

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY MADELEINE K.
ALBRIGHT AT THE NED MEMORIAL TRIBUTE TO VACLAV HAVEL**

Thank you Carl and thanks to the National Endowment and to Ambassador Gandolovic and the Czech embassy for sponsoring this event.

I would also like to greet our colleagues in Prague, including Norm Eisen, the United States Ambassador to the Czech Republic, and Ambassador Martin Palouš, director of the Havel Library.

[In Czech] Greetings, friends, and thank you for joining with us in celebrating the life of Václav Havel on this, the 35th anniversary of Charter 77.

[In English] In the days since President Havel's death, we have heard many fitting tributes to his work and legacy.

My own feelings in this time are based on my personal friendship with him and on my identity as a Czechoslovak-American with a lifelong commitment to democracy.

I will remember Havel most vividly in casual settings, when he felt free to talk about whatever was on his mind – from music and theater to the frustrations of politics and the mysteries of the universe.

His was a restless and inventive intellect; and he was the kind of person who admired beauty in all its forms.

I recall especially the night he played host to President Clinton at the Reduta jazz club in Prague, shaking maracas and a tambourine while Clinton tried out the new saxophone that Havel had just given him.

This was diplomacy with a sound track, not to mention a thick cloud of cigarette smoke.

Havel, as we know, loved music very much, which kept any of us from pointing out that he had absolutely no sense of rhythm.

This quiet hero had the demeanor of a humble man, and it was no act.

I think he was genuinely astonished to find himself the leader of a revolution and even more, to be given the keys to the palace as head of state.

But he also had an unshakable confidence in certain basic principles about how we humans should treat one another, and about the proper relationship between citizens and the state.

Throughout his life, he bore witness to the many excuses we employ to avoid fulfilling our moral and civic responsibilities, which can be at best inconvenient and, in the face of repression, lead to imprisonment, even death.

He was charitable toward those who failed the test of courage, but he assured us over and over again that we could do better.

Whether he was reminding the Czech and Slovak peoples of their own best traditions, or rousing the slumbering conscience of the world, he never wavered in his commitment to personal liberty, respect for human rights, and the pursuit of democracy.

The best way for us to honor his memory is to carry on with his work.

I know from conversations in the past year that Havel was profoundly encouraged by Arab spring and by the promising, albeit fragile, developments in Burma, where he cared deeply about the success and well-being of Aung San Suu Kyi.

In October, he signed the Budapest Appeal, calling upon Europe to take a stand against any government—even a democratically-elected one—that abuses its power by undermining democratic institutions.

His most recent public statements were in support of political prisoners in Belarus and of opposition protests in Moscow where, on the day of his funeral, 80,000 demonstrators observed a moment of silence to mark his passing.

Through Charter 77 and the Velvet Revolution, Havel and his compatriots gave their country a new birth of freedom, but his own preoccupation was never the mere attainment of liberty, but its use for the right purposes.

People are mortal, but that goal is for all time.

Three months ago, many of us gathered in Prague to celebrate Havel's 75th birthday.

My gift to him was a compass that had been used by American soldiers in World War I, the conflict that led to Czechoslovakia's founding.

In my note, I cited the irony of giving a compass to someone who had served as the North Star for a generation.

In one sense, Havel was very much a product of his place and time, but he thought, spoke and acted on behalf of principles that will always matter everywhere; that is why his words--and the memory of the man who authored them--will survive as long as moral and democratic ideas are relevant to our race.

Thank you very much, and now I am pleased to yield the floor once again, to the president of the National Endowment for Democracy, Carl Gershman.