6-8-1939

New Citizens Day Address - KGVO

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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NEW CITIZENS DAY ADDRESS
June 8, 1939

My fellow-Americans: and, as the son of immigrant, myself.

As one American to another, I should like to extend greetings to those of you who have taken out your citizenship papers. It is with a great deal of pride that we welcome you into our midst because we know you are going to be distinct assets to the American form of existence which, to sum up, is embodied in the word Democracy. Democracy, as you all know, means a type of government in which the majority of the people participate. It means your government — not the government of one man or a few men but a government of the people. It is a government which in this chaotic world of today stands out like a beacon lighting the way to peace, happiness, and security. It is the direct antithesis of the alien "isms" permeating the world today and there can be no amalgamating or assimilating of those foreign ideas with Democracy. We must guard and, if need be, fight for the principles which were laid down by the founding fathers of our country — yours and mine. We must always remember that Americanism is to us the paramount factor in our lives and you, friends, by becoming citizens, have earned the right to participate in enjoying the privileges embodied in that term.

In recognition of your desirability you have been granted membership in the greatest democratic body of the world. As a member of this democracy you will be expected to do your share to promote that spirit of liberty, freedom, and equality which is so distinctly American.
As citizens of the United States we are all participants in a great work. But this work is great only as you as an individual, and we as a whole, can make it by our zeal to perpetuate its underlying principles.

True citizenship is to devote, unselfishly, our energies to the welfare, happiness, and well-being of our less fortunate citizens—so ours is a great work. Citizenship also means that you are now a firm believer in the principles of democracy but it might be well to realize that democracy is at the present time in a difficult position. Wherever we look we see determined efforts to tear down the things that the masses of mankind have been painfully struggling to achieve all through the ages. The right of self-government, the right of every man to speak his thoughts freely, the opportunity to express his individual nature in his daily life and work, the privilege of believing in the religion that his own conscience tells him is right—all these precious things that men have won through blood and anguish are hanging in the balance.

We, fellow Americans, must not let the scales drop the other way. If we do, we betray civilization itself. We must fight to keep these treasures just as bravely and vigorously as those who have gone before us fought to gain them. Democracy will not save itself. It isn't something automatic that will go on and on by its own power. We can't just be sentimental and dreamy about it. We must bestir ourselves and see that it works smoothly and efficiently in every respect. We must actually apply the principles of democracy to the world we live in—giving them life and substance and meaning.
It will not be enough to do just half the job. We will have to be thorough and conscientious, because those who would like to destroy democracy are doing a thorough job of it wherever and whenever they have the chance. They are giving no quarter - therefore we must fight all the harder to maintain the privileges which we as citizens of this grand country consider rightly ours.

As individuals you have come from many countries all with different cultural traditions. You have come to America seeking opportunities which did not exist in the land of your origin. You wanted to exercise political, social, and religious freedom. We willingly granted to you the opportunities you desired and, in return, we asked for very little. We expected you to observe our laws, to gradually become conditioned to our ways, and eventually to become American citizens. This you have done and the result has been that you have now entered fully into the rights and privileges to which you are entitled.

You are not members of a regimented citizenry told when to do things but rather you are free to do as you wish with the only proviso being that you observe the laws of your country. Socially, you are equal to anyone because here in America we have neither a class nor caste system; intellectually, you and your children are free to enjoy the benefits of our public school systems; culturally, you are the heirs of an American tradition still in the making; politically, you are your own man capable of arriving at independent judgments and, by means of your franchise, putting that judgment in effect at the polls; and religiously, your beliefs are your own because this is a country of complete religious toleration.
Lest we forget, you also are contributing to the welfare of our country. The United States is receiving from you a feeling of complete loyalty and an ability to contribute toward the common good. You have voluntarily given up your obligations to your old country and pledged yourself to your new country. "By their actions ye shall know them" sums up - in a simple statement - your real regard for America.

For many of you life in your new country has not been easy. You have had to overcome many difficulties such as the learning of a new language, the assimilation of new ideas and practices; you have had to enter into economic competition in the cities and on the farms; all this and much more has had to be overcome. In succeeding you have proved to your fellow-Americans that you have the necessary intelligence, ingenuity, and ability, and these traits have endeared you to us. You are the kind of people we are proud and honored to call "friend".

You understand, of course, that democracy lacks perfection. There are many problems to be solved but together we will find the necessary solutions by adhering to the American way - a way of life as well as of law and government.

Beginning with nothing in this country, and pulled together by like ideals, we at length built here on this continent a way of life whose faith is that there is a common touch of nature that makes all men kin - all races, all religions, all cultures. This is the land of opportunity and of progress and this is the land of equal protection and equal participation. We are proud to be considered citizens but, at the same time, our pride is tempered with humility because we are well aware that only through recognizing our weaknesses have we achieved our
strength. We are also a decent and friendly people and we respect the rights of others.

We must keep alive certain facts in the enjoyment of our citizenship. We need to realize that as a people we have by inheritance a love of liberty and a belief in freedom. We will not bow our heads nor bend our knees to anyone because of our belief in a practice of equality. We are members of a national group second to none and we are associated together for the furtherance of all things which have as their ultimate aim the benefit of the country as a whole.

As citizens of the United States we will uphold and defend the Constitution of our country. We will promote peace and good will on earth, we will safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of freedom, justice, and democracy, and we will consecrate and sanctify our citizenship by our devotion to the country in which we live.