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November 14, 1967

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

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In the last Congress, the distinguished Minority Leader (Mr. Dirksen) and several other Senators joined with me in sponsoring a joint resolution which was designed to provide adequate supervision of the works of art and the antiquities of the Capitol. This resolution passed the Senate by unanimous vote, as had a similar measure in the preceding Congress. In neither case, however, was the proposal acted upon in the House of Representatives.

There has been a gratifying upsurge of interest in recent years in the preservation of the memorabilia of America's history as a source of continuing national inspiration. There comes to mind, of course, the work of Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Johnson in the home of the Presidents, the White House, which has provided considerable impetus for this growing interest.

There has not been, I regret to say, a similar solicitude for the historic contents of the home of the Congress, the Capitol. Yet this edifice is a great storehouse of furniture, paintings, statues, and other objects of art and antiquity. The Capitol's collection dates back to the earliest days of the Republic, much of it is irreplaceable, and the whole is of incalculable value.

As has happened in state capitals, it is probable that there has already been, over the decades, considerable loss in this great collection. That is to be expected when it is realized how loose and scattered are the arrangements for its supervision. Various officers and

committees of the Congress share these responsibilities under practices which have grown up over the decades and without any particular rhyme or reason. At this point we do not even know what there is, where it is, or what it is worth because there is no central source of supervision.

I sometimes wonder when we will make the discovery of the need for more satisfactory arrangements for the preservation of this collection. Will it take a catastrophic event to act as a catalyst? I do not suppose that the Potomac is about to overflow its banks and flood the Halls of Congress but there does come to mind the devastating floods in Italy last year which resulted in irreparable damage, particularly in Florence, to priceless objects of art and antiquity. We ought not to require some such calamity in order to bring ourselves to take adequate steps to conserve the treasures of the Capitol. I hope that we will not wait until we find ourselves in a position of being able to do too little because it is already too late.

I believe that there is a clear and compelling need for legislation now which would provide for the integrated safeguarding and display of the Capitol's art and antiquities. It should seem incredible to the American people and to the Congress that this institution not only has no central authority to care for its art objects, but it doesn't even know the extent of its possessions. The first task of the proposed Commission would be to conduct a thorough inventory. Then it would restore and protect these priceless objects which have accrued to the Capitol since Colonial times. The urgency of this need was dramatized last December with the wanton slashing of four historic paintings on the House side of the Capitol.

I am hopeful that the House will have the time to give the matter the careful consideration which it deserves and that the pressing desirability of taking this action will be interpreted into effective legislation during the current session.