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Senate

JOINT RESOLUTION TO LOWER VOTING AGE

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, on my own behalf I should like to be recognized not only for 3 minutes but also for several additional minutes, for the purpose of introducing a constitutional amendment.

The VICE PRESIDENT. Is there objection to the request of the Senator from Montana? The Chair hears none and it is so ordered.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, it is my understanding that at present in the States of Georgia and Kentucky, citizens of the age of 18 are allowed to vote; that in the State of Alaska, at the age of 19, they are allowed to vote; and that in the State of Hawaii, at the age of 20, they are allowed to vote. What I have just said is subject to correction, but that is my understanding.

Mr. President, since the First World War a number of measures have been introduced in Congress which have been designed to extend the franchise to citizens 18, 19, and 20 years old. In my opinion, the adoption of a constitutional amendment along these lines is long overdue. The joint resolution which I offer, therefore, represents another effort to remedy what I believe to be a serious inadequacy in the electoral processes of the Nation.

There is no reason to assume that citizens who have attained the age of 18 are any less capable than any other age group of casting a responsible vote. Not only are these younger citizens no less worthy than other Americans of sharing in the basic decisionmaking process of representative government, but their participation may well improve the process.

Thanks to the growing efficacy of the educational systems of the Nation and the spread of media of public information, the 18-to-21 age bracket clearly comprises an intelligent, well informed, and responsible constituency. More of these young people have completed high school, more are attending college, than any similar age grouping in the Nation's history. Indeed, a summing up of the general characteristics of these young citizens leads to the conclusion that

they ought to be at least as capable as the rest of us in the effective employment of the franchise.

Their interest in public affairs and their potential for highly creditable public service at home and abroad are attested to by the personal dedication that is characteristic of such voluntary programs as VISTA and the Peace Corps. About 7 percent of the Peace Corps enrollees, for example, are 20 years of age and below. Finally, their capacity for mature patriotic commitment to the Nation is nowhere more manifest than in their service in the Armed Forces of the United States.

Beyond obvious and demonstrated capacity, there is a fundamental consideration which strongly suggests the desirability of the enfranchisement of our younger citizens. They are bound, along with the rest of us, by the decisions which are reached by the Government of the United States. Vietnam illustrates that these decisions may well involve a grim life or death bond for many of these young people. Surely, when citizens of the United States reach an age when they can be so clearly and directly bound by policies of government, they ought to be able to participate in the choice of political representatives. In the end, these representatives are the responsible source of foreign as well as domestic policy, of the waging of war and of the pursuit of peace.

Where is the rationale in considering an American old enough to fight in Vietnam but not old enough to vote in the selection of those who determine the basic commitments in Vietnam? By the same token, it may well be asked why an 18- to 21-year-old taxpayer should be expected to bear a portion of the burdens of long-range domestic programs which elective officials initiate, while at the same time he is precluded from any say in the choice of those officials. In passing, it is possible to sense the frustration which must be engendered among the youth of the Nation by statements of political leaders who call for the establishment of one kind or another of compulsory national service for all 18-year-olds while these young people are excluded from any voice in the selection of those who issue these statements.

I realize that it is possible to reduce to absurdity a suggestion that the age of enfranchisement be lowered. It can be noted that much of what is said of 18-year-olds may be said of 16-year-olds. Why not the vote, then, at 16 or 12 or 6?

Any age cutoff is obviously an arbitrary selection. That would be as true of 18 as it is of 21, which now generally prevails in the Nation. I would hope, however, that the current Congress will not be deterred from action on that basis. I would hope that this Congress will face up to the question of enfranchisement of Americans at the age of 18.

There is a single and compelling reason for that arbitrary selection. Eighteen is the age when Americans become liable for compulsory military service. If they are old enough to face a bullet, they are old enough to cast a ballot.

Lowering the voting age to 18 is at least as much a matter of effective and responsible government as it is of justice, because it will tend to bring about a better and more equitable balance in the electorate of the Nation. As life expectancy rises, the number of older voters increases. A corresponding expansion in the number of younger voters not only will broaden the political base of the Government, but may well provide concurrently a more balanced approach in the Nation's general political outlook.

The constitutional amendment which is proposed, Mr. President, will put to the States the question of lowering the voting age to 18. It is brief and, I hope, clearly to the point. I send to the desk a Senate joint resolution cosponsored by Senators NELSON, INOUE, BIBLE, METCALF, and CANNON and ask that it be read.

The VICE PRESIDENT. The joint resolution will be read.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

S.J. Res. 8

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the following article is hereby proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States:

"ARTICLE —

"SECTION 1. The right of any citizen of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age if such a citizen is eighteen years of age or older. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

"Sec. 2. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States within seven years from the date of its submission to the States by the Congress."

Mr. DIRKSEN. Mr. President, will the majority leader yield?

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I am delighted to yield to the distinguished minority leader.

Mr. DIRKSEN. Mr. President, it was 4 or 5 years ago that I introduced an identical joint resolution. We had two or three hearings before the Committee on the Judiciary, to which it was referred. No action was taken by the committee. No action was taken by the Senate. However, I have never lost my interest, and if the majority leader so desires I would be delighted to be a cosponsor of this proposal.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I am honored to have the distinguished minority leader as a cosponsor.

I ask unanimous consent that the name of the distinguished senior Senator from Wisconsin [Mr. PROXMIRE] be added to the original proposal; and I ask unanimous consent that the proposal lie at the desk for a week for other cosponsors.

The VICE PRESIDENT. The joint resolution will be received and appropriately referred; and, without objection, the joint resolution will be held at the desk, as requested by the Senator from Montana.

The joint resolution (S.J. Res. 8) proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, extending the right to vote to citizens 18 years of age or older, introduced by Mr. MANSFIELD (for himself and other Senators), was received, read twice by its title, and referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Mr. PROXMIRE subsequently said: Mr. President, earlier today the distinguished majority leader, the Senator from Montana [Mr. MANSFIELD], introduced a joint resolution proposing a constitutional amendment to provide an opportunity for 18-year-olds to vote. I am delighted to be a cosponsor of that proposed amendment. I say that for three reasons.

First, educational psychologists have urged that the ability to grasp new ideas reaches its peak at the age of 18, and then it proceeds on a plateau. This, of course, does not mean that wisdom does not increase throughout life—it does. But the capacity to grasp new ideas and developments readily in this so rapidly changing world was never more essential.

Second, it is my experience from speaking to high school students—in our States and I have done so to many thousands each year for 10 years—that never

have we had a better informed group of high school students than today. We have a much higher proportion of young people finishing high school and receiving a high school education than ever before. This means that the 18-year-old vote will significantly elevate the educational level of our national electorate.

The third reason is the well known fact that we are asking boys to serve in the Armed Forces at the age of 18, and to go to Vietnam to fight and if necessary die at the age of 19. It seems to me that these boys through their vote should have something to say about the policies that send them there.

For those reasons I am delighted to be a cosponsor of the proposed constitutional amendment establishing 18 as the voting age.