

# Remarks at a Dinner Honoring Speaker of the House of Representatives Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.

**March 17, 1986**

Reverend clergy, Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, ladies and gentlemen, I want to begin tonight by saying how touched I am to know that Tip wanted me here this evening. [Laughter] Why, he even called me himself last week and said, "Mr. President, make sure you don't miss the dinner Tuesday night." [Laughter] But to be honest, I've always known that Tip was behind me -- [laughter] -- even if it was only at the State of the Union Address. As I made each proposal, I could hear Tip whispering to George Bush, "Forget it. No way. Fat chance." [Laughter] I think it was inevitable, though, that there'd be a standoff between us. Imagine one Irishman trying to corner another Irishman in the Oval Office. [Laughter] But despite all this, Tip wanted me here. He said that since it was March 17th, it was only fitting that someone drop by who actually had known St. Patrick. [Laughter] And that's true, Tip. I did know St. Patrick. In fact, we both changed to the same political party at about the same time. [Laughter]

Now, it's true that Tip and I have our political disagreements. Sure, I said some things about Tip, and Tip said some things about me. But that's all history. And anyway, you know how it is, I forget. [Laughter] I just follow that old motto, "Forgive and forget." Or is it, "Forget and forgive"? [Laughter]

Ladies and gentlemen, I think you know Tip and I've been kidding each other for some time now. And I hope you also know how much I hope this continues for many years to come. A little kidding is, after all, a sign of affection, the sort of things that friends do to each other. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful you have permitted me in the past, and I hope in the future, that singular honor, the honor of calling you my friend. I think the fact of our friendship is testimony to the political system that we're part of and the

country we live in, a country which permits two not-so-shy and not-so-retiring Irishmen to have it out on the issues rather than on each other or their countrymen.

But in addition to celebrating a country and a personal friendship, I wanted to come here tonight to join you in saluting Tip O'Neill, to salute him for the years of dedication and devotion to country. Tip's recollections of politics go back, of course, far beyond my own. [Laughter] He's seen some who play the game well and others who do not. He's seen some who love politics and some who came to it only out of a sense of duty. But through it all, Tip has been a vital and forceful part of America's political tradition, a tradition that he has truly enriched.

Yet Tip O'Neill represents far more than just this political tradition. Deep within, too, is the memory of places like Back Bay and South Boston, the docks, the piers, those who came off the ships in Boston Harbor seeking a better land, a better way for their children. And they found that something better. They rose above the prejudice and the hardship. Tip would see one of his contemporaries become President. John F. Kennedy would be 68 today had he lived. And Tip can remember those golden hours better than most in this room. And, then, not too many years later, there was another of immigrant stock who would become Speaker of the House. In so short a time, so much leadership from one city, one place, one people. How fitting that Boston College, a place that became to so many of those new arrivals a symbol of moving upward and onward; how fitting that Boston College, whose towers on the heights have reached to heaven's own blue for so many, should sponsor this salute to Tip O'Neill.

Tip, you are a true son of Boston College and our friend, and we salute you. You are also a leader of the Nation, and for that we honor you. But you also embody so much of what this Nation is all about, the hope that is America. So, you make us proud as well, my friend; you make us proud.

Thank you. God bless you all.

*Note: The President spoke at 8:06 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his opening remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald of Ireland.*

Date

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