

WASHINGTON - House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (MD) will delivery the following statement this evening on the House Floor (as prepared for delivery):

"Mr. Speaker, like every Member of this House, I offer my sincere condolences to the family and friends of former President Reagan, particularly his beloved wife, Nancy, and his children.

"Ronald Reagan loved this nation, and served it with distinction. And he will forever be remembered for his humor, grace and irrepressible optimism, which mirrored the American spirit and buoyed it in periods of difficulty.

"The last decade, when this man who had lived life with such physical vigor slowly slipped away, was an especially cruel blow. However, let us be comforted today that he has been summoned to a far better place.

"Having been elected to Congress just four months after he took office - and just six weeks after an assassin's bullet nearly claimed his life - I had a front-row seat during President Reagan's eight years in Washington.

"He was a man I both liked and respected. I liked him for his warmth and for the respect that he accorded others. And I respected him for the honesty of his convictions and the intellectual integrity that he displayed in pursuing them.

"After signing into law what was then the largest tax cut in American history in 1981, President Reagan had the fortitude to face fiscal reality.

"His policies caused yawning deficits and spiraling debt, consequences that he subsequently tried to address - albeit unsuccessfully.

"Without question, Ronald Reagan held strong ideological beliefs. But one of his real strengths was his willingness to put pragmatism above ideology.

"I also remember him as a person who early in life committed to equality and justice for all and later in life to the success of freedom and democracy around the world.

"While Democrats disagreed with and strongly opposed much of his domestic agenda, our political differences never hardened into paralyzing personal animosity. That was due in great measure to the leadership styles and personalities of President Reagan and Thomas P. 'Tip' O'Neill, the Speaker of the House during this period.

"These two men, the most powerful political figures in our nation in the 1980s, one a Republican and the other a Democrat, demonstrated to all Americans that our elected leaders could disagree politically without being disagreeable personally.

"They reminded all of us that cynicism and mean-spiritedness are inimical to American democracy; and that our real adversaries lie beyond our shores.

"The surest tribute that we can pay to Ronald Reagan today is to commit ourselves to recapture the generosity of spirit that always guided him.

"In a very real way, Ronald Reagan's life was the embodiment of the American Dream.

"Both President Reagan and President Clinton, like Harry Truman, gave credence to the promise that in America neither privileged birth nor economic advantage is necessary to enable one to become the President of the United States of America, the land of opportunity.

"President Reagan's leadership renewed the conviction that the future would be better than the past and that America's best days were still to come.

"That is a philosophy that all of us should embrace.

"May God bless his soul."

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