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Keynote Address - Montana State Democratic Convention

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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During the past year, this country has experienced a very serious recession from which we have not fully recovered. We could have easily found ourselves in a depression, had it not been for a few safeguards that were enacted in the 30's. Events were trending in that direction for a long time and little was done to alter the trend. The Democratic controlled Congress recognized the signs and symptoms, but the Administration, the Executive Branch, paid little attention to these warnings and continued to drift along, hoping that there would soon be an upturn in the economy.

While the Executive Branch directs the foreign policy of the nation with the advice and consent of Congress,
the Senate and House of Representatives were in a more advantageous position to react positively to the threat of a depression. The Democratic Congress proposed and started to work on an imaginative anti-recession program early in the year, but there were obstacles each step of the way inspired by Executive leadership -- or lack of it. When they came forth with a suggested program, it invariably was inadequate, too half-hearted, too late.

A candidate of the opposition party here in Montana was recently quoted as saying, "The last five years of Republican Eisenhower-Nixon Administration can be identified as the most fabulous and productive years in American History."

Now this is an extremely rosy and optimistic picture of our national economy, but it is a very porous one and without substance.

What exactly is the domestic situation in this nation?
There are five million people unemployed.

There has been a seasonal pickup in employment, but there is no assurance that this is a permanent and stable recovery. Employment conditions in the mining industry continue to be depressed.

Industries are operating at half-capacity. Inflationary conditions are rampant. The cost of living has been mounting month after month, for 21 consecutive months, and the value of the dollar has been decreasing month by month.

Soviet achievements in rocketry and missiles are challenging our scientific and military position.

There continues to be a mass exodus from our farms. The income of the small family farmer has not improved, and his cost of operating has continued to increase.

The small businessman is finding it rough these days and in fact, there has been a record of bankruptcies.
in the past few years. In Montana, approximately twice as many businesses and individuals went bankrupt during the six-year period 1953-58 as did in the previous six-year period 1947-52. The number of bankruptcy cases filed in Montana during the fiscal year 1958 reached a high of 178 individuals and 19 businesses.

The number of bankruptcies has increased comparably on the national scene. During the five-year period 1953-57, 41,815 businesses and 246,659 individuals filed bankruptcy proceedings, as compared with 35,042 businesses and 126,139 individuals in the six-year period 1947-52.

The Administration told us in effect, to do nothing but sit tight, and the recession would go away by itself. Inertia set in, little was done to improve our defense, our educational system, our resources development and our economic stability, all the factors so important to America's
continued prosperity.

The Democratic Majority in Congress and Democrats everywhere could not be content to merely stand idly by. We want a strong America and we want an imaginative and forward looking program. This need not be a partisan program: it is something of vital interest and importance to Republican and Democrat alike. A strong America is vital to all of us.

I think the voters of this country are now beginning to realize where the future of this country lies, and that is with the Democratic Party. Americans are turning to the Democrats everywhere -- in California, Wisconsin, and Maine -- and our own Montana primary supports this trend.

Remember those promises made by the GOP in the election campaigns of 1952, 1954 and 1956. Prosperity was at the top of their list, but I think they were talking about
prosperity for the few, the big businessmen and vested interests.

Since 1953, this Administration has allowed our foreign policy to stagnate. It has shifted from crisis to crisis and brink to brink, and we now find ourselves involved militarily in the Middle East.

The GOP was going to clean up the mess in Washington. Candidate Eisenhower promised "to build back honesty and integrity in the Government which is not duly influenced by any particular segment of society, any particular special interest." Events in the past several months testify to how well they have cleaned up the mess in Washington. They have a bigger mess of their own.

They promised to clean the dead wood out of the ranks of the Federal agencies and to reduce the numbers employed by Federal civilian agencies. During the current
fiscal year, this country will have the largest Federal pay-roll in our history, approximately $12 billion dollars as opposed to 7.5 billion in 1952.

The Federal debt has increased, the development of our natural resources is practically at a standstill and the Administration has done little to meet the humanitarian and educational needs of our citizens.

Yes, they promised to do great things, but they have turned around and done all the things they have accused prior Administrations of doing, and, in most cases, they have exceeded their predecessors.

Let us turn from the negative to the positive. What has Congress and the Democratic Party done to enhance the stability of the American economy and to improve the livelihood of the people living in these United States.

Quite a lot has been done and a lot more will be
done, but it is hard to initiate programs in Congress without
Executive help or over Executive opposition. Despite this,
the record of the 85th Congress is a good one, and many
imaginative and forward looking programs were born and
enacted in the past two years.

Early in the last session, Democratic Leaders
formulated an anti-recession program which has been instru-
mental in helping to pull us out of the economic slump.
Congress recommended a speed up in military construction
and public works projects, but received little encouragement
from the White House.

We passed a Rivers and Harbors Bill, but the Pres-
ident vetoed it. In order to save some very important pro-
jects, such as the Sun River Flood Control Project at Great
Falls, the Congress sent another authorization bill to the
White House; this time it was signed.
The Highway Act of 1958 was one of the major accomplishments of the last session. It will mean hundreds of thousands of more jobs and it will make it easy for such states as Montana, with limited sources of highway funds, to proceed with the construction of the new Interstate System. The President signed this bill with "serious misgivings."

Housing legislation will inject a new incentive into the home building program financed by FHA, and it will put more men to work. The Senate passed another housing bill providing for urban renewal, college and veterans housing, but Republican opposition in the House defeated the bill. Here again, the Administration wanted to put a higher interest rate road block in the path of these programs.

The House and Senate prodded the Administration into speeding up our defense effort. Additional monies were appropriated to accelerate construction on the Air Force jet
base at Glasgow. The Congress went along with a reorganizational plan for the Pentagon only after sufficient safeguards were insured to protect the identity of the individual Armed Services.

Congressional Committees and a new Space Agency were set up to cope with the problems of space and aeronautics. We now have a centralized agency to control air traffic problems.

We repealed the freight tax and Congressional attention was directed to the freight rate structure that now exists in Montana.

Alaska became the 49th State, and the door has been opened for the inclusion of Hawaii as a new State.

The Senate passed labor-management reform legislation, but here again, a majority of the Republican House Members defeated the measure. Congress improved and
liberalized the social security benefits, provided tax relief for small businesses, and enacted a new program of Federal scholarships and student loans and other aids to encourage the study and teaching of sciences and technical courses in our schools of higher education. I think you will agree that this is quite an impressive list. We were, unfortunately, unable to enact a stabilization program for the mining industry. This program would have been of extreme importance to Montana, especially in the Butte area. The purchase program which would have been set up under this proposed law would have activated many of the copper, lead and zinc and tungsten mines that now are slowed down or closed.

Farm legislation is the one black mark on the legislative record. In my opinion, little was done to improve the livelihood of the farmers and this area remains pretty
much at a standstill. We did, however, reenact the Wool Act, which is one of the finest pieces of operating legislation that affects the farmer and rancher.

The 85th Congress was a good Congress, despite the roadblocks inspired by the Executive Branch. Not only were the past two years good to the Nation, but they were also effective as far as Montana is concerned.

When it becomes operative, the new Area Redevelopment Program should be of tremendous value to the cities and towns of the Treasure State. Congressional action has enabled the State to recover from the dark days of January, February and March of this year when we ranked at the top of the insured unemployment list.

Congressional action approved several new projects in the State and provided funds to accelerate construction of others. Missoula will have the first forest fire research
laboratory in the Nation. This will be a valuable addition to the smoke jumpers school. This research program will be of tremendous value in the study of the causes and effective means of combating fires such as the one that recently ravaged Glacier National Park.

Forest access road funds have been increased and the Federal Highway Act of 1958 is being of great service to Montana in allowing the State Highway Commission to speed up its construction schedule on the new Interstate System. The Mission 66 Program is proceeding on schedule and material improvements are beginning to be made. Recreation is becoming one of Montana's major industries. The Lewis & Clark Highway is fast becoming a reality under the new highway program.

Construction is proceeding on the Helena Valley Unit and the Second Power Plant at Fort Peck Dam. The one
remaining obstacle to the construction of Yellowtail Dam and Reservoir has been removed and negotiations are proceeding for the payment of $2,500,000 to the Crow Indian Tribe for the transfer of land necessary for the project.

Public Law 151 sponsored by the Montana Delegation will facilitate the construction of joint community-Indian hospitals providing better hospital services for both small communities and the Indians.

A united Democratic Delegation in Washington has been of great help and as a unit we have been able to direct all of our efforts towards what we considered to be the best interests of Montana. We want to continue this solid Democratic representation. We need a strong Democratic State Legislature out here. Every office at the State and County level should be filled by a Democratic candidate. We will have to wait until 1960 to recapture the Governorship and the
White House, but a solid Democratic victory in November will make our task in two years that much easier.

The Democratic Party is the party of all the people, we represent no special interests, all are welcome. We represent the farmer, the rancher, the shopkeeper, the businessman, the lawyer, the laborer, and the professional groups. Our goal is to strengthen and enhance the security and prosperity of the Nation, in the interests of all. The Democratic Party is a party of many groups and factions, and no one has a monopoly on party influence. We recognize the right to disagree, but foremost, we are Americans first, and Democrats second.

Things look good for us in November, and there is a new awakening to the general drifting and negative policies originating with the Administration now in Washington, D. C. The issues are on our side, we have a constructive
program, supported by a fine legislative record. But we cannot sit back and let ourselves drift into complacency. A single turn of events may reverse the tide. We must be prepared to meet all-comers. This will be a Democratic year if we make it so. We must go forward united in 1958 and 1960 in our efforts to elect all Democratic candidates.