

In Honor of Walter Cronkite

Monday, 20 July 2009

My generation came of age at a time when Walter Cronkite was the name in American culture, synonymous with credibility and respect. His role in our society transcended his TV news anchor position. His pronouncements on the events of our time were like a slow rolling thunder delivered from an electronic Mount Olympus. When he said 'and that's the way it is,' we believed his every word because his compassion, dignity and respect merited our trust.

In his later years, Walter Cronkite became a powerful spokesperson for world peace. I was humbled to share a platform with him at an event sponsored by the Peace Alliance.

Please continue to rally support for our legislation to create a cabinet level Department of Peace, HR808, which now has 70 cosponsors in the House

of Representatives.

Thank you.

DENNIS: The idea of a Department of Peace first came to me when I saw the Administration of Bill Clinton locked into a course of combat against Serbia, which included bombing the cities in Serbia.

And I began to study war. I learned that over 100 million people perished in the 20th century in wars; most of them civilians, non-combatants. And I began to look at the philosophy behind war and the world views behind war and the individual views behind war and got to that question, "Is war inevitable?" And, "If it's not inevitable can we create structures in our society that can help us avert conflict before the conflict really starts?"

And it's not the first time that anyone has ever thought of an idea of a Department of Peace. The one application we've been talking about tonight is how this particular legislation goes very deeply into domestic considerations.

So, whether we're looking at domestic violence, spousal abuse, child abuse, violence in the schools, racial violence, violence against gays, police-community relations challenges - all of those represent challenges to our humanity. So the Department of Peace would serve as a powerful tool for providing programs for education and support for existing community organizations and help to fund the creation of other community organizations and other programs that would give rise to a culture which would be more supportive, more humane, more loving, more compassionate.

WALTER CRONKITE: In both of your approaches to domestic problems and international problems, what you're actually saying is that our present system has failed. We have a structure that is supposed to be handling all these various things that you mentioned; but the structure does not work under the present guidance, the present organization.

We've got to move on to this question of peace; in some way to also excite the American people from the top, which your proposal of a separate Department would certainly begin, at least, to do.

So it seems to me that, if we're going this route - and we ARE going this route; I hope you're going to stay with this route and that all the people will stay with it -

[Cheers and applause from the audience.]

Our product is peace. And every time that name appears in the newspaper or on the broadcast or Internet, these days, and around the world - "The United States Department of Peace said this or that" - peace is being drummed into the people; that this is our principal motive: peace.

[Applause from the audience.]

What is quite clear - and would become clear as you go along with this campaign - is that you are trying, and I consider myself with you on this in every way...

[Applause from the audience.]

DENNIS: [Dennis applauds.] Thank you.

WALTER: ...But it is, of course, not only massive but basic change in our culture, in our entire approach to our relationship with other human beings. And, indeed, even with the animals, the birds out there...

[Applause.]

...which is an immense project, of course, as you obviously understand and recognize. We all do. It's not a matter of simply getting another Department of government. You're speaking of an entire philosophical revolution.

[Cheers and applause.]

And as big and as great as that problem is, we have to start somewhere.

DENNIS: Absolutely.

WALTER: This is a great start; a great start.

[Applause.]

What is it going to take to strike off the shackles of belief that nothing can be done?

DENNIS: Each individual here.

You know, Robert Kennedy once said something that I never forgot because it's one of those speeches that is just emblazoned in my mind; the purpose of individual action. He was speaking to students in South Africa in Capetown, who doubted that this white senator from a wealthy family and a big state had anything to say to them, had any relevance to their condition of apartheid. When he spoke to them in '68, they were right in the middle of this awful condition, separate with no hope of ever breaking out from this two-race, two-class society.

When he was challenged by them, he said something: He said, "Each time a man or woman stands up for an ideal, acts to improve the lot of others, strikes out against injustice; he or she sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. And crossing each other, in a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples create a current which can sweep down the

mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Each person in this room is as a tiny ripple of hope. Each community you're from, you have a chance to cross with a million different centers of energy and daring. And so, I believe that, just with the people in this room and with the people that they're connected to around the country, it has already started.

People ask me, "Do you think this will ever happen?" It will absolutely happen; it's not a question of "if" but "when." It will. Absolutely.

[Cheers and applause.]

WALTER: Let's get that word "peace" - Department of Peace - out there as constantly as you can do so. And this organization, of course, and you people are on the leading edge of that campaign. And obviously, as with any campaign, the enlistment of like-minded individuals - devoted individuals - to a process or a cause is the only way that you're ever going to put it together. You people are on the edge of that. And not only your organization, but through your organization the word spreads out among the people, so it becomes a more popular thing to be counted as one of the pilgrims, trying to lead us to this promised land of peace.

[Applause.]