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Office of the Vice President

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REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
DEDICATION OF THE OLD SENATE CHAMBER  
THE CAPITOL  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

JUNE 16, 1976

All of us who cherish the heritage of this Nation are deeply indebted to those who led this brilliant restoration of the Old Senate Chamber, Senator Mansfield and Senator Scott, and the architect of the Capitol, George White and his colleague, Mario Campioli, and all those who worked with them.

The life of our Nation echoes from the walls of this Chamber. History makers served in this room. And magnificent history they made. Here spoke the impetuous Henry Clay. Here sat the austere John Calhoun, always clad in black. And, here on this very floor Daniel Webster proclaimed: "Liberty and union, now and forever, one and inseparable."

On January 4, 1859, they met for the last time, before filing over to the new Senate Chamber. Among their members were names that recount the history of that age, Stephen Douglas and Jefferson Davis, William Seward and Andrew Johnson. The closing of this Chamber was a symbol of what was happening to the Nation.

When the Chamber had first opened in 1810, 34 Senators sat here representing 7 million Americans in 17 states. When they left this Chamber, there were 64 Senators representing 28 million Americans in 32 states. America was growing, growing in size, in strength, in the role it was to play in the world arena.

Here they had debated the great issues of the mid-19th Century. Here the great compromises to hold the union together had been painfully pieced together. Here the policies that opened the Nation to its manifest destiny were decided.

When they first met in this Chamber, the place of the Senate in the American system was ambiguous, merely an executive council some judged it. By the time they left, the U.S. Senate had become the greatest deliberative body on Earth.

After the move to the new Senate Chamber, great chapters of American history continued to be written -- the hard controversies over binding up the Union after the Civil War; epic amendments to the Constitution ending slavery, extending due process and granting suffrage to millions of the disenfranchised; then, later, momentous decisions to commit America's might and men to two world wars; measures in the 1930s to meet human needs; decisions in the 1960s that carried forward the civil rights crusade; and inquiries in the early 1970s which led ultimately to the restoration of faith and confidence in government.

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Today, we dedicate this old Senate Chamber as a new shrine of American liberty. When we look back on the American past, so brief in years, yet so miraculous in accomplishment, when we look back on the lives of those who once occupied these places, when we remember what they survived and what they achieved, one can but have faith in America. We can't but realize that we are the most fortunate people on Earth, because, through God's abundant blessing, we have built the greatest, strongest, freest nation on Earth.

Today, we also face unparalleled problems -- problems in their way every bit as grave as those that confronted our predecessors in this Chamber. Remembering what they faced, recognizing what they achieved, cherishing what they bequeathed to us, we know that ours can be no time for pessimism, no time for anguish.

The third American century will be one of the greatest periods in the history of civilization. It will mark a new era of growth and social progress. The strength of American science and technology, the might of our productive enterprise system, and most of all, the vision, the creativity and the imagination of a free people, combined with their will and determination, their willingness to take risks, to work and to sacrifice, will make it so.

America will continue to extend the frontiers of science and technology, enlarge individual opportunity and extend the realm of the human spirit -- not only for ourselves, but for the people of the entire world.

When Vice President Crittenden closed that long ago session in this Chamber, he said: "These marble walls must molder into ruin, but the principles of constitutional liberty ... do not decay."

These walls have not been allowed to fall into ruin. And our liberties have not decayed. They survive, they flourish, strong and unimpaired. And so shall America.

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