

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
"LES ARENDS DAY" CELEBRATION

MELVIN FAIRGROUNDS

4:20 P.M. CDT

Thank you very, very much, Les Arends, Betty Arends, Louella Dirksen, my dear friend Charlie Halleck, Bill Springer. We are kind of old-timers, but then there are some new ones -- Cliff Carlson, George O'Brien, Ed Madigan, George Burditt, your candidate for the Senate, Bill Scott -- well, a number of outstanding, wonderful servants of the people of the great State of Illinois.

It is almost unbelievable for me to be in Melvin and see this magnificent crowd. You would not think it could happen any place in the country except you know and I know and Charley Halleck knows and Louella Dirksen knows what a great, great guy Les Arends is. And that is why all of us are here.

I am sure that many of you made a much bigger effort than I, but we are here because you know and I know and literally thousands of other people know that Les Arends gave 110 percent in anything he ever did.

He did it for you all in this Congressional district. He did it for the State and he did it for the country. He did it for his family, his friends. Les Arends, on each and every occasion that he ever undertook to do anything, made the most maximum effort, and that is why you love him, we do; why you respect him, and why we do.

Les, I can't thank you enough for those years that we worked in tandem trying to lead the minority to do a responsible and constructive job, with the help of many, many others. I think we developed a close, warm, deep, personal relationship that has not been matched by any that I have ever had in the Congress, or almost anyplace. And for that experience, Les -- a very personal one -- I thank you very much.

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It has already been alluded to, but aside from the reasons I have just given for being here on behalf of Les, there are not many Ford Counties in the whole United States. We don't have one in Michigan, so I am here just to get acquainted with a lot of people from Ford County. I don't know whether any of my ancestors ever settled here, but if not, obviously they should have, with one exception: If they ever had, and Les Arends had been in Congress, I would never have made it to Washington, D.C.

The weather, the location, the people, just make this an ideal setting for this testimonial to Les. I am told Melvin has a population of roughly 500, and Les' comment as he was speaking indicated that, well, maybe you might lose an inch or two with all the people.

Let me add this postscript, if I can. All of you -- the 500 of you from Melvin -- are so darned proud of Les, you will just stand up and take charge, and you are not going to sink one inch -- one one-eighth of an inch because you have something that will never be forgotten in the history of Melvin. And that is Les Arends.

I have been told that three Presidents have visited Melvin and they all appeared for the same, the precise, the identical reason -- to tell all of you in Melvin and all of you who have come from many other places, the high regard that all of us have for Les Arends.

I looked at the history. I thought I knew it about Les -- 20 terms, 40 years. It will be a sad day in Washington, D.C. when Les Arends takes the final step out of Room 2306 in the Rayburn Building. Sometime in January, that will be the last time Les Arends will leave an office building where he had the honor to serve all of you in the House of Representatives.

The history books record that out of the 9,442 elected Members of the House of Representatives, from the very beginning until the last election, only 10 of them -- 10 out of 9,442 -- have spent a longer time in the House of Representatives than Les Arends. So his name and his service will go down in the history books of our country.

Now I know, as I look across this tremendous crowd that is paying tribute to Les Arends, that your grandparents and your great-grandparents, in some instances, and your parents, and literally hundreds of you have participated in sending Les Arends to Congress for these 20 elections.

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It is a lot easier, Les, as you know, to get to Washington today than it was that first trip. When you first left in 1934 it was either a long, bumpy drive, probably took three to four days, or maybe it was a pretty rough railroad trip. But you made it every year.

You served conscientiously, constructively, with compassion, with firmness. All the accolades that have come Les Arends' way, he richly deserves.

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I am told that back in the 1934 election, Les was campaigning to unseat an incumbent Democrat, and that was not a very good year for Republicans, as many of you may remember, but Les won, and his opponent, who he defeated, the incumbent, was pretty upset.

After the election, he was quoted as saying he didn't mind getting beat, but he didn't like the idea of being licked by a pair of long legs. (Laughter)

Well, I think all of you know that it was not Les' legs that endeared him to you; it was his door-to-door, his barnyard-to-barnyard campaigning that did it. He started it in 1934 and for the next 19 elections he did the same thing.

In his own inimitable way, Les Arends got to know people, he got to know their problems and he indicated a desire to work to solve those problems. He didn't ask whether a person was a Democrat, an Independent or a Republican. He did it the way Abe Lincoln did.

Les Arends wanted to solve problems of people and do what was right for the district and the State and the country, and for those reasons Les never had much trouble. He was respected, admired and loved.

On the issues--and I know intimately because we had some tough ones in recent years -- Les never looked at the problem from a political sense. He looked at those problems from the point of view of what was right, and he voted the way he thought it was right for people in the country, and that basic ingredient which is so necessary in this day and age made it possible for Les to serve this district for so long.

I don't have to embellish his record; it speaks for itself. He did a great job in a period of time which was unique in our country's history.

Let me cite a few figures, a fact or two, to indicate the change that went on in this country from 1934 until today. This span of time, four decades, when Les Arends did a job for all of you.

When Les entered the Congress in 1935, the Federal budget for everything was \$6 billion. Isn't that right, Charlie? Les? Six billion dollars to run everything for the Federal Government. Now it is \$305 billion. We are trying to cut it about \$5.4 billion.

Back in 1934 Les Arends entered Congress, and at that time, the Federal payroll for everybody was \$780,582. Today it is over \$2 billion, something around \$2.1 billion.

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Back in 1935 the budget for the Army, the Navy -- there was not an Air Force; it was the Air Corps in those days -- the total budget for the Department of Defense--they didn't actually have that in those days-- but for whatever we bought for guns and aircraft was under \$1 billion. Today it is \$88 billion.

Back in those days, the national debt was \$29 billion and it was forecast as a catastrophe for America. I hate to admit it now, but today the national debt is \$507 billion.

I don't bring these facts and figures up to indicate in any way whatsoever that Les Arends had anything to do with what took place or the things that happened -- just the opposite. Les fought against deficit financing, he did his utmost to hold down the growth of the Federal deficits and national debt, but I can't help but indicate that in these four decades, this 40 years, Les Arends was in the majority only four out of 40 years, so whatever happened that made these things go wrong, it was not Les' fault. He didn't control or he was not in the majority.

One thing that always impressed me about Les, he was a Member of the Committee on Armed Services. He had a substantial part in helping us catch up to get prepared to eventually win against the dictators -- Hitler, Mussolini. He helped us gear up to take care of the problems that resulted from an invasion of an ally, South Korea.

It was Les Arends who made sure from the very beginning that the only way to make sure that we would win the peace and keep the peace was through strength.

I am proud of that record of Les Arends, and all of you are proud of the record. You know as well as I do that peace comes from strength and war comes from weakness.

There is one other fact that I think is a tribute, Les. Charlie Halleck and I and others who have served in the Congress know of the vital role that a Whip plays. I didn't know it until I came to the Congress, but I have learned of the importance of that key responsibility in any legislative body, but particularly in the House of Representatives where you had 435 Members.

Les Arends served as Whip of the House of the Republicans in the House of Representatives from 1943 until now, the longest service of a Whip in either the Democratic or Republican parties in the history of the House of Representatives. That is a tribute to him beyond almost anything.

Let me just conclude with one final observation and comment.

Just before the House recessed, I was up on Capitol Hill, and I saw a good many of the Republicans as well as Democratic leaders. We were chatting about what they were going to do and what I was going to do after the recess began and before the election on November 5, and I indicated to the Democratic as well as Republican leaders that I was coming out to Melvin to pay tribute to one of the great Members of the Congress in the history of that legislative body.

Les, everybody on both sides of the aisle in the leadership and many, many others with whom you have served, whether they are Democratic or Republican, asked me to say to you that they are proud of their personal relationship, they are indebted to you for their friendship with you, and they asked me to say to the people who are gathered here today, and I will as a personal remark -- We are all deeply indebted to you for your service, your friendship, and your example as a great, great American.

Thank you for the opportunity of being here in Melvin on this occasion.

END (AT 4:40 P.M. CDT)