ourselves moving and the reassertion of old values for which we stand once more. Just as we take pride in their lives and examples, so they would have taken pride in America's fresh resolve. For they devoted their lives, not only to protecting the country of their birth, but to extending the democratic ideals that gave birth to their country. In renaming this hospital Colmery-O'Neil, we do more than signify our debt to these two proud sons of Kansas. We pledge anew to make America so strong, so purposeful, and so wise in her conduct of foreign policy that future sons of the prairie will not have to confront the horrors that you and I have experienced firsthand.

#### A House of Hope

And that, my friends, is a memorial that will honor every man and woman who contributes to its realization. This hospital is a house of hope, and a haven for healing. May God bless all who come to it for help - and all those who welcome them with open arms.