

A Statement by Individual Members of the Roosevelt Family

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The undersigned descendants of Franklin D. Roosevelt are very concerned that the growing issue of whether or not to portray FDR's disability in the soon to be opened FDR Memorial in Washington, D.C., will seriously detract from and disrupt the Memorial's public dedication ceremonies to be held on May 2, 1997.

It is undeniable that FDR was one of this country's greatest and most beloved leaders during times that held some of the greatest challenges to our society and all that it stands for. It is also undeniable that he lived with serious, disabling paralysis that resulted from his having contracted poliomyelitis. And, from those closest to FDR- Eleanor Roosevelt to Steve Early to Frances Perkins- to later-day, award-winning, historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Geoffrey Ward, we have learned that the experience of polio and his learning to live with constant pain and debilitating disability most likely gave FDR much of the strength, courage and determination that made him the great President and leader he was.

We also know that FDR and those around him went to great lengths to avoid having his disability known, photographed or otherwise publicized. This was probably a result of his personal and political judgment of the time that a clear perception of a fully confident and strong leader was needed in order to inspire a country and a world struggling to overcome the debilitation of the Depression and to respond to the challenges of fascism, totalitarianism and World War II. Nevertheless, FDR was also known to be comfortable with allowing his disability to be known and shown, particularly in appearances before wounded soldiers or other audiences, such as at Warm Springs, Georgia and Howard University in Washington, D.C. When he appeared seated before Congress to report on the Yalta Conference, he referred to his disability in a most natural way. Thus, the record is clear that whether or not FDR personally chose to "hide" his disability depended on the circumstances.

We wish it known that there is no "family position" of how best to represent FDR's disability because, as in most large families, there is no unanimity on this issue. Therefore, whether or not the FDR Memorial portrays FDR's disability should not be left to either the perceived or real "wishes" of the Roosevelt family. This Memorial is a tribute to a man and his times. The public's interest is in learning about those dramatically challenging times and about the courage, strength and determination of the man who led the country and the world in overcoming great odds, and in becoming the single greatest example for democracy, freedom, and enterprise in the history of the world. It would be a disservice to history and the public's interest if the impact of polio on the man were to be hidden.

The goal of the FDR Memorial must be to enable future generations to understand the whole man and the events and experiences that helped to shape his character. We the undersigned believe that this cannot be accomplished without a commitment to a permanent, meaningful portrayal in the Memorial of FDR's disability and how the process of adjusting to living with his disability made him a better and more able man and President.

We hope that a good faith effort will be made to arrive at a constructive solution to this controversy, allowing the dedication to proceed without disruptions that will only detract from the focus on FDR the man and his contributions to this country.

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