

Speaker Ned McWherter's Farewell Remarks at the closing of the second session of the House of Representatives

May 14, 1986

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, I hope Lamar and Jim and my other colleagues know that I'm filming commercials today.

I'm like Elbert Gill was this morning. I'm at a loss for words, but I do have a few brief remarks that I'd like to make. It may be my last opportunity here. Some of the members of the House have been contemplating my being a "Lame Duck" for the last eight or ten weeks. I keep telling them I'm not. Remember, ladies and gentlemen, you changed the Constitution a few years ago, and whatever happens to me, I'll be back to convene this House in January to help you elect a new Speaker. Therefore, this is the last day I'll ever preside over the Tennessee House of Representatives.

I see a lot of people in the galleries. I see some young people up there in the galleries, and I'm sure proud they're here. I see employees all around this chamber, and members that I've served with in the past, my colleagues in the House and Senate serving in this General Assembly. I appreciate your presence today.

About fourteen years ago, the members of this House took a chance, and they elected a young two-term legislator from West Tennessee as Speaker. I recall those days well -- I barely won. Some people wondered, silently and out loud, if that was a mistake. I truly and sincerely hope it was not. Over these fourteen years, I've stood right here and watched this House, along with our colleagues in the Senate, change the shape of Tennessee. I've stood here and I've watched us improve our schools and our universities. We've built a health care system for our poor. We've built billions and billions of dollars of roads and bridges. We've made commitments to clean air and water for our children and for future generations. And we've done this all responsibly. As Mr. Snodgrass pointed out, we did it with balanced budgets annually.

You know there are some people that would give me all the credit for this in the House for a few years, but I'd like to clear up the record today as I leave this Chamber. I believe that we've set the stage for Tennessee to become the leading state in this nation between now and the turn of the century. We have accomplished all these things because, after the elections, and this has always been important to me, Democrats and Republicans, urban and rural, were all willing to come together to do the responsible thing at the right time.

I've stood here and presided over this House and seen the members work ten long hours for days after day. We've gotten mad. I've been challenged in the

Chair, we've fussed a little, and we've even fought. I can remember a little fight up here one day on the floor. But in the end, I always knew I could count on each and every member of this House to do what needed to be done, and for this, and for your compliance, when I've asked you for order, I'll always be grateful.

I couldn't leave this Chamber without a few personal remarks to some of the people that have really helped me over the years.

To the members of my party -- and I'm proud of my party -- you've been loyal, you've been hard-working, and you've been men and women who've made me proud to be a Democrat.

To the members of the Republican Party, my friends -- you've sometimes disagreed, but you've been responsible, and you've never tried to obstruct the work that goes on in this House in partisanship, and I thank you for that.

To Alice and the employees that have always worked for me -- one simple message: Thank you, I love you all.

To the Constitutional Officers, my friends -- I grew up in the politics with all three of you. Thank you for your encouragement, support and wise counsel.

To Cletus McWilliams -- he was probably the sorriest pro tem we ever had in this House (laughter). He locked the doors, the sergeant-at-arms came after me and said, "You've gotta go straighten this place out," and I said, "Just get rid of that little Marine up there, and you'll get it working alright." (laughter) Cletus, my appreciation to the Court, and thank you for coming, and thank you for your friendship.

To my good friend, Lieutenant Governor John Wilder, and all the members of the Senate -- I can't ever remember a time when I thought something was really important, that I went over to the Senate, and I didn't find the Senators ready to help. I'm grateful for that, and I thank you. All the Senate, together with the House, have been equal partners in everything we've accomplished over the last fourteen years.

To Governor Alexander -- you've been a good Governor, and I'm proud to have served with you. More than that, you've been a gentleman. And the Governor referred earlier in his remarks that we had an understanding about eight years ago. I said, "Governor, if we fight, fuss, disagree, talk about each other, or talk about our friends, I don't want to ever hear you stand on the tailgate of a pickup truck in some rural community and talk about me, or tell it, and I won't either." Governor Lamar Alexander has lived up to that understanding, and we've been able to have our free, competitive discussions and debates. I'm really proud of that, because that's the way the system works. As I explained to one of our members one day, that's the process. He has never betrayed my trust, and I've

never betrayed his trust. He's never lied to me, or knowingly misrepresented anything to me, and I thank you, and your administration, for being my friends.

Finally, to my friends in the Press -- and I do have another name that I occasionally use for some of you that have some length of service here. But I'll refrain from that today. There have been times when I really wanted to clean these cages out up here -- I built these cages, you know, and I really wanted to clean them out -- but in truth, I believe you've worked hard. I believe you've been informed, and I believe you've been more fair in reporting on me as Speaker and the members of the House.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I've presided over this House for more than 1250 times, that's more than 1250 days. When I step down from this podium, I'll leave few regrets. Yes, I've made some mistakes. I'd change some votes that I've made over the years.

But I think that I'll be able to look back on my service knowing that I've fulfilled three simple goals that I had as Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives. I helped make this Legislative Branch, along with all of you in the House and Senate, an equal branch of government. I helped make this body more democratic, and to my Republican friends, I'm referring to small d's. As I look over this body now, I see leaders in the House who are men and women, who are black and white, who are from urban areas and rural areas. We opened up the House to the democratic process.

Finally, if they remember nothing else about me when I'm gone, I hope they will say that I was honest, that I was open, and that I always tried to be fair.

I'm not too much on these emotional farewells, so I'll conclude by saying I just want each of you to know that I am a great big fellow in stature, but I'm not too big to tell you how much you mean to me, and the way I have been taught all my life to express this is that I love each and every one of you, and that I'm leaving here with no regrets, the best of memories, the best friendships any man could ever have.

I say to you --

GOODBYE

GOOD LUCK

AND GOD BLESS YOU ALL.