

REMARKS OF SENATOR BOB DOLE
FREEDOM TREE DEDICATION
MEMORIAL PARK
CLIFTON, KANSAS
MAY 5, 1974

FIFTEEN MONTHS HAVE PASSED SINCE THAT DAY IN JANUARY 1973 WHEN THE PARIS AGREEMENTS BROUGHT A FORMAL END TO THE VIETNAM WAR.

WE WATCHED THE SIGNING OF THOSE ACCORDS WITH THE FERVENT PRAYER THAT THEY WOULD PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR A REAL AND LASTING PEACE IN THAT TROUBLED PART OF THE WORLD. WE WATCHED WITH THE DEEP HOPE THAT THEY WOULD MEAN AN END TO THE DEATH AND SUFFERING. AND MOST OF ALL, WE WATCHED IN ANTICIPATION THAT THEY WOULD BRING ABOUT THE RELEASE OF OUR PRISONERS OF WAR AND INFORMATION ABOUT THE MISSING.

2.

IN THE MONTHS THAT FOLLOWED THOSE AGREEMENTS, WE SHARED SOME OF THE MOST JOYOUS AND HEARTWARMING MOMENTS IN OUR HISTORY. MORE THAN 500 MEN WHO HAD BEEN HELD IN CAPTIVITY WERE REUNITED -- ON AMERICAN SOIL -- WITH THEIR FAMILIES AND LOVED ONES AFTER FIVE, SIX AND SEVEN YEARS OF ISOLATION, DEPRIVATION AND ANXIETY. THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TOOK GREAT PRIDE AND INSPIRATION FROM THOSE REUNIONS AND FROM THE MANY MEMORABLE WELCOMING CEREMONIES WHICH CULMINATED IN A GALA STATE DINNER IN THEIR HONOR AT THE WHITE HOUSE. A GREAT BURDEN SEEMED LIFTED FROM THE WAR-WEARY MIND OF THE COUNTRY BY THE RETURN OF OUR CAPTIVE MEN, AND WE BREATHED A COLLECTIVE SIGH OF RELIEF.

3.

NO CELEBRATION FOR SOME

BUT THERE WERE THOSE IN AMERICA WHO COULD NOT FIND RELIEF, REUNION AND CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION IN THOSE EARLY MONTHS OF 1973. FOR THEM, THAT TIME WAS ONLY ANOTHER FEW PAGES ON A CALENDAR THAT IS MARKED BY NO RED LETTER DAYS -- ONLY QUESTION MARKS AND DOUBTS AND UNCERTAINTIES. AND FOR THEM, THESE PAST 15 MONTHS HAVE BEEN LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM THE 15 WHICH PRECEDED THEM.

THE WIVES, PARENTS, CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF MORE THAN 1,200 AMERICANS STILL LISTED AS MISSING IN ACTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA CONTINUE TO WAIT AND WONDER. THERE IS PRECIOUS LITTLE CAUSE FOR REAL HOPE NOW. THE HARD REALITIES MUST BE FACED. BUT THERE IS STILL THE DOUBT, THE LINGERING QUESTIONS, THE UNCERTAINTY THAT HAUNTS THEIR LIVES.

4.

RIGHT TO CERTAINTY

THIS IS WRONG, IT IS UNFAIR AND IT IS CRUEL. THEY DESERVE THE CHANCE TO HAVE THOSE DOUBTS RESOLVED AND TO HAVE THESE QUESTIONS ANSWERED. THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW WITH AS MUCH CERTAINTY AS SCIENCE AND HUMAN EFFORT CAN PROVIDE.

BASIC HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS DICTATE THAT THEY BE GIVEN THIS KNOWLEDGE, AND THE SPECIFIC LANGUAGE OF THE PARIS AGREEMENTS REQUIRES IT. WE HAVE SEARCH TEAMS, THE EQUIPMENT AND THE INFORMATION TO MAKE AN INTENSIVE SEARCH OF HUNDREDS OF CRASH SITES AND MANY REPORTED GRAVES. WE COULD GO IN, DO THE JOB AND BE FINISHED QUICKLY, EFFICIENTLY AND THOROUGHLY -- IF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND THE VIET CONG WOULD ABIDE BY THEIR OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE PARIS AGREEMENTS.

5.

BUT THEY WILL NOT LIVE UP TO THEIR AGREEMENTS, AND THEY CONTINUE --
EVEN NOW -- IN THEIR CYNICAL DISREGARD FOR BASIC HUMANITARIAN CONSIDER-
ATIONS AND IN THEIR DEFAULT ON THEIR OWN INTERNATIONAL UNDERTAKINGS.

MUST USE REMAINING RESOURCES

THERE IS NOT A GREAT DEAL REMAINING FOR US TO USE AS LEVERAGE OR
PRESSURE ON THEM. MILITARY ACTION IS PROHIBITED. DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS
ARE OF LITTLE USE. WE HAVE NO TRADE OR AID TO WITHDRAW IN REPRISAL. SO
WE MUST MAKE USE OF EVERY MEANS AT OUR COMMAND, AND OUR MOST FORCEFUL
AND EFFECTIVE WEAPON IS PUBLIC OPINION.

6.

WE MUST KEEP ALIVE THE SENSE OF ANGER AND DETERMINATION WHICH PLAYED SUCH AN IMPORTANT ROLE DURING THE WAR. SO LONG AS THE ACCOUNTING FOR ONE AMERICAN IS OBSTRUCTED, WE MUST NOT ALLOW THIS SPARK IN THE PUBLIC CONSCIENCE TO DIE. IT MUST BE KEPT ALIVE AND NOURISHED IN EVERY STATE, IN EVERY COMMUNITY AND IN EVERY HOUSEHOLD.

THOSE 1,200 AMERICANS MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN, AND THEY SHALL NOT BE ABANDONED WHILE OUR SENSE OF JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS AND DIGNITY SURVIVES. EVERY DAY EACH OF US SHOULD BE REMINDED OF THESE MEN AND OF OUR OBLIGATIONS TO THEM.

7.

LIVING REMINDERS

AND I CAN THINK OF NO MORE APPROPRIATE REMINDER THAN A LIVING TREE TO SYMBOLIZE AND REPRESENT OUR COMMITMENT AND THEIR CAUSE. A FREEDOM TREE, STANDING FOR THE BELIEFS THEY HELD AND THE IDEALS THEY SERVED, IS A MOST FITTING GESTURE FOR US TO MAKE. AND HERE IN CLIFTON, IN HOLTON, IN TOPEKA -- WHEREVER THOSE WHO REMEMBER AND CARE CAN BE FOUND -- THESE TREES WILL SERVE AS DAILY ADMONITIONS TO EACH OF US AND OUR NEIGHBORS THAT THE CAUSE IS NOT FORGOTTEN -- NOR ARE THESE MEN.

IT IS AN HONOR TO PARTICIPATE IN DEDICATING THESE TWO TREES TODAY. ONE SERVES TO REMIND US PARTICULARLY OF SPECIALIST FOUR FLOYD ROBINSON, AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL THE MISSING FROM KANSAS.

8.

AND THE OTHER TREE REPRESENTS THEIR MISSING COMRADES FROM THROUGHOUT THIS GREAT NATION.

SO AS I SAID, IT IS AN HONOR TO BE HERE TODAY AND JOIN IN THESE DEDICATION CEREMONIES. AND WITH THESE CEREMONIES WE ALSO RE-DEDICATE OUR DETERMINATION AND COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE OF THESE BRAVE AMERICANS.

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