

# Speaker Ryan: At NED event, Speaker Ryan reaffirms Congress's commitment to democracy and human rights

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**WASHINGTON**—Today, House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) spoke at the National Endowment for Democracy's (NED) 2017 Democracy Award ceremony, an event honoring five activists fighting corruption in Afghanistan, Angola, Guatemala, Malaysia, and Ukraine. In his address, Speaker Ryan reaffirmed Congress's commitment to advancing democracy and human rights. Below are the speaker's full remarks as prepared for delivery:

*"Thank you so much. In particular, I want to thank Judy Shelton, Carl Gershman, and the incredible team at NED for hosting this event.*

*"I want to extend my congratulations to all of tonight's honorees.*

*"We are so humbled to have you here at our Capitol, which we consider to be the world's greatest symbol of democracy.*

*"So much of this building is dedicated to honoring the origins of democracy, but you are on the front lines of this fight every day.*

*"Mr. Parsa, you are not even 9 months removed from an attempt on your life.*

“Following it, you said: ‘The attempt on my life did not stop me. My team and I continue to combat corruption even if it is tough.’

“It is this kind of dedication and bravery that brings us all here tonight.

“Of course, all of this goes back to that speech President Reagan gave at Westminster 35 years ago tomorrow.

“Though we now look at that speech as iconic, it was not all that well-received at the time.

“One of the biggest headlines, actually, was that members of Parliament had never seen a teleprompter before.

“But the reason some of the experts didn’t connect with it is they just didn’t share Reagan’s optimism about winning the Cold War and defeating communism.

“They didn’t see it, but he did. And here is the passage from the speech that I found most compelling.

“Reagan said, ‘While we must be cautious about forcing the pace of change, we must not hesitate to declare our ultimate objectives and to take concrete actions to move them. We must be staunch in our conviction that freedom is not the sole prerogative of a lucky few, but the inalienable and universal right of all human beings.’

*“Think about that for a second. That was not just an observation or a comment on events—it was a call to action.*

*“What Reagan meant is that freedom, although an inalienable and universal right, is not guaranteed. It needs to be fought for and defended at every turn.*

“And America would not just be part of a coalition in that fight. America would need to lead that charge.

“That is the mission NED carries out every day on behalf of this nation.

*“But it does so against some powerful forces. According to Freedom House, 2016 was the 11th straight year of decline in global freedom. This trend should alarm all of us.*

*“The rising tide of authoritarianism, corruption, and terror undermines not only our principles, but our security. These forces seek to divide, destabilize, and demoralize us. Corruption is not just a means to gain power or influence.*

*“It threatens to deprive ordinary citizens of their voice and their belief in one another. And when people lose that confidence—that resilience that is so vital to an active citizenry—the whole system comes into question.*

*“This is why we cannot separate our values from our policies. We cannot separate our ideals from our interests. We cannot separate moral imperatives from strategic imperatives.*

*“They are inextricably linked. If America will not bring people together around freedom, human rights, and the rule of law, who will? And how can we credibly hold these principles up as our heritage if we don’t fight for their future?*

*“Here in the United States Congress—the heart of our democracy—is where our values and policies intersect. Every year, no matter the politics of the day, Republicans and Democrats work together to reaffirm and expand these commitments.*

*“After all, it was under Speaker Tip O’Neill—Reagan’s great nemesis on domestic affairs—that the National Endowment for Democracy was created.*

*“We work together to fund critical programs to support emerging democracies and civil society organizations. . .*

*“Impose sanctions on human rights abusers and their enablers. . .*

*“Expand economic cooperation with our partners around the globe. . .*

*“Rebuild our military so it can confront the challenges of the 21st century. . .*

*“And raise awareness for women’s rights in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan.*

*“So let me just close by saying this:*

*“The pace of change can be slow. Reagan understood this as well as anyone. Not everyone will see around the corner like you do. Not everyone will be as staunch in their convictions as you are.*

“But nothing is more important than speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

“And this Congress, and the people we represent, will always have your back.

*“Thank you.”*