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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
DEDICATION CEREMONIES OF THE
HARRY S. TRUMAN STATUE

INDEPENDENCE SQUARE COURTHOUSE

2:50 P.M. CDT

Governor Bond, Margaret Truman Daniel, distinguished Members of the House of Representatives and the United States Senate, Mayor King, Dr. Jonas, distinguished guests, friends and admirers of Harry Truman:

Surrounded as I am by old friends and neighbors of President Truman, it would be hard and perhaps foolhardy for me to try to add anything to the affectionate tributes already paid him as a public servant and as a great man, but I have a few memories of my own, so let me try.

Mr. Truman, as it has been mentioned, was a great student of history, and he particularly liked to talk about his predecessors and the qualities of each of them that they brought to the Presidency. He was really an expert at it, allowing for a little tilt toward Jefferson, Jackson and his distant kinsman, John Tyler.

The reason I know this goes back to my very first close view meeting with him. In fact, my very first meeting with anybody, and my first view of the White House. In the 81st Congress in 1949 I was a very freshman Member of the House of Representatives, and on the minority side. President Truman had seen to that.

In 1948 I had been assigned a place at the very bottom of the seniority ladder on the Public Works Committee, and one day President Truman invited all of us down to visit him at the White House. He greeted us very warmly and asked if we would like a personally guided tour through the House, and we got the full lecture; not just the public rooms, but upstairs through the family living quarters.

President Truman explained all the portraits, pointed out all the changes made by First Ladies, all the way back to Abigail Adams. But the tour wasn't all ancient history. The President also showed us the hole in the floor in Margaret's sitting room where her spinet piano attempted to obey the law of gravity. He stood us under the crystal chandelier that almost crashed down in the middle of an East Room reception.

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He pointed to the swayback ceiling of the State Dining Room, which he said was only held up by the force of habit, not gravity. We were all so tremendously impressed. We thanked President Truman, and trooped back up to Capitol Hill and promptly voted him every penny of the \$5,400,000 he wanted to completely renovate the White House.

So, I broke all the anti-spending promises of my first campaign, and I want to testify here today that I am glad and grateful for President Truman's foresight and concern for future occupants of that beautiful and historic House. Betty and I especially enjoy the Truman balcony.

There is a serious side, of course, to the story of President Truman's skill in lobbying the whole Public Works Committee. He was proud of his powers of persuasion and he often said the President was the only person in Washington whose job is to lobby on behalf of all of the American people.

As a Senator from Missouri, he had to look after the special interests of his State. But, when he became President, he had to think about the interests of the whole country. That sometimes got him into trouble with the Congress -- he conceded that very openly -- and with political critics, not only in my party but from both the left and the right of his party.

"When a President does not have a fight or two with Congress" -- President Truman wrote in his memoirs -- "you know there is something very wrong."

Although I was on the other side of many contests with him, I now know how President Truman felt. I am still trying, but I have a long way to go to beat his post-war record of 250 vetoes.

Differ though we did on a lot of issues, I completely agreed with President Truman's stern concept of Presidential duty. "A President cannot always be popular" -- he wrote after coming back home to Independence -- "He has to be able to say yes and no and, more often, even no to most of the propositions that are put up to him by partisan groups and special interests who are always pulling at the White House for one thing or another."

"I have never felt that popularity and glamour are fundamentals on which the Chief Executive of the Government should operate. A man who is influenced by the polls or is afraid to make decisions which make him unpopular is not a man to represent the value of the country," so said Harry Truman.

"I have always," he said, "believed that the vast majority of the people want to do what is right, and if the President is right, and can get through to the people, he can always persuade them."

President Truman, like Abraham Lincoln, had a great faith in the ultimate good sense of our people. He like them, he talked their language, and in 1948 they went to the polls and proved that his faith was fully justified. I remember that campaign very well, not because Governor Dewey was a native son of Michigan, but because it was my first bid for elective office. I had a tough primary fight against an incumbent and President Truman, unknowingly, did me a favor by calling the Congress back in mid-summer for his famous Turnip Day Session.

This kept my primary opponent in Washington while I was busy campaigning against the whole establishment, which has always been a good way to get there. But, the real difference between my primary opponent and me was that he was a sincere isolationist and a leading opponent of the Marshall Plan and President Truman's other efforts to rebuild war-torn Europe and to maintain the United State's role of leadership in the world.

Like most of us just home from World War II, I went along with President Truman and the United States Senator from my home town of Grand Rapids, Michigan, Senator Arthur H. Vandenburg, in supporting a strong bipartisan posture in defense and foreign affairs. I won.

I went on supporting President Truman as a Member of the Congress on the great issues affecting peace and national security, which is in the best tradition of our history and ought never to be exploited or distorted for personal or partisan political advantage.

President Truman noted in his memoirs that in 1948 it was the worst possible time for him to have to wage a political campaign because he was trying to negotiate with the Russians and trying to get some kind of cease-fire in the Middle East.

"There should be no break in bipartisan foreign policy in the United States at any time," he said, "particularly during an election year." Quoting President Truman, "We are dangerously close to forgetting today that it is the President's duty to lead the nation in the conduct of its foreign affairs. This is a responsibility that cannot be delegated and must not be avoided."

Mr. Truman was much too seasoned a campaigner and much too realistic about the two-party system to suppose that foreign affairs would or even should be a forbidden subject in political debates. That is not what President Truman said. What he said was that American policy should not be demagogued, damaged or derailed because of election year considerations.

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I agreed then, and now I know how right he was. I am going to follow his counsel and his example. Nobody in this country expects consensus or conformity in a democracy, but it is not too much to expect of a mature 200-year old nation that its free political debates be conducted responsibly and rationally in the very sensitive areas of national security and our relations with other countries.

We know that both friends and foes are watching our election process closely and listening to every word we say that might affect them in the future. Throughout his eventful years as President, and after he left office, Mr. Truman repeatedly said the primary goal of all of his efforts was peace. He had learned about war firsthand as Captain of Battery D in the First World War.

As Commander-in-Chief, he made some of the most difficult decisions of World War II, as well as Korea. He was acutely aware that world peace can only be secured through American strength and the closest ties with our allies. He had no illusions about our adversaries, but believed nevertheless that no door should be closed, even to the remotest chance, in the pursuit of peace.

I was just back from carrier duty in the Pacific on April 12, 1945, the day Vice President Truman was suddenly called to assume the Presidency of the United States. On the evening of August 9, 1974, after the same thing happened to me, I was walking through the West Wing of the White House and I remembered my first visit there and how easily President Truman made a freshman Congressman feel at home -- and got his \$5,400,000.

One of my long-time associates reminded me that one of the first things a new President usually does is choose which portraits of three Presidents should be hung in the Cabinet Room. "We will leave President Eisenhower right where he is," I said, "And of course I want Abraham Lincoln." "To balance it off," this associate of mine said, "how about Andy Jackson?" "No, Harry Truman," I said. "Are you absolutely sure," he asked. "That is my decision," I said. He knew where the buck stops, and he was never afraid of the heat in the kitchen.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 3:03 P.M. CDT)