Excerpts of Remarks by Nelson A. Rockefeller
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The Harry Truman Good Neighbor Award Luncheon
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You honor me by your invitation to share in this
celebration of the birthday of Harry S Truman, a great American
and surely one of the greatest Presidents of the United States of
America.

Like many of you, I was privileged to know President
Truman personally. But, unlike you, I had the special privilege
of being fired by him. As a holdover appointment from the previous
administration, I was "given my liberty" when I did not resign. The
event did not shake the Nation. However, it gave me something in
common with General of the Army Douglas MacArthur.

Harry Truman was as American as apple pie and sour mash
bourbon. He needed no research nor public opinion polling to know
what the great American public thought, what its values were, what
it aspired to. Harry Truman was an integral part of that public.
And despite the high offices he held and the enormous impact of his
leadership upon the whole world, he never left that great American
public. Neither the blandishments of privilege nor the temptations
of power blunted his common sense or open integrity.

He held fast to his belief in the dignity of the individual
-- and all individuals. He never despained of the common sense
judgment of the American people when they knew the facts. He never
gave way to cynicism. He hated sham. He never disparaged our basic
American institutions and values. The ardor of his patriotism was
founded in knowledge, experience and faith.

Harry Truman became our President at one of the most
critical times in our history. We were at war on two fronts across
the major oceans. The grand alliance that was winning the war against
Hitler, however, was already showing signs of coming apart. Stalin
was seizing Eastern Europe. The British Empire was disintegrating.
Charles de Gaulle was already asserting his impervious independence.

The Japanese war machine, stopped at Midway and defeated
in the struggle for Okinawa and Iwo Jima, was still formidable in
its home islands fortresses. Calculations estimated a million
American casualties would be the price of invasion and ending that war.

At Los Alamos, the Atom Bomb had been developed. The
Nation was in shock at Franklin Roosevelt's death. The "father figure"
-- that had seen the country through the trials of the depression
and four years of world war -- was gone.