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Jefferson - Jackson Day Dinner

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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REMARKS OF SENATOR MICHE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)
at the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner
The Armory, Wilmington, Delaware
Saturday, May 15, 1965

I came here this afternoon by plane. It is a very pleasant flight. It is mostly over Democratic territory—in Maryland and in Delaware. Not that you can recognize Democrats from the air. But you can see the hallmarks of the Democratic Party—smoke rising from busy industrial plants and fine crops on rich farmlands.

I was also going to claim the beauty of the Delaware beaches for the Party. But there are limits to partisanship—even at a Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner. This lovely stretch of sand, sea and inlets is above politics. Nevertheless, Delaware’s Riviera does give point to the President’s suggestion that we spend some travel dollars in the United States. So far as I can see, these beaches have just about everything that you find on the French Riviera except, perhaps, Bridget Bardot.

If there are any travel dollars to spare here—after this dinner is paid for—I urge you to visit Montana—the nation’s Treasure State. We have magnificent mountains and lakes and great plains and a lot of democrats. We do not have an ocean but we do have more ocean-going admirals per capita in the Navy than any other State in the Union.

We are drawn together, tonight, in a political gathering. It honors two of the great historic figures of the National Democratic Party. But, in a sense, it honors all party members—those who are elected and those who work to get them elected. Here in Wilmington, this dinner honors
your distinguished governor, your able Congressman, your outstanding mayor and the many other Democrats who lead this State in consonance with the great national democratic tradition.

And this dinner honors all of you democrats who are in attendance, even if you have to pay for it. For, in all seriousness, in the end there is no Democratic Party here or anywhere else, in the sense we know it, unless there are men and women in great numbers who are prepared to give their time, their energy, their devotion and their money for the cause of decent and honorable and effective government in the United States.

As we meet tonight, when the nation is at a pinnacle of economic prosperity and the Democratic Party at a pinnacle of political prosperity, I ask you to think of an earlier period. It used to be, not so long ago that many of us cannot remember, that these Jefferson-Jackson Dinners were occasions, primarily, for mutual commiseration and reassurance. We knew, or rather, we hoped that some day the people of the nation would again turn to the Democratic Party for national leadership. That hope was just about all there was to hold the national party together. That period was—as the present era is—an era of great prosperity for the nation. There was one big difference: It was also an era of Republican Party prosperity. It was 1929. To the Republicans of that time there was not a cloud on the horizon.

And then look what happened. Look what happened to them again in November last year. I ask you not to laugh at the Republican experience
but rather to learn from it. Don't deride their predicament but concentrate on seeing to it that we do not fall into it.

In short, I urge you--as Democrats--to learn to live with political prosperity, not on it. As Democrats, it is more important to preserve the public confidence which we have earned than to entrench the political power which it has brought.

We have had great public acceptance for three decades. It is greater now than in many years. Why did we emerge from the November election with a massive Democratic victory? Not because our electioneering or electronic gimmicks were better. Not because our candidates were more photogenic than Republicans, although that may have been incidentally true. Certainly not because we had more money for campaigns.

The fact is that this nation has been in a period of general Democratic ascendancy which has persisted through three decades. There is one key reason for that persistence. The nation has turned to our party because we learned or rather relearned, one thing during the twenties. The opposition knew it at an earlier time and began to forget it even as we began to relearn it. We learned and we learned the hard way, that beyond all else, it is a sincere and dedicated service to all the people that counts with the people.

We learned in the long years in the wilderness that political ideals without organization and unity are not enough. And we learned that organization and unity without dedicated ideals are not enough. We learned to put the two together and to put both to work for the people of the nation.
Through these years of Democratic ascendancy, the political problems which have confronted us have changed, even as the needs of the nation and its people have changed. And through the years, the Democratic Party has had ideals rooted in the welfare of all the people with which to meet these changing problems and these needs. And through the years, we have found the dedicated leadership to supply the initiative and the energy to overcome the problems and the needs. In short, we have met the responsibilities of party government in this nation. We have not been without shortcomings, not without failures, not without imperfections. The truth is--and it is as true at a Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner as it is on a Lincoln Day picnic--that there are no pre-packaged perfections, no guaranteed successes in the political life of the nation. We have made our mistakes. We will make more.

But for the past thirty years, as a party in the majority and in the minority, we have met our responsibilities to the people of the nation and we have met them well. The people of the nation in increasing numbers have recognized that this party, whatever its shortcomings, is their party. And whether it be in Montana or Delaware or Washington we mean to keep this party, the party of all the people and of all sections of the nation.

You know, as do I, that for a time, for eight years, during the past three decades, the people turned away from Democratic Administrations in the search for national leadership. I will not go into the reasons.
They are many and complex. But I do know that when a young man out of Massachusetts, vibrant with a great human vitality and intelligence, full of decency and good sense gave renewed expression to the great traditions and finest ideals of the nation, the American people turned back to the Democratic party for national leadership. And when Lyndon B. Johnson lifted the nation out of its hour of profound tragedy, when he acted with a sure hand and an immense dedication—the people underscored their restored confidence in the Democratic Party by giving him one of the greatest political victories in the history of the Presidency.

What have we done to retain the restored public confidence which began in 1960? We have applied ideals of the party to the problems and needs of the people. We have acted to carry the nation to the highest level of economic prosperity in history and we have kept it there for the longest continuous period since World War II. To that end, an $11.3 billion tax cut was passed last year. That legislation and many other legislative acts of the past four years have acted as healthy stimulants to growth and without significant inflation. In the not-too-distant future, moreover, we shall move to reduce and to repeal various excise taxes on consumer goods, dating from the Korean War, as a further stimulus to expansion of the economy.

Times, indeed, are good for most Americans and in most parts of the nation. It is not only the function but the determined intention of the democratic national leadership to see to it that they stay good. To that end, the balance of payments—the gold-problem, the still-obscure implications
of automation, of price and wage movements—of all the clear and not so
clear forces which shape the nation's economy are being watched with great
care by this Administration. This Administration will not take national
prosperity for granted. The Leadership of the nation will not act unneces-
sarily but it will not hesitate to act, as necessary, to keep the nation's
economy in full momentum.

By the same token, the Administration is not going to overlook in
Washington the fact that, for millions of Americans elsewhere, the times
are not so good. This party cannot, should not and will not now, anymore
than in the days of Franklin D. Roosevelt, accept the proposition that
nothing can be done about Americans who are outside looking in on this great
national prosperity. This party is determined now as it was then that
something can be done about this situation, that something must be done
about it.

And it is doing something about it.

Since 1961, the National Leadership has sought to open wider
economic opportunities through many programs for those who have been left
behind in the great economic surge forward. About a billion and a half
dollars will be appropriated this year alone for training and for other
special aid to Americans who need help so that they will be able to help
themselves.

In the nearby Appalachian region, where vast impersonal economic
forces have produced appalling human wastelands, a great effort of economic
restoration is under way. In thirteen states, over a billion dollars
will be spent to encourage new industry, to provide better access, to inject
modern skills and techniques—to do all of the things which are necessary to
bring this region into the mainstream of American material progress. There
are hundreds of thousands of Americans in this region, Americans without
hope, Americans fearful of tomorrow. That situation, we will strive to
change and we shall persist in this effort until it is changed.

What is learned in Appalachia, moreover, will tell us much of what
needs to be done elsewhere in the nation in similar situations. What is
done successfully in Appalachia will be done elsewhere. We shall continue
until the map of a prosperous America is no longer pock-marked with areas
of economic blight. We shall continue until mass poverty and serious
depivation are banished from the land. We shall continue until, not one-
third, not one-fourth, not one-fifth but until no part of the people of
this nation shall go ill-clad, ill-housed or ill-fed.

That is a major aspect of the current responsibility of this party.
If we are to learn to live with political prosperity and not on it, we will
neglect no longer in this time of economic prosperity those who have been
for too long neglected. We will not forget those human needs of the few
which are too easily forgotten in the midst of a surfeit of satisfactions
for the many.
We will keep our concern for the nation’s economy and we will also keep and deepen our concern for the old, for the young and others in need of special help.

We will spur the nation’s industry and agriculture and we will also act to clean up its rivers and harbors and the air above it. We will act to preserve and extend the nation's open spaces and wilderness, its lakes and shores for the benefit of a growing population. We will see to it that the nation's cities not only remain great centers of commerce but are restored as places in which people can live in decency and in safety, as places in which the arts are cultivated and encouraged.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy expressed these changing needs of the nation and he pointed the Democratic Party in the direction of meeting them. President Johnson has underscored, reiterated and elaborated this direction when he has spoken of a great society.

It does not much matter what we call the objective. But we move in the right direction when we pass, as we shall pass, this year a program of health care for older citizens. The time has come—in this session of Congress—to put an end to the crocodile tears over the plight of older people who are faced with the devastating costs of illness and, often, with an income no larger than a social security cheque. It is time to insure a dignified and decent attention to the health needs of these people. It is time to insure that attention, not as a matter of charity, but as a matter of hard-earned right.
We move, too, in the right direction when we expand as we have expanded and will continue to expand, through legislation, the research and treatment facilities for the mentally ill and the retarded and for those who suffer in the whole range of diseases and illnesses to which the human species is heir.

We move, too, in the right direction when we provide, as this Congress and its predecessor have provided, for a vast increase in the educational facilities of the nation at all levels, when we act to bring the nation nearer to the goal of an equal access to education in excellence for every child in the land.

And we move in the right direction when we act as we have acted and will continue to act, to the end that we shall fulfill the purpose and the promise of the Constitution—when we act to the end that all Americans without regard to race, color, creed or origins shall share the public responsibilities of this nation and shall have equitable access to its opportunities.

We move in the right direction when we bring federal cooperation to the hard-pressed states and municipalities—as we have done and will continue to do over a whole range of community and urban needs—for better water supplies, for cleaner air, for recreational facilities, for decent housing, for better transportation and, yes, for a little beauty along with the highways that knit the nation together. These are some of the needs of the nation which must be met and which your party’s national leadership is working to meet.
And beyond all those proper demands of the people on the party in which they have reposed their confidence, there is one other which is over-riding. It, too, is a most proper demand. The people did not elect this party to office to lead them to a great war, even if there are some who would goad it in that direction. The people elected this party to order the defense and the international policies of this nation in such a fashion as to safeguard the nation’s freedom in peace. They elected this party to work for peace, to work for it soberly, responsibly and relentlessly, through all the machinery, national and international, which is open or might be opened.

And yet I would be less than honest with you if I did not say that we work for peace, today, under a cloud and the cloud has darkened. It is in the nature of world-wide events that no single nation can control their flow. It is in the nature of foreign policy that it does not begin afresh with each change of administration. There are no cheap solutions in this realm. There are no easy solutions. In this era, we live every moment of our lives in great danger of the end of life as we have known it. We work and we build in terms of years of dedicated effort and all of it can be reduced to ashes in one blinding instant. And, what applies to us, to every man, woman and child in America applies to every other nation in the world.
So let there be no glib talk of quick and painless military solutions to the situation in Viet Nam or in the Dominican Republic, or anywhere else, however remote, where military force is in use or may come into use. These situations are cause for deep concern. That concern is felt by the President and by all who are in positions of responsibility--democrats and republicans alike--in the government. The President has not placed American military forces in Viet Nam and the Dominican Republic because he seeks a great war. He did not put them there because he seeks to demonstrate that the American military muscle is strong. He put them there because, on the basis of the facts available to him, he saw no alternative if he was to meet his responsibilities for the safety and freedom of the nation. And there is every expectation that he will take them out just as soon as a satisfactory alternative is found.

I can assure you that the search for such an alternative goes on, in the Presidency, in the Congress and in all available diplomatic channels. It is right and proper and, in the last analysis, essential, that this search go on. We are even now in the Dominican Republic, preparing to reduce our unilateral effort as the organization of American states, for the first time, moves an inter-American force into that situation in an effort to safeguard the bystanders and to insure the free choice of the Dominican people as to their political future.

That the American states have agreed to act in this fashion is a development of great significance. For the responsibilities of peace are such that they cannot be borne by a single nation acting alone. The
responsibilities of peace, whether in Southeast Asia, in the Caribbean
or in Africa or anywhere else will be discharged successfully in the
end only if they can be discharged in concert and in understanding with
many other nations, whether within the United Nations, through regional
organizations or through the traditional channels of diplomacy.

Your Administration will not be goaded by the voices of an
impatient arrogance either at home or abroad. It will do what must be
done for the safety of the nation. But it will continue the search in
concert with other nations which was begun in earnest and with firmness
and dedication, under the late President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, for a
secure peace. It will seek this peace not only in Southeast Asia and the
Caribbean but throughout the world. For, in the end, it is only in a
secure peace in the world that this nation’s own existence and freedom will
be secure.