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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
WREATH LAYING CEREMONY

THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL

12:30 P.M. EST

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ambassador, Mayor Washington, Senator Beall, Mr. Hunt, ladies and gentlemen:

When Abraham Lincoln was President, the half-finished Washington Monument down the Mall stood as a silent testimony that the Nation itself was still unfinished, that it was young and that it was struggling.

Today, I find a new inspiration in laying this wreath to the memory of Lincoln on his 185th anniversary of his birthday.

President Lincoln envisioned a program to achieve, in his words, "a just and lasting peace among ourselves and among all nations." He saw the need for action to face an unprecedented challenge.

Addressing himself to a Nation, then divided, he proclaimed that the dogmas of a quiet past are inadequate in the stormy present. None of our problems today are as severe as those facing Lincoln -- human slavery and civil war between the States -- but we are confronted with the need to achieve economic emancipation.

As President, I believe it would be fitting to memorialize Abraham Lincoln by rededicating this Administration to reviving the moral and spiritual strength which he bequeathed to the United States.

In his first annual message to the Congress on December 3, 1861, Lincoln stressed that responsibility must center somewhere, advocating action on a united program for a troubled America.

Lincoln told the Congress exactly that, and these are his precise words: "In a stormy sea, no one on board can wish the ship to sink and yet, not infrequently, all go down together because too many will direct and no single mind will be allowed to control."

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So, spoke Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln had the courage to openly assert that he would conduct the affairs of his Administration so that, as he put it, "If, at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall have at least one friend left, and that friend shall be deep down inside me."

The finest testimonial I can conceive for Abraham Lincoln is for the Congress and for the President to unite at once on an effective program for national recovery and economic independence. I concur with the vision which Lincoln put this way: "We have the Congress and this Administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves."

Ladies and gentlemen, in serving America we shall nobly save or weakly abandon what Lincoln said, so aptly described as the last great hope on earth.

The way, as it was in his day, is plain, peaceful, generous, just, a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud and God must forever bless.

Despite all the tribute that we can pay him, Lincoln himself honors his own memory the very best because he left all of us a message about humility and humanity that continues to inspire and to help us grow as a people.

I believe the reason each generation of Americans find inspiration from Lincoln's life is because he seems, above all, to have been so human himself. He was humble. His compassion for others came from an understanding of himself.

He laughed. He laughed at himself and with others. He ran for President knowing that he faced the most grave political crisis in the Nation's history. He accepted the challenge because he believed in his own ability.

In these days of new hardships, new responsibilities and new challenges, it is important for us as a people to reflect upon the past, to draw strength from triumph over great trials in other times.

We honor the memory of Lincoln best not only by formal ceremonies but by doing our best to preserve for the next generation the legacy he so proudly handed down to us -- a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 12:36 P.M. EST)