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Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
ADDRESS BY SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

at the
KENNETH P. O'DONNELL FRIENDSHIP DINNER, SHERATON-BOSTON HOTEL

Boston, Massachusetts - Saturday, January 22, 1966

It is not my practice to venture forth from Washington very frequently while the Congress is assembled. And when I do leave the Capital, it is usually to return to my own State of Montana.

Nevertheless, I find myself in Boston, tonight, in the Bay State. I did not take the wrong train. I did not come here by accident. I came here by an invitation extended to me some months ago which I was delighted to accept. I came here because I regard it as a privilege and a distinction to join with Kenny O'Donnell's many friends in this expression of appreciation for his outstanding public service to the people of the United States.

It is easy to praise a man when he deserves it; and Kenny O'Donnell does. It is easy to call a man a fine and generous and wise human being when he is; and Kenny O'Donnell is. But I should like, tonight, to go beyond these broad and applicable generalities. I should like to consider what lies beneath these words of praise and appreciation.

Why have you Bay Staters gathered together from all parts of this State? Why have others come from Washington and a hundred places more to be here tonight? What is it that brings this outpouring of friends and these expressions of friendship and respect?
Is it not because we recognize in Kenneth P. O'Donnell a man with that unique quality of excellence and a man with that extra measure of dedication to the public well-being? Is it not because we recognize in him the kind of man that the late beloved President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, chose to have around him, close to him, in his brief but great work for the nation?

The fact is that you cannot speak of the quality of Kenny O'Donnell without also thinking of the standards of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. You cannot separate Kenny O'Donnell's past service to the late President from John Fitzgerald Kennedy's service to the nation.

Kenny O'Donnell was Appointments Secretary to the President. He was in truth the guardian at the gate. It was in that role that he made his major contribution.

Appointments Secretary to the President is a very impressive title. But the truth is that it tells us very little of the nature of this man and of his work in the Kennedy Administration. The title suggests, merely, that Kenny O'Donnell kept a book in which he wrote the names of those who would see President Kennedy and those who would not, and at what time. It suggests that he stood at the President's door and said: "You shall pass and you shall not." And those who passed thought he was a fine young man and those who did not had other words to describe him.

That is, indeed, something of the job of Appointments Secretary. That is, indeed, a part of the service which Kenny O'Donnell performed for the President. Let us not underestimate the importance of that job in itself. To decide how, when and to whom to
apportion the time and energy of the busiest man in the world, the
President, is among the most important responsibilities in the govern-
ment of the United States. It is a responsibility which requires an
immense knowledge of public affairs, of the flow of events and of the
operations of government.

It is a responsibility which requires a high sense of discern-
ment and discretion. It is a responsibility which requires both tact
and courage. Most of all, it is a responsibility which requires a
complete harmony of understanding and mutual trust with the President
and a dedication to his leadership of the nation.

And yet the job of Appointments Secretary—significant as it
was—was really only a part of Kenny O'Donnell's contribution to the
Kennedy Administration. He was, more than any official title can
express, a good right arm of a great President. He was one of
John Fitzgerald Kennedy's trusted intimates. He was one of his
closest friends and confidants. And, he was, Kenny O'Donnell, one
of the work-horses and one of the leading engineers of the Kennedy
Administration. He was, in short, a key figure in that group of
energetic, intelligent, zestful, and self-confident young men who
answered the call of John Fitzgerald Kennedy and marched down to
Washington and into the White House with him. And he became, Kenny
O'Donnell, one of the rocks of political sagacity and practical
administrative skill upon which was built the structure and style
of the Kennedy Administration.
The measure of Kenny O'Donnell's accomplishments, of Kenny O'Donnell's contribution to the nation is not to be gauged then, solely by his title under the Kennedy Administration. It is to be found, rather, as his part of the total contribution of the Kennedy Administration to the nation.

When you recall that the Kennedy Administration kindled a great new idealism in the political life of the United States, and especially among young people, remember that Kenneth P. O'Donnell was a part of that Administration. Recall that he made his personal idealism a part of the idealism of the Administration. That provides some indication of his real contribution to the nation.

When you recall that the Kennedy Administration brought a burst of energy into a nation which had wallowed in a recession and got it on the move again, recall too Kenneth O'Donnell contributed his energy to that movement. That, too, provides some indication of his contribution to the nation.

When you recall that the Kennedy Administration dramatized to the nation the immense accumulation of neglected public and human needs and called for action in education, in urban affairs, in medical care for the aged and in all manner of things by which the quality and decency of a society may be measured, recall, too, that in all these matters Kenneth P. O'Donnell was an integral and essential part of that drama and his voice was a part of that clarion call. That, too, provides some indication of his contribution to the nation.
When you recall the crises in Berlin and Cuba and elsewhere which confronted this nation and the wisdom, the restraint and the steel-nerved determination with which they were met by President Kennedy, recall, too, that Kenneth P. O'Donnell stood firmly at the side of the late President through these crises. That, too, provides some indication of his contribution to the nation.

And when you remember Dallas, remember, too, that Kenneth O'Donnell was there at the end. It fell to him to advise Mr. Johnson to return at once to Washington as President and he was with Mr. Johnson in the plane when Mr. Johnson became President. Remember, too, that he stayed on to help President Johnson at the latter's request until the transition was achieved and it was possible to say with some assurance, "We shall continue," we shall continue the great work begun under the late John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

So if you would measure the worth of Kenneth P. O'Donnell, the man whom we honor, tonight, measure the thousand days of the Kennedy Administration and the difficult weeks of transition thereafter. Know that the clear head and steady hand of Kenneth P. O'Donnell was in all those days and in those weeks. Know that his was a total dedication of heart, mind and self to the service of the nation.

Kenny O'Donnell, in short, is forever marked with those years of splendor and those weeks of grief, as we all are who were a part of those times. And Kenny O'Donnell, in turn, put his own mark upon that era and its great and stirring moments. For above all else, Kenny O'Donnell is his quiet, determined self. He is a fully human being of
the highest personal integrity. Those of us who are here tonight, those of us who have gathered here to honor him tonight, know that his past service in government is but a prelude. And in the many years which lie ahead, he will make his own contribution to the progress of this nation and to the welfare of all of its people.