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Kenneth P. O'Donnell Friendship Dinner

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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It is a high honor to be awarded the Silver Quill, and, especially, to share the award with Everett McKinley Dirksen. The Senator from Illinois is not only an esteemed friend of many years standing, he is also properly identified as Mr. Republican Party in the Senate, or Mr. Republican in the nation, or Mr. Minority Leader of the Senate.

It is in the latter role that I most frequently meet with Senator Dirksen. In these times of 14(b), I encounter his awesome presence not only during my waking hours on the Senate floor but also in an occasional nightmare.

Now we meet again this evening. We meet not as adversaries but as joint participants in these brief but highly literate proceedings. In anticipation of the occasion, I sought to find some explanation in lexicography for the phenomenon known as Everett McKinley Dirksen, Senate Minority Leader. In the dictionary, listed under "leader," along with more customary definitions, there is also one which reads: "--leader--something for guiding fish into a trap." This definition obviously does not apply to me, since I do not fish. It would, perhaps, be too obvious in the light of 14-B to state that it might apply to the Republican leader.
Searching further, one finds under "majority" the definition "a group having a sufficient number of votes necessary for control." That does not appear to apply to the group in the Senate which calls me leader, in any event, not within the framework of the current extended debate on 14(b). Again, it is, perhaps, too obvious to state that it is more apt as a description of the group headed by the Republican leader since he has no control-problem in extending the debate.

So when the two definitions are combined and put where they obviously belong, after the name of the distinguished Minority Leader, we find that Everett McKinley Dirksen may be defined as: "a phenomenal leader certainly having a sufficient number of votes to guide the fish of the Senate into his trap."

I must say that this definition of Senator Dirksen, accurate as it is in the light of the current proceedings on 14-b, is not fully satisfying. It is not complete. It says nothing of his immense service over many decades to party, state, and nation. It says nothing of the impassioned and compelling debate he has contributed time and again to Senate deliberations. It says nothing of the leadership he has provided, time and again, in international and domestic affairs. When the chips of patriotism are down, his have invariably been placed, before all else, on the high interests of the nation. It was so when Dwight D. Eisenhower was President. It was so when John Fitzgerald Kennedy was President. It is so with Lyndon B. Johnson, as President.
The role of Everett Dirksen was, for example, decisive—and the word is used advisedly—in the passage of the historic Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. His contribution, too, was great to the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Time and again, he has lent his vitality, his voice, his vote, to a legislative cause which, regardless of party or personal popularity, he deems, with deep conviction, to be vital to the nation in its domestic tranquility, its international relations or its fundamental validity.

Everett Dirksen and I have differed many times over the years. Our votes on the major controversial issues, more frequently than not, show up on opposite sides of the tallies of the Senate. Yet, as Majority Leader, I have no hesitancy whatsoever in stating that the record of the 88th Congress and the first session of the 89th owe an immense debt to the contribution of the distinguished Minority Leader. His has been a wise, cooperative and understanding participation in the work of the Senate. As majority leader through these years I acknowledge freely that I have been aided, although not necessarily abetted, by a great Republican leader who is, even more, a great Senator and a great American.