

Bob Dole

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

NEWS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER



SENATE MAJORITY LEADER BOB DOLE
REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
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One hundred and thirty six years ago this summer, a committee arrived in Springfield, Illinois to formally notify Abraham Lincoln that the Republican Party had nominated him to run for President.

History records that Lincoln's formal reply to the news was just two sentences long. And then, as he surveyed the crowd of friends and neighbors who had gathered outside his home, he said, "And now I will no longer defer the pleasure of taking each of you by the hand."

As I speak for the final time as a United States Senator, I wish that, like Lincoln, I could shake hands with all the people I am indebted to for having the privilege of serving in Congress.

I would begin, of course, with my family.

My parents both lived to see their son become a Senator, and anything I have achieved in my life I achieved because of the example they set, the lessons they taught, the values they instilled, and the love and support they provided.

I have also been blessed with a remarkable wife and a wonderful daughter who have stood with me through victories and defeats, and who have patiently put up with the hours and demands that go with serving in the Senate.

Along with other members of my family, Elizabeth and Robin are in the Senate gallery today, and I would hope you would join with a proud husband and father in recognizing their service, and through them, the service of all Senate families.

Elizabeth and Robin join with me in expressing our deep appreciation to the people of Kansas. Nine times I sought the honor of serving them in Congress, and they gave me their trust and support each time. Such trust is perhaps the greatest gift that can come to any citizen in our democracy, and I will be forever grateful.

I thank every Kansan who played a role in our democracy by sending me a letter, making a phone call, visiting my office or attending a town meeting--whether we agreed or disagreed. In a democracy, differences are healthy--only indifference is to be feared.

And then there are those who have served on my staff over the years, and who have shared with me their enthusiasm, their idealism, their intelligence, and their loyalty. Many are on the Senate floor or in the gallery today, and to them I say: We've worked hard, we've made a difference, and we had some fun along the way. I am grateful to you beyond measure.

And to all those who have served the Senate during my time as Republican Leader, be they Parliamentarian or page, I thank you for your tireless service, as well.

I don't want my friends in the press gallery to fall out of their seats in shock, but let me add that in acknowledging those who have worked here in this building I also salute you. While I certainly did not agree with everything you said or wrote, I know that what you do off this floor is as vital to American democracy as anything we do on it.

And then there are my Senate colleagues--past and present--for whom it is very difficult to express my thanks and appreciation.

My Republican colleagues know that my years as your Leader have been some of the most rewarding and challenging of my life. I will always be thankful for the trust you placed in me.

And to those on the other side of the aisle, I say that while we have had our debates and disagreements, I have always respected your point of view.

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Like many others on this floor, I have had the privilege of serving with some of the true giants of our time.

Though Everett Dirksen left us the year I arrived in the Senate, I've never forgotten his many words of wisdom, which included the admonition that "a billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon, we're talking real money."

There was Hubert Humphrey, who used to say of his own speeches, "I never thought they were too long. I enjoyed every minute."

And Russell Long, the estimable Chairman of the Finance Committee until the Reagan landslide landed me in the job, causing me to ask, "Who's going to tell Russell?"

There was Phil Hart, who Dan Inouye and I first met when we were all recovering in the same hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan...Scoop Jackson, Margaret Chase Smith, Howard Baker, Robert Byrd...the list goes on and on.

From them--and from you--I have learned a great deal.

I learned that in this town--as in any other--your word is your bond. And I hope that even if you disagreed with every vote I cast in my time in the Senate, you always knew that Bob Dole kept his word.

I also learned that leadership is a combination of background and backbone. It's telling the truth. It's saying what you will do and doing what you say. It's knowing how the political process works and, crucially, how to make it work better. It's looking beyond the next election to the next generation. And it's understanding that in the give and take of writing and passing legislation, you sometimes must be satisfied with less than total victory. As Ronald Reagan said, "If I can get 90% of what I want," I'd call that a pretty good deal."

I've read that my decision to leave has caused astonishment in some quarters. I don't begrudge anyone their surprise. But I do want to set the record straight and disabuse anyone of the sadly mistaken belief that I leave in hopes of distancing myself from the Senate.

The truth is that I would no more distance myself from the United States Senate than I would from the United States, itself.

For this body is a reflection of America--with all her goodness, her vision, and her generosity of spirit--as well as her imperfections and her occasional inefficiency. Like America, we have yet to reach our full potential. We are a work in progress.

My friends, today is the latest, but I trust not the last, chapter in a story that began when a young law student and World War II Veteran announced his candidacy for the Kansas State Legislature. Shortly after winning the election, I was approached by a reporter wanting to know my legislative agenda. I told him after sitting and watching the action for a couple of days I planned on standing up for what I believed was right.

As I look back over my years in this chamber, I know I've made my share of mistakes. But for the most part, I have attempted to stand up for what I believed was right.

And perhaps on this day you will indulge me in mentioning a few causes in which I take the most pride.

I'm proud of having stood with the farm families of Kansas and America, who make so many sacrifices to feed this country and much of the world.

I will always remember standing with our courageous soldiers in Vietnam--heroes like John McCain and Bob Kerrey--at a time when some in Congress would have cut off funding for the war, even at the risk of imperiling America's front line defenders.

The same holds true for undernourished children and malnourished mothers whose needs could only be met by expanding food stamps, and by creating the Women, Infants, and Children program.

No first class democracy can tolerate treating people like second class citizens, and I'm proud to have served as the floor manager of the legislation that made Martin Luther King's birthday a national holiday.

The first speech I ever delivered on the Senate floor concerned the rights of disabled Americans. More recently, I've been honored to stand with many who might not be able to stand on their own, in passing legislation that finally and belatedly recognized the skills and talents and possibilities of 43 million Americans who ask for nothing more than the chance to be full participants in our society.

All too often around here, we forget that our ultimate clients are American taxpayers. Ronald Reagan never forgot that. And I will never forget managing legislation that created the single largest tax cut in American history.

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Back in 1983, it was my privilege to work with Senator Moynihan, the late Claude Pepper, and other members of the National Commission on Social Security Reform who came together across partisan lines to take the heat and save Social Security for generations to come.

More than a decade later, Medicare faces impending bankruptcy. Some want to deny this hard truth, and pretend that tomorrow will never come. But that is not the way problems get solved. That is not the way Americans are best served.

The world has often seemed a dangerous place over the past quarter century. And yet because I know something of our past, I have no fears for our future. Because this Senate stood with the freedom loving people in Nicaragua, South Africa, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere, we have lit liberty's torch with a glow that can truly light the world.

We have done so because to us, America is much more than a place on the map. America is a beacon of hope, a magnet for the oppressed, and a shield against those who would put the soul itself in bondage. Certainly those of us who stood with President Bush in giving him the needed authority to liberate Kuwait can look back upon our stand with pride.

But when all the votes are counted, when all the bills are catalogued, when all the amendments and riders are sent to the Archives, I hope it will be said that you and I together left future generations a legacy free of debt and full of opportunity. Quite simply, if we love our children and grandchildren, we will not bring them into this world hobbled by the ball and chain of debt.

Whatever the future may hold for me, whatever office or station may be mine, I will continue to raise my voice on behalf of a Balanced Budget Amendment to the United States Constitution. My hero, Dwight Eisenhower, said it best. In his final speech as President, he told us, and I quote:

"As we peer into society's future, we--you and I--and our government--must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow.

We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow."

Those words have not lost their urgency in the 35 years since President Eisenhower spoke them. As the people's representatives, the choice is ours: We can lead, or we can mislead. But whatever we do, we will be held responsible. Not just in November of 1996, but well into the next century.

The Bible tells us that to everything there is a season. It is now time for my season in the United States Senate to come to an end. But the new season before me makes this moment far less the closing of one chapter than the opening of another.

For while I take pride in the past, I live for the future. I agree with the prairie poet Carl Sandburg, who told us that

"Yesterday is a wind gone down,
A sun dropped in the West.
I tell you that there is nothing in the world,
Only an ocean of tomorrows,
A sky of tomorrows."

For me, America's greatest tomorrows are yet to be lived. May God bless America, and may God bless the United States Senate.

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