Excerpts of Remarks by Nelson A. Rockefeller
Prepared for Delivery at
The Harry Truman Good Neighbor Award Luncheon
Hotel Muehlebach, Kansas City, Missouri
12:00 Noon, May 8, 1978

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 despaired 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.