

Rolf Grankvist

Speech as Honorary Grand Marshal

17th of May Festival

Seattle, Washington

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I am very proud of the fact that today I represent the people of Norway and the people of the United States at the 17th of May Festival here in Seattle. I have been a part of this celebration in this wonderful city many times as a visiting professor at the University of Washington. The collaboration with this famous university has been very important to me for more than 20 years. As a member of the Royal Norwegian Society of Science and Letters in Trondheim, I also want to greet you all here today, as well as my friends at the UW, from this oldest Norwegian research organization, which dates from 1760.

I was also here in Seattle in 1989 for the centennial of the 17th of May celebration in the State of Washington. I was much impressed by the fact that Gov. Booth Gardner that year proclaimed May 17 as Norwegian Day in Washington State. My cousin Alf Buan, who lived in Seattle at that time working for a newspaper, was also impressed by this celebration and the governor's proclamation.

Today there are more people of Norwegian descent living in the United States than in Norway itself. This makes it easy for me to represent both the people of Norway and the people of the United States as an honorary grand marshal at today's celebration.

The United States and Norway have the two oldest and still active democratic constitutions in the world today—the American from 1788 and the Norwegian from 1814. The American constitution

played an important role when the Norwegian Constituent Assembly met at Eidsvoll, Norway, from April 10 to May 17, 1814, to form a democratic constitution. Norway has, however, changed and modernized its constitution several times to make it even more democratic for all people, and that might be something that the U.S. should think about today. Money must not dominate too much in a democratic election.

This is a conclusion that I can draw after having read several books by Professor Ole O. Moen. He is an expert on the American constitution and U.S. history, and has lived in America as a Norwegian visiting professor for many years.

I have a large family in the U.S. from my relatives on both my Swedish and Norwegian sides. My mother's Norwegian brother and his large family were in Duluth, Minnesota, when the ship *Leif Erikson* arrived there on its journey from Norway to America in the 1920s. I am also proud to tell you today that my so-called Leiv Eriksson-project in Trondheim started shortly after I had visited my relatives in Duluth for the first time in 1989.

In 1991 the Viking ship replicas *Oseberg*, *Saga Siglar* and *Gaia* left Trondheim on their way to reach Washington, D.C., on Leif Erikson Day. I was there when the ships arrived, and I also presented a small booklet titled "Leif Eiriksson and the Royal City of Trondheim in the Tradition of the Nordic Sagas." Queen Sonja of Norway was also on hand for the ships' arrival.

In 1994, when I was in Seattle as a visiting professor for a third time, I contacted Kristine Leander, a former American student at the University of Trondheim. After our meeting she at once formed a group called the Leif Eriksson Society—which later became the Leif

Erikson International Foundation and is well known on both sides of the Atlantic.

Kristine has been the leader of this group since she created it. Members of the group have together actually established a Viking route with Leif Erikson statues—from Norway to Greenland to Canada—to bind Europe together with North-America according to the Norse saga texts. The last of these three statues was unveiled in Newfoundland in 2013. Without Kristine and her hard work over the past 20 years, this project would not have been carried through.

Today this is a route that people from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Norway are proud of, together with our relatives in the U.S. who represent millions of people.

I am so proud today to give this short speech as an honorary grand marshal, being invited to my favorite place in the U.S. to celebrate the 126th annual 17th of May Festival here in Seattle. I thank you all in the Festival Committee for inviting me to represent the people of Norway and the United States on this great occasion.