

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2013*

**Remarks at a Memorial Service for Former Speaker of the House of Representatives Thomas S. Foley**

*October 29, 2013*

To Heather and the Foley family; to Tom's colleagues and friends; President Clinton; Vice President Mondale; former Speakers; and those who preceded me: I am honored to join you today to remember a man who embodied the virtues of devotion and respect for the institution that he led, for the colleagues that he served alongside, and most importantly, for the citizens that he had the honor to represent.

Unlike so many of you, I did not have the privilege of knowing Tom personally; I admired him from afar. But like millions of Americans, I benefit from his legacy. Thanks to Tom, more children get a Head Start on success in school and in life. More seniors receive better health care. More families breathe easier because they know their country will be there for them in times of need. And all of them—all of us—are indebted to that towering man from Spokane.

I think, in listening to the wonderful memories that have been shared, we get a sense of this man, and we recognize his humility. He often attributed much of his success to good luck, and he may have had a point. Leader McConnell told the story about his first race; there were a couple of details that got left out. On the way to Olympia to file the paperwork for his first congressional campaign, apparently, Tom blew out a tire. [*Laughter*] So he and some friends hitchhiked to a service station to get it fixed. And then, as they approached the outskirts of the city, they ran out of gas. So they pushed the car up the hill, coasting into town just before the deadline. And Tom went on to win that race by a resounding 54 votes.

So there's no question that there may have been some luck of the Irish operating when it came to Tom Foley, as well as incredible stamina. But what led him to make history as the first Speaker of the House from west of the Rockies was not luck. It was his hard work and his deep integrity and his powerful intellect, and as Bob Michel so eloquently and movingly stated, his ability to find common ground with his colleagues across the aisle. And it was his personal decency that helped him bring civility and order to a Congress that demanded both and still does.

Which brings me to a final point: At a time when our political system can seem more polarized and more divided than ever before, it can be tempting to see the possibility of bipartisan progress as a thing of the past, "old school," as Bob said. It can be tempting to wonder if we still have room for leaders like Tom, whether the environment, the media, the way that districts are drawn, and the pressures that those of us in elected office are under somehow preclude the possibility of that brand of leadership. Well, I believe we have to find our way back there.

Now more than ever, America needs public servants who are willing to place problem-solving ahead of politics, as the letter that President Clinton held up indicates, as the history of the crime bill shows. We are sent here to do what's right, and sometimes, doing what's right is hard. And it's not free. And yet that's the measure of leadership.

It's important for us who feel a responsibility to fight for a cause to recognize that our cause is not advanced if we can't also try to achieve compromise, the same way our Founders saw it: as a vital part of our democracy, the very thing that makes our system of self-

government possible. That's what Tom Foley believed. That's what he embodied. That's the legacy that shines brightly today.

Now, on the last day that he presided as Speaker, Tom described what it should feel like to serve the American people in this city. He spoke about coming to work in the morning and catching a glimpse of the Capitol. And he said that it ought to give anyone a thrill, a sense not only of personal satisfaction, "but very deep gratitude to our constituents for the honor of letting us represent them." And Tom never lost that sense of wonder.

It's interesting—as I read that passage, what he wrote—the first time I visited Capitol Hill, Tom Foley was Speaker. I was a very young man and I was doing community work, and I remember seeing that Capitol and having that same sense of wonder. And I think now about Tom Foley being here doing that work and inspiring what might have ultimately led me to be interested in public service as well.

When we're standing outside these magnificent buildings, we have that sense of wonder and that sense of hope. And sometimes, the longer you're here, the harder it is to hang on to that. And yet Tom Foley never lost it—never lost that sense of wonder, never lost the sense of gratitude. What a privilege, he felt it was, to serve. And he never forgot why he came here: on behalf of this Nation and his State and the citizens that he loved and respected so much.

And so, as a country, we have to be grateful to him. And to Heather and to the people of the great State of Washington, thank you so much for sharing Tom with us.

God bless Tom Foley. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:11 p.m. in the Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Heather S. Foley, wife of former Speaker Foley; and former Rep. Robert H. Michel.

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