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Civil Rights Bill

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
Statement of Senator Mike Mansfield (D., Montana)
August 6, 1957

Mr. President:

There has been a good deal of talk pro and con about the Civil Rights bill now before us for final passage. There are those who say it does not go far enough and others who contend that it goes too far. In my opinion, the Senate is to be commended for analyzing this measure in its entirety and finally coming up with a bill which is workable and marks sound progress in the field of civil voting rights. This is what the President asked for; this is what the President is getting. The bill offers neither resurrection nor reconstruction, but it will tighten up and make more emphatic the right of all Americans to vote, the right of all Americans to trial by jury in criminal cases, and the right of all Americans to serve on federal juries. It is a bill which even yet contains some hindrances relative to the position of the press and penalties which can be imposed for an alleged violation of secrecy. If it were possible at this late date, I should like to offer an amendment to correct this dangerous precedent; however, we are down to third reading and in view of the agreement unanimously assented to, there is no further opportunity for amendments.

There has been no split in the Democratic Party because of this measure. We can take credit that the "gimmicks" and the "angles" have to a large degree been obliterated; we can take credit that the American people as a whole have a greater understanding of this bill than when it came
over from the House; we can be thankful that there has been no filibuster, and we can be grateful that the right of unlimited debate has been maintained and its worth proven through the analysis which this bill has received over the past five weeks.

I hope sincerely that no one on either side will attempt to play politics with this measure. It is my fervent wish that the high level of debate which has marked our consideration of this legislation will transfer itself into a better understanding of the measure before us. This is a good bill; it is a strong bill; it is a better bill than the measure passed by the House and sent to us for consideration. The President, in this measure, has the kind of a bill which he has consistently maintained he wanted. The right of trial by jury has been emphasized, broadened and made more secure in the annals of American jurisprudence. This is as it should be.

The question before us is -- do we want a Civil Rights bill? As for me, my answer is in the affirmative because the measure before us is a long step forward and is in the right direction. I hope it will pass the Senate by an overwhelming majority. I hope the House will agree to a conference, and I hope the conferees will forego politics and work out a solution which will meet with the approval of both Houses and will be signed by the President.