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Historic Marker Dedication

Guthrie, Ky., June 20, 2009

It is altogether fitting in these difficult economic times that we spend this time at this place doing what we are doing -- dedicating a marker to the memory of our ancestors who came together here in equally dire economic straits to do something about their plight.

We came here today to pay tribute to the former lions of our blood who gathered here 5,000 strong on the sultry September day over a hundred years ago. We traveled here -- some from a long distance -- over paved roads, in air conditioned cars, and to the serenading music of XM music being reflected to us from outer space. They rumbled here from afar on dust choked and rutted roads in the searing heat, in wagons and buggies, on horseback, or in hot and crowded trains.

They came to voice the economic anguish which they suffered, but more importantly to proclaim their solidarity in fighting for economic survival. Here, only a short forty years after our country had been torn asunder in the great civil war, farmers, merchants, and professionals from both Kentucky and Tennessee stood together in forming an organization to fight the injustice imposed upon them by the abuse of the Duke tobacco monopoly. Wealthy planters, large landowners, tenant farmers, rich and poor, black and white. They heeded the call to action as voiced by Lord Byron, "Hereditary bondsmen, know ye not that by your own hands ye must be freed? Your own hands must strike the blow."

Stephen Foster promised in those words so sacred to all Kentuckians, "by and by hard times come a-knocking at the door."

We gain inspiration today from the example they set in dealing with hard times. "United we stand, divided we fall," the Kentucky motto was very much alive on that autumn afternoon in this village of Guthrie. That remains our anthem to this day; both in word and deed. We saw graphic examples of this just a few months past when we saw neighbors and strangers, family and friends, coming together to deal with the freezing wrath of Mother Nature when she swept up a frigid and devastating ice storm across this area.

Our sacred land of west Kentucky and Tennessee was then as it is today -- a soft and rolling land, a haunting land where the spirits of our fathers still beckon us to stand tall and courageous in these challenging times; to fight injustice wherever it may be; to do the best of things in the worst of times.

This is a day of dedication of a marker and for all the things it symbolizes. But it is also a day of celebration, celebrating the triumph of human spirit right here on this spot so long ago. The human spirit conquers all. Neither stone nor steel, darkened dungeons or walls of beaten brass ... nothing can be retentive to the strength of spirit.

So let me ask you as I close, that with the dedication of this historic highway marker we lift our eyes beyond the troubles of today to the hopes and dreams of tomorrow. That by erecting this marker, we raise a banner which will speak to generations yet unborn. That when hard times come a knocking, the human spirit will conquer all.