



U.S. Department of
Transportation

News:

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

Contact: Jennifer Hillings
Tele.: (202) 426-4321

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE
JEWISH NATIONAL FUND
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
SEPTEMBER 12, 1985

Thank you so much for this National Tree of Life Award. I will cherish it for many reasons, not the least of which is that it comes from the Jewish National Fund, an organization possessed with a spirit of freedom and self-help known only in democratic societies.

I feel very humble at this hour. For it is I who should be honoring you. You who support the Jewish National Fund are at this moment building roads, constructing public works facilities and preparing sites for housing and industry. With your help the Fund has planted 180 million trees -- beautiful symbols of life. You have taken a once sterile desert and made it into an exporter of produce and flowers. To me, you are truly remarkable, and you deserve the credit for a magnificent contribution to world history. You have given life, in a very special sense of the word, to the State of Israel.

In the eight decades of the Jewish National Fund's you who support it so generously have reclaimed thousands of acres of arable land from swamp and devastation. The achievements of the Jewish National Fund are permanently engraved on the face of Israel and in the hearts of people throughout the world. By your deeds you prove that indeed there are no limits on individual commitment.

Commitment such as yours inspired me to decide upon a career in public service because I wanted to make a difference -- a positive difference -- in people's lives. Many of you have chosen public service in a different way -- through this marvelous organization. So we share a kindred spirit and I don't have to tell you that public service finds its greatest fulfillment when fueled by personal commitment and joined to crucial causes.

Think for a moment about who we are, and where we came from. Before there was an American Government, there were Americans drawn together in

- MORE -

voluntary associations. From our earliest days in America, we have been prone to organize for the betterment of the community. Prior to independence, there were sons of liberty and committees of correspondence to raise the flag of a new nation. Government arose to defend our territory, promote our enterprise, and embody the charitable attitudes of the people themselves. Over the years, the volunteer tradition continued: on Western prairies and in urban slums, at church suppers and in the synagogues and temples.

For much of America's history, we relied on the voluntary efforts of business, churches, synagogues and temples, foundations and other civic organizations to provide jobs, income, health care, food and housing to those most in need. When disaster struck, the Red Cross arrived before federal loans. Forty years ago when American servicemen lacked recreational facilities, the USO stepped in to fill the void. In truth, we are still what we were then -- a philanthropic family: one million voluntary organizations rolling up their sleeves instead of twiddling their thumbs. And today, we are witnessing all across America a tremendous reawakening; a resurgence of those fundamental principles that gave character to our land and reality to our dreams. We are once again drawing much of our strength as a nation from our moral commitment to one another. Similarly, Israel's strength rests in the moral commitment of her people and of those who give to the Jewish National Fund.

Now more than ever, Israel and the United States are allies of the heart as well as the head. Ours is the oldest surviving democracy in the world. Israel's is one of the newest. It's no accident of history that among the earliest settlers in this land were refugees from religious persecutions. Both our societies are grounded in faith in God. Both are determined to remain free while promoting freedom for others.

All this, I believe, is not without relevance to the future of Israel. For despite the constant threat to her security, Israel has proved in the past that she can achieve economic miracles. Israel's highly-educated, dynamic people, the richness of her culture, and her impressive capacities for research and development of new technologies; these and more give her potential to succeed, and to achieve, new levels of growth and prosperity.

It's a source of great satisfaction to me to know that today the United States and Israel have the closest and deepest bonds since democracy planted its roots in the Middle East, some 37 years ago. President Reagan has asked me to reaffirm to you his commitment to the security of Israel and to the well-being of her brave people. We will never do anything to place either in jeopardy. As a measure of our commitment, we have said that if Israel's right to membership in any United Nations organization is withdrawn, the United States will also withdraw.

We are more than just allies. The U.S. and Israel are allies of the spirit as well. Together, we put our faith in God and our trust in the people -- in their goodness and their compassion, in their common sense and

uncommon sensitivity. Our alliance for peace is strengthened all the more by the successes of your organization in promoting life as expressed in the beauty and productivity of the land itself. And as we approach the high holy days, may we all be inscribed in the book of life another year. For now, more than ever, as we strive to defend our shared ideals in a world full of threats, we must be mindful of the words of the prophet Isaiah, that those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

President Reagan tells a poignant story I'd like to share with you. A few years ago in Newport Beach, California, there were some beachfront homes that were threatened by an abnormally high tide and heavy surf -- homes in danger of total destruction. And all through a cold winter day and night, volunteers worked filling and piling up sandbags in an effort to save the homes. About 2 o'clock in the morning a newscaster grabbed a young fellow in his teens, attired only in wet trunks. Along with several hundred other young people, he'd been working day and night. No, he told the reporter, he didn't live in one of those homes they were trying to save. Yes, he was cold and tired. Why then, were he and his friends doing this, the reporter wanted to know. The young man paused for a moment and then he answered, "Well, I guess it's the first time we ever felt like we were really needed."

You are needed. I am needed. As I said at the outset, there are no limits on individual commitment, on the creativity or the talent of one man or woman fired with an ideal or filled with the knowledge that they, too are needed.

For in the end, society is judged by how it acts on its deepest convictions. One American who gave eloquent voice to our national credo of independence entwined with generosity was the great novelist of the American frontier, Willa Cather. She was born in Virginia, raised in Nebraska, and had her artistic flowering in a crowded corner of New York City. She never abandoned her adherence to a way of life that was individually strong because it was socially compassionate.

Cather's heroes and heroines were ordinary Americans: cowboys and Bohemian immigrants, southwestern missionaries and rural clerks. Most were poor: many suffered from being strangers in a strange land. Yet all obtained a kind of nobility by working hard and caring deeply. And when Miss Cather died, she was buried, at her request, on a New Hampshire hillside, behind a white-steepled meetinghouse that was itself raised by a congregation of Yankee carpenters and laborers. On her tombstone, she had inscribed words from her classic novel, My Antonia.

"This is happiness," it says, "to be dissolved into something complete and great."

To accept this Tree of Life Award and have a small part in your noble effort is to me to be involved in something complete and great. May we continue to strive together to make a difference -- a positive difference -- in people's lives.

Thank you so much, and God bless you all.