

# FDR MEMORIAL TO OPEN WITHOUT WHEELCHAIR

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

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A walk through FDR's four terms The park-like memorial features four outdoor gallery `rooms': Room One: Sets the stage for the FDR presidency with a bas-relief bronze sculpture of the Great Seal of the President as it appeared at Roosevelt's inauguration and a life-sized bas-relief showing FDR waving from an open car during his first inaugural parade. Among the quotations on the walls are `I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a New Deal for the American people' and `The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.'

Room Three: A granite wall seems reduced to rubble, symbolizing the upheaval and ruin of World War II. The dominant image is a 9-foot statue of FDR, seated, with his cape draped around him and his dog, Fala, at his feet. Among the quotations inscribed on the walls: `I have seen war. I have seen war on land and sea. I have seen blood running from the wounded. ... I have seen the dead in the mud. I have seen cities destroyed ... I have seen children starving. I have seen the agony of mothers and wives. I hate war.' Room Four: The theme is Seeds of Peace as Roosevelt enters his final term near the end of World War II. There is a sculpture of Eleanor Roosevelt with a United Nations symbol in the background. A waterfall cascades into a series of pools. A 30-foot-long bas-relief depicts Roosevelt's funeral cortege - horses pulling a caisson with mourners following. A time line of landmark events in FDR's life are carved in the granite, along with quotations including `Freedom of speech. Freedom of worship. Freedom from want. Freedom from fear.

## FULL TEXT

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Franklin Delano Roosevelt said he wanted a simple memorial "about the size of my desk." He's getting one that sprawls across 7.5 acres, costs \$48 million, and features waterfalls, bronze statues and enough granite to construct an 80-story building.

On Friday, President Clinton will dedicate the FDR Memorial beside the Tidal Basin, honoring a Democratic predecessor who gave hope to a downtrodden populace during the Great Depression and led a determined nation toward victory in World War II.

FDR joins George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln in the select rank of presidents with memorials in the nation's capital.

Completion of the memorial comes amid continuing controversy over the absence of a statue depicting the polio-stricken Roosevelt in his wheelchair.

Unless Congress passes legislation calling for creation of a new statue, hundreds of protesters will demonstrate at the dedication, said Jill Solomon, a spokeswoman for the "FDR in a Wheelchair Campaign" of the National Organization on Disability.

This week, Clinton said he would push Congress to approve a law to include "an additional statue, bas-relief or similar sculpture" that satisfies these demands.

Designing the memorial without showing Roosevelt in the wheelchair where he spent much of the momentous last quarter-century of his life is an insult to 49 million disabled Americans, said Jim Dickson, chairman of the "FDR in a Wheelchair" campaign.

The memorial park commemorating FDR's presidency from 1933 to 1945 is located along the scenic Cherry Tree Walk, across the Tidal Basin from the Jefferson Memorial and about a 10-minute walk from the Lincoln Memorial.

Inside the wooded memorial are four outdoor granite gallery rooms, one for each of FDR's presidential terms. The walls are inscribed with FDR's famous quotes, including his pledge of "a New Deal for the American people" and his reassurance that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

There is a sculpture of FDR and his wife, Eleanor. With her husband's encouragement, Mrs. Roosevelt "created what we know as the office of the First Lady, sharing in the presidential partnership as well as becoming a leader in her own right, developing her own political agenda," said Phil Rulon, a history professor at Northern Arizona University and associate editor of the *Presidential Studies Quarterly*.

The memorial's array of waterfalls and reflecting pools symbolize the prevalence of water in Roosevelt's life - including his boyhood love of boating, his recuperative time spent at Warm Springs, Ga., and his meetings with Winston Churchill and other World War II leaders on ships in the Atlantic Ocean.

The total cost of the memorial is about \$48 million, of which \$42.5 million is federal funding.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the first president to be known by his initials. For a generation of Americans, now drawing Social Security checks that are a legacy of FDR's New Deal, the memorial will mark the milestones of their lives.

Growing up, they gathered around the radio to hear his crackling "fireside chats" during the hard years of Depression. As young adults, they followed his leadership into war in Europe and the Pacific or into the support and sacrifice of the home front. And throughout middle age, they reared the Baby Boomers and paid taxes under the expansionist government that was born under Roosevelt.

The "narrative" memorial will provide "a living history lesson for all the generations to come," predicted Dorann Gunderson, executive director of the FDR Memorial Commission.

The first legislation calling for an FDR memorial was introduced in 1946, the year after he died of cerebral hemorrhage and was succeeded by Harry S. Truman. However, the decades it took to get Roosevelt memorialized is shorter than the time it took for completion of the Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln memorials.

"The timing is right. You have to let time go by before you can get some kind of measured estimate and you do get the perspective in 50 years," said James Macgregor Burns, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography Roosevelt, the Soldier of Freedom.

"In terms of how historians rate presidents, he was not rated that high during the first decade or two after his death. But in the last decade or two, he is routinely listed among the top three or four presidents," Burns said.

Any so-called delay could be attributed to FDR's specific request for a small, simple memorial about the size of his desk. Indeed, there already is such a memorial - an often overlooked slab of inscribed marble beside the National Archives Building.

"Obviously, a president elected four times would have known some people had more ambitious plans, and he discouraged them," said Richard Harrison, a historian of the FDR presidency and dean of faculty at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis. "So the decision to build a memorial would, at least in some ways, have displeased him." There is still some debate about whether FDR deserves to be in the memorialized company of Washington, Lincoln and Jefferson, but historians say that controversy has dwindled over the decades.

"If there are criteria for such a memorial, Roosevelt would certainly meet them," Harrison said. "His dedication to what is now called positive government revolutionized the American political process and effectively changed interpretation of the Constitution." But "there are many aspects of FDR's leadership that are subject to question and criticism," he conceded. "Many decisions, among them the Japanese internment policy, the slow response to racial segregation, the choice to pursue the atomic bomb and the failure to address the Holocaust, may be endlessly debated."

Doug Bandow, a historian and analyst with the Cato Institute, said FDR was "certainly giant in terms of politics and the dominating force of the century." But he disputes the notion that FDR was among the truly great presidents.

"His campaign to get the U.S. into war covertly was wrong," said Bandow. "A great president would make the case directly to the American people. And, in a broad sense, the New Deal was a failure."

It was World War II, not Roosevelt's policies, that eventually turned the economy around, Bandow argues.

It is not FDR's place in history that has caused the greatest controversy about the new memorial, however, but rather how the memorial will depict him.

In 1921, Roosevelt was stricken by polio at the age of 39, and he never again walked unaided. Disabled activists charge the memorial does not adequately portray the fact FDR spent his historic presidency in a wheelchair.

But Roosevelt himself went to elaborate lengths to keep his disability from being known.

"He was a shrewd politician, and he wanted to be elected president," Dickson said.

But he said Roosevelt also set up the March of Dimes and raised funds for the Warm Springs Treatment Center.

The FDR Memorial Commission said that Roosevelt's disability is shown in the overall display. An exact replica of one of FDR's wheelchairs will be displayed in the entry building and an entry time line will include one of the two known pictures of FDR in a wheelchair. Close examination of the major FDR statue shows him sitting in a chair with casters.

In another time line, carved in granite, is the notation: "1921 Stricken With Poliomyelitis - He Never Again Walked Unaided."

After Clinton's call for an additional statue, the Commission issued a statement noting that its mission to "plan, design and construct" the memorial will be "successfully completed" with the dedication Friday.

Reading the statement, Gunderson said the commission "has not had the opportunity to meet to consider the issue" of an additional statue and inquiries on proposed changes should be directed to the White House.

A walk through FDR's four terms The park-like memorial features four outdoor gallery 'rooms': Room One: Sets the stage for the FDR presidency with a bas-relief bronze sculpture of the Great Seal of the President as it appeared at Roosevelt's inauguration and a life-sized bas-relief showing FDR waving from an open car during his first inaugural parade. Among the quotations on the walls are 'I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a New Deal for the American people' and 'The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.'

Room Two: Images of the Great Depression appear: Three sculptural ensembles of a weary rural couple, figures in a bread line and a man listening to a 'fireside chat' on his radio. The wall inscriptions include 'I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad and ill-nourished. The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.'

Room Three: A granite wall seems reduced to rubble, symbolizing the upheaval and ruin of World War II. The dominant image is a 9-foot statue of FDR, seated, with his cape draped around him and his dog, Fala, at his feet. Among the quotations inscribed on the walls: 'I have seen war. I have seen war on land and sea. I have seen blood running from the wounded. ... I have seen the dead in the mud. I have seen cities destroyed ... I have seen children starving. I have seen the agony of mothers and wives. I hate war.' Room Four: The theme is Seeds of Peace as Roosevelt enters his final term near the end of World War II. There is a sculpture of Eleanor Roosevelt with a United Nations symbol in the background. A waterfall cascades into a series of pools. A 30-foot-long bas-relief depicts Roosevelt's funeral cortege - horses pulling a caisson with mourners following. A time line of landmark events in FDR's life are carved in the granite, along with quotations including 'Freedom of speech. Freedom of worship. Freedom from want. Freedom from fear.'

### **Illustration**

Caption: RICK McKAY/Palm Beach Post Washington Bureau 1. (C) A visitor to the new Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial snaps a photo of the bronze statue Saturday. 2. (B&W) Bronze statues of men standing in a Depression-era bread line are part of the memorial.

## **DETAILS**

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