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Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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REMAMKS OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)
at the
39th Annual Convention of the Puerto Rico Manufacturers Association
El San Juan Hotel, San Juan, Puerto Rico
Saturday, November 4, 1967

PUERTO RICO, THE UNITED STATES, AND THE WORLD SCENE

Ladies and gentlemen, I cannot begin to express my pleasure at being with you in Puerto Rico and my gratitude for the warmth of your welcome. I have been here only a short time but it is already evident that the climate is hospitable, the foliage luxuriant and the beaches delightful. In contrast, the nights are chilly in Washington and even the days. The leaves are going. The landscape is becoming bleak. The chill of winter is already felt...especially in a Congress which is still confronted with a tax bill.

To come to Puerto Rico, however, is to forget about taxes... and in that and many other ways to brighten the outlook. It was not always so. Those of you who are as old as I am remember another time.
Not too many years ago, Puerto Rico was a neglected and poverty-stricken land. It was a land in which the vital fires had almost gone out.

It is easy enough to forget the past in the ambiance of the present. Yet it is wise not to forget it entirely. It is better to remember something of how it was in order to see more clearly how it is and how it should be.

Puerto Rico has found in these years of our times the source of an extraordinary rebirth. Even a brief exposure, such as I have had, underscores what observers and journalists have been reporting for the past few years. The progress of Puerto Rico has drawn the admiration and respect of people of the States. It has also attracted the attention of the entire world.

What has unfolded here is, indeed, a great achievement. It is an achievement which can be expressed statistically in G.N.P.'s, in life expectancies, in income figures, in investment expansion and by many other mathematical indicators. It is expressed, perhaps, more
simply in that people from all over the world no longer bypass this island but rather seek out its loveliness. It is expressed more profoundly, perhaps, in that it is to this island—home that Pablo Casals has chosen to bring his heart and his music.

The magnificent transformation of Puerto Rico owes its origin to the genius of the leadership and the dedication of the people of the Commonwealth and to the enlightened and coordinated actions of Washington. For some years now there has been a strong disposition in the United States and in Puerto Rico to cooperate in the adjustment of the constitutional relationship and to support the bold economic initiatives which have had to be taken here in order to induce the rapid development of the island. I would hope and expect that this sort of cooperation will continue to characterize the association in the years ahead.

That is as it should be because the creation of the Commonwealth relationship has yielded great benefits for both Puerto Rico and the United States. The Commonwealth is a unique legal concept,
combining as it does self-government in local affairs with free association with the United States and coordinate citizenship. In Puerto Rico, the Commonwealth idea has been a stimulus not only to economic self-help but to a cultural revival which has created here one of the great cosmopolitan centers of the Western Hemisphere. For the United States the success of the Commonwealth has brought relief from an expensive and, at times, embarrassing enmeshment in outmoded colonial practices. In both places, the Commonwealth concept has meant great material gain in place of serious material drain. The concept, in short, has worked for 15 years; it has worked well; it has worked for both sides.

I suppose that the tendency to want to let good enough alone applies to the Commonwealth system. Insofar as I am aware, that is the present inclination in Washington. That many Puerto Ricans are similarly disposed would appear to be indicated by the recent plebiscite. Nevertheless, I know that there are differences of outlook here with
respect to the future of the U. S.-Puerto Rican relationship. I know
that there are those who believe that the last chapter in the associa-
tion has yet to be written.

Certainly, I would not wish to leave the impression that I
think the doors to further change have been closed. I would suggest,
however, that the important consideration in any further evolution in the
U.S.-Puerto Rican relationship should continue to be, as it has been
in the recent past, the satisfaction of the range of needs of the
people of this island—spiritual as well as material—and that it
should rest on substantial popular consent and clear mutual benefit.

In this connection, I think we should not hesitate to acknow-
ledge that the excellent relationship which now exists did not arise
out of thin air. There was a time, as you know, when there was neither
mutual respect nor trust but rather a high degree of mutual ignorance
and suspicion. There was a time when the needs of the people of this
island were seriously neglected. There was a time when indifferences
and exploitation marked the relationship with the states.
That is in the past. For many years now we have gone forward together in the elaboration of the Commonwealth relationship and in the steady solution of the specific problems to which it has given rise. We have done so in a manner which is consonant with the interests of both parties and which has had substantial popular consent. In this process we have come to learn, I think, that whatever the differences in cultural tradition, we do share basic human values and aspirations. From this awareness has grown at last the mutual acceptance which is the key to the effectiveness of the relationship.

I can remember a time, if you will forgive a personal note, when Luis Munoz-Marín was a lonely man in Washington. For some years now, however, his voice has been recognized as an authentic source of leadership, not only in the Commonwealth relationship but in the solution of the problems of the U.S. relationship with all of Latin America. Out of the ranks of his colleagues, moreover, have come distinguished and dedicated men, whose significance has gone beyond
the shores of Puerto Rico. They are men who gave much of themselves for the progress of this island. They are men who have made great contributions to the peace and well-being of the Americas. There comes to mind, for example, an Arturo Morales-Carrion, and, among other things, his contributions to international order by his work in the Department of State and the Organization of the American States; a Teodoro Moscoso and his sparkplug contributions to economic development throughout Latin America under the Alliance for Progress.

I wish that the kind of collaboration that characterizes the U.S.-Puerto Rican relationship were in evidence elsewhere in the world. I regret to say, however, that a high degree of tension and violence is still the order of the day in international relations. There is little predisposition to the kind of persuasion, rationality, and pragmatism which eventually yielded the cooperation that underlies the Commonwealth.
The Middle East remains an inferno that smolders, erupts, and smolders again but does not finally subside. At this juncture neither side has shown much disposition to negotiate on a bilateral basis or to use in good faith the facilities of the U.N. Without negotiations, there can be no compromise. And unless there is compromise there will be no durable peace or reliable progress in that critical region.

If we turn to Africa, where there was bright hope not long ago, there is only a rending of an old stability without the emergence yet of a new order. Nigeria is perhaps the most pertinent case in point. It is Africa's most populous nation and one of its richest in resources. At one time it seemed to offer great prospect of an orderly transition to a stable and progressive independence. Now Nigeria is split by secession; its promise of rapid development has been undermined by the intransigent confrontation of armed factions.
The example is multiplied many times over in Africa, which, like other parts of the world, has been caught up in a reckless infatuation with violence. Indeed, closer to home, we find types of violent intransigence in the great continent to the South. Whether it is the repressive intransigence of an entrenched privilege or the militant intransigence of revolutionary disciplines, both tend to a violence which blocks the emergence of more responsive and responsible societies.

From the point of view of the United States and the world, however, the most serious violence is that which confronts us--indeed, in which we are plunged--in Asia. In that continent we are up against the hard fact of Viet Nam. It is, in my judgment, the most serious situation which has confronted the United States and the world since World War II.

I do not hesitate to discuss the question of Viet Nam in Puerto Rico. Thousands of Puerto Ricans have fought in Viet Nam or will have fought in Viet Nam before this war is over. The sons of the Commonwealth who serve in Viet Nam together with the sons of
the fifty states have linked us inseparably in this matter. We are as one in the tragedy of a grim and brutal war. We are as one in the personal grief which it has brought. We are as one in the recognition that the men who are in Viet Nam are there in pursuit of policies which they did not make, but they are men who are carrying responsibilities on behalf of us all. They deserve the best. They have received and they will continue to receive the best of which we are capable. On that point there is unity and there will be unity.

The question of how or why we became involved in Viet Nam is now moot. The fact is that we are involved. We are involved with over half a million men, and we are not going to extricate ourselves easily or quickly. The questions which confront us, the questions which we must examine and re-examine are how the conflict can be prevented from spreading and how it can be brought by negotiations, as soon as possible, to an honorable conclusion. Every day adds to the pain of the war and to the dangers of its spread. Already our casualties are well over 100,000. Already our planes have bombed less than...
half a minute from the Chinese border and two have even been shot
down within China proper.

Whatever the merits of our involvement in Viet Nam, the
continuance of this conflict in its present pattern has produced
serious repercussions in the world and it has fostered deep and
dangerous divisions at home. It serves no useful purpose to blink
at that fact in the name of unity. A unity that is surface-deep will
impress no one except ourselves. And, in that respect, it is likely
to be as misleadingly dangerous as a beauty that is skin-deep.

The reality is that, abroad, there is only limited understand-
ning of this war in Viet Nam and little support for its continu-
ance. That is in sharp contrast to the situation in World War II and
even the Korean conflict. The war in Viet Nam has, in fact, stimulated
divisions between us and nations of Western Europe which are by tra-
dition and practice otherwise very close to us. Insofar as Eastern
Europe is concerned, the tentative policy of building bridges to that
region which for a time held a measure of promise has suffered a severe setback. It is, in fact, just about dead for the duration on both sides.

Our capacity to maintain far-flung defense and other commitments elsewhere in the world has been severely strained by the voracious demands of Viet Nam for both manpower and resources. It ought not to be surprising, therefore, that there is going to be very substantial retrenchment this year in foreign aid; indeed, the continuance of the war in Viet Nam may be expected to require similar retrenchment in defense commitments elsewhere abroad as time goes on.

The Vietnamese conflict has complicated every domestic problem with which the nation is confronted. It has deflected concern as well as funds and skills from the effort to meet the problems of the cities, of education, housing, and whatever. It is the key factor in the inflationary pressures which, for some months, have existed in the U. S. economy and it is bound to intensify difficulties in the balance of payments. It is the chief reason for the need of a tax
increase. It is involved in the current wage-price squeeze. It is the primary cause of the deficit in the federal budget which, it is anticipated, will be in the range of $25 or $30 billion, an amount which just about equals the estimated cost of the war for a year.

Even more serious, Viet Nam is contributing to an atmosphere of personal hostility and antagonism at home which is as deplorable as it is disturbing. The right of dissent and its expression by peaceful assembly and petition is fundamental to our constitutional structure. As such, it must have every reasonable protection. Nevertheless, the right is seriously abused and it could be damaged in the heat of emotional reactions to Viet Nam. The right is abused, for example, when peaceful protest becomes the occasion for vile expressions of hatred towards the President and his family, for spitting at soldiers, for displays of disrespect for all law enforcement, and for street brawling.
These adverse consequences and many others—most serious of all the war-induced loss of tens of thousands of lives and damage to hundreds of thousands of others—American and Vietnamese—urges upon us every effort to bring the war to an honorable close. The President wants the war ended as soon as possible by negotiations and I know of no Member of Congress—regardless of differing views—who feels any differently. Both, in this connection, I believe, are expressing the most profound desire of the people of the nation. That is why many ideas for the restoration of peace have been advanced in the Congress and elsewhere. That is why many avenues have been explored by the President. It is regrettable that the path which leads to settlement has yet to be found. Nevertheless, the search will go on. Indeed, it must go on even as the war goes on. One can only hope that the former yields an entry to peace before the latter goes beyond the point of no return.

The concern for the prompt restoration of peace has led me and more than half the Membership of the Senate—59 Members, to be
exact—to sponsor a resolution in the Senate calling for a try at using the United Nations in an effort to find a solution of this conflict at the negotiating table. The President's Ambassador at the United Nations, Arthur S. Goldberg, endorsed this resolution in his appearance just last Thursday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and there is every reason to hope for its prompt enactment.

I am frank to say that I do not expect any miracles if consideration of the Vietnamese question is initiated at the U. N. It is my hope, however, that the matter would, at least, be discussed before the Security Council. It is my further hope that all those directly and indirectly involved—and that includes Peking, Hanoi, and the National Liberation Front as well as others—would be invited to participate in a face-to-face confrontation. In that way, perhaps—in the juxtaposition of the conflicting views—there may be at last some slight opening of the door to peace. The U. N. might well be at the beginning of the road to solution in Viet Nam even if, at the end, a settlement is reached in another place.
Whatever its limitations (and we should be frank to recognize them and not expect miracles), the U. N. does have a responsibility to face up to the breakdown of peace in Viet Nam. The member nations have so far dodged this responsibility. They have evaded it in spite of the fact that over 100 have expressed their concern with Viet Nam in statements before the General Assembly. They have ignored it in spite of the fact that fifty nations have seen fit to comment critically on the policy of bombing North Viet Nam. It seems to me that time has come for the U. N. to try to put these expressions of concern into responsible action to end the war. Unless this effort is made the words of concern are drained of meaning and the United Nations, as an organization, is reduced to irrelevance. Procedures for the restoration of peace are provided for in the U. N. Charter. They have not been tried. They should be tried before there sets in a hopeless resignation to the indefinite continuance of the conflict.
To take the Vietnamese issue to the U. N., in my judgment, can only help both the United Nations and the United States. On the one hand, a U. S. initiative would be a visible act of faith in peaceful procedures and an evidence of support of the U.N.'s obligation to make a responsible contribution to the settlement of the conflict. An initiative would help us, too, by placing before the world body a tangible earnest of this country's willingness to back its words of peace with acts of peace. At the very least, votes in the U. N. Security Council can make clear to the world who is prepared and who is not prepared now to enter on the road to an honorable settlement of the conflict by negotiations.

There can be no escape from the primary responsibility of trying to bring the war in Viet Nam to a close. For all of us, for the United States, for the Vietnamese, and for the rest of the world, Viet Nam will either be the first order of international business or it may well be the last.