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Barack Obama

George W. Bush Library Dedication Address

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To President Bush and Mrs. Bush; to President Clinton and now-former Secretary Clinton; to President George H.W. Bush and Mrs. Bush; to President and Mrs. Carter; to current and former world leaders and all the distinguished guests here today: Michelle and I are honored to be with you to mark this historic occasion.

This is a Texas-sized party. And that's worthy of what we're here to do today: honor the life and legacy of the 43rd President of the United States, George W. Bush.

When all the living former Presidents are together, it's also a -- a special day for our democracy. We've been called "the world's most exclusive club" -- and we do have a pretty nice clubhouse. But the truth is, our club is more like a support group.

The last time we all got together was just before I took office -- and I needed that. Because as each of these leaders will tell you, no matter how much you may think you're ready to assume the office of the presidency, it's impossible to truly understand the nature of the job until it's yours, until you're sitting at that desk.



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And that's why every President gains a greater appreciation for all of those who served before them; for the leaders from both parties who've taken on the momentous challenges and felt the enormous weight of the nation on their shoulders. And for me, that appreciation very much extends to President Bush.

The first thing I found in that desk the day I took office was a -- a letter from George, and one that demonstrated his compassion and his generosity. For he knew that I would come to learn what he had learned -- that being President, above all, is a humbling job. There are moments where you make mistakes.

There are times where you wish you could turn back the clock. And what I know is true about President Bush, and I hope my successor will say about me, is that we love this country and we do our best.

Now, in the past, President Bush has said it's impossible to pass judgment on his presidency while he's still alive. So maybe this is a little bit premature. But even now, there are certain things that we know for certain.

We know about the son who was raised by two strong, loving parents in Midland, famous -- famously inheriting, as he says, "my daddy's eyes and my mother's mouth"; the young boy who once came home after a trip to a museum and proudly presented his horrified mother with a small dinosaur tailbone he had smuggled home in his pocket.

I'll bet that went over great with Barbara.

We know about the young man who met the love of his life at a dinner party, ditching his plans to go to bed early and instead talking with the brilliant and charming Laura Welch late into the night.

We know about the father who raised two remarkable, caring, beautiful daughters, even after they tried to discourage him from running for President, saying, "Dad, you're not as cool as you think you are." Mr. President, I can relate. And now we see President Bush, the grandfather, just beginning to spoil his brand-new granddaughter.

So we know President Bush the man. And what President Clinton said is absolutely true -- to know the man is to like the man, because he's comfortable in his own skin. He knows who he is. He doesn't put on any pretenses. He takes his job seriously, but he doesn't take himself too seriously. He is a good man.

But we also know something about George Bush the leader. As we walk through this library, obviously we're reminded of the incredible strength and resolve that came through that bullhorn as he stood amid the rubble and the ruins of Ground Zero, promising to deliver justice to those who had sought to destroy our way of life.



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We remember the compassion that he showed by leading the global fight against HIV/AIDS and malaria, helping to save millions of lives and reminding people in some of the poorest corners of the globe that America cares and that we're here to help.

We remember his commitment to reaching across the aisle to unlikely allies like Ted Kennedy, because he believed that we had to reform our schools in ways that help every child learn, not just some; that we have to repair a broken immigration system; and that this progress is only possible when we do it together.

Seven years ago, President Bush restarted an important conversation by speaking with the American people about our history as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. And even though comprehensive immigration reform has taken a little longer than any of us expected, I am hopeful that this year, with the help of Speaker Boehner and some of the senators and members of Congress who are here today, that we bring it home -- for our families, and our economy, and our security, and for this incredible country that we love. And if we do that, it will be in large part thanks to all the hard work of President George W. Bush.

And finally, a President bears no greater decision and no more solemn burden than serving as Commander-in-Chief of the greatest military that the world has ever known. As President Bush himself has said, "America must and will keep its word to the men and women who have given us so much." So even as we Americans may at times disagree on matters of foreign policy, we share a profound respect and reverence for the men and women of our military and their families. And we are united in our determination to comfort the families of the fallen and to care for those who wear the uniform of the United States.

On the flight back from Russia, after negotiating with Nikita Khrushchev at the height of the Cold War, President Kennedy's secretary found a small slip of paper on which the President had written a favorite saying: "I know there is a God. And I see a storm coming. If he has a place for me, I believe I am ready."

No one can be completely ready for this office. But America needs leaders who are willing to face the storm head on, even as they pray for God's strength and wisdom so that they can do what they believe is right. And that's what the leaders with whom I share this stage have all done. That's what President George W. Bush chose to do. That's why I'm honored to be part of today's celebration.

Mr. President, for your service, for your courage, for your sense of humor, and, most of all, for your love of country: Thank you very much.

From all the citizens of the United States of America, God bless you.

And God bless these United States.