

Prepared Remarks of Senator Bob Dole
Dole Plaque Dedication Ceremony
World War II Memorial
April 12, 2011

Thank you, Elizabeth—not just for saying such nice things about me after 35 years—but, even more, for believing them. I'd like to thank every one of you for coming this morning—but that would be long even by senatorial standards. So let me just say a special word of gratitude to Tom Brokaw, who has done more than anyone in his generation to convey the story of our generation; and to Fred Smith of FedEx, who can't be with us today, but without whose incredible dedication and generosity, this memorial probably wouldn't be finished. I'd also like to thank Secretary Salazar and Pat Roberts, Dirk Kempthorne, Sheila Burke and Rod DeArment who joined forces with Senator Inouye to make this day possible.

Let me also acknowledge a more recent colleague, Secretary Donna Shalala, a distinguished public servant with a passionate commitment to America's veterans. Most of all, I want to thank the citizen soldiers, farm and city boys, factory worker and recent immigrants, as diverse as America itself, for all you did to preserve civilization when it was most endangered. It's hard to believe that seven years have come and gone since we dedicated this memorial on a spring day in 2004. Since then, countless millions of visitors have acknowledged the heroism commemorated here in granite and bronze.

Many bring with them intensely personal memories to lay on history's altar. They come like pilgrims of old, accompanied by children or grandchildren. Some arrive on honor flights, cheered by people they have never met. Their step may be slowed, but their pride is as robust as their patriotism. To stand within these embracing arms of stone is to kindle memories of distant battlefields, bottomless seas and endless skies. It invites both reflection and renewal.

For this memorial celebrates not only the Americans who waged the second world war, but the values for which they fought. Values that transcend any one generation. Values for which brave young Americans are even now risking their lives in a Middle East awakening to the dawn of liberty.

Like many of you, I have lived long enough to see these values put to the test. I can remember a time when dictators were on the march, and it was fashionable in some quarters to question the future of democracy itself. I have seen walls go up, and walls come down. I have seen planes flown into buildings—and organized hatreds confuse murder with martyrdom.

But that's not all I've witnessed. For mine is the generation that banished polio and Jim Crow, invented the computer and left footprints on the surface of the moon. I once described myself as the most optimistic man in America. How could you live through what I have and be anything else? Sixty-six years have passed since another April 12, when Franklin Roosevelt's great heart gave out at the little white house in Warm Springs, Georgia. That morning he put the finishing touches on a Jefferson Day speech to be delivered two days later.

"More than an end to war," he wrote, "we want an end to the beginnings of all wars—yes, an end to this brutal, inhuman and thoroughly impractical method of settling the differences between governments."

To some this might appear visionary. But not to the leader whose last words were, appropriately, words of encouragement.

“the only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith.”

Like President Roosevelt, we can all pray for a world without war monuments. In the meantime, we can all thank God for those qualities of courage and character, service and sacrifice, that protect our freedoms and dispel our doubts. Let others imagine the worst. I am *still* the most optimistic man in America.