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Acceptance of the Distinguished Congressional Service Award

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

REMARKS OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

at the

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in acceptance of the

ARTHUR V. WATKINS DISTINGUISHED CONGRESSIONAL SERVICE AWARD

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It has been said with considerable validity that a statesman is a dead politician. I should like to note at the outset, therefore, that it is my preference to remain for as long as possible in the status of politician. It is not that I am unmindful of Senator Watkin's efforts to lift me by his words, so to speak, to a higher plane. I appreciate them more than I can say.

I can lay claim, however, neither to the wisdom nor the irreproachability which is usually associated with statesmen. On the contrary, I acknowledge my full complement of shortcomings and more than enough mistakes in a quarter of a

century of public life. To the extent that I have not reproached myself for them, there have been political opponents enough over the years who have been ever-ready to call them to my attention.

The point that I am trying to make is that the path of political virtue is neither one-track, clearly delineated, nor brightly lit. On the contrary, in a nation and time of sharply conflicting interests, a public official has no choice but to grope in a forest of many pressures in the search for the course of responsibility.

I speak of this problem as a Member of Congress, as a Senator. The integrity of every Senator is always on the line. He learns to live with the constant stress of conflicting interests or, soon enough, he dies from it.

This stress is greater, today, than at any time in my experience in public life. At home, our institutions are seriously tested by a range of discontents and anxieties which

find a most disturbing expression in the great metropolitan areas of the nation. In these enclaves of poverty and depravation a rage of despair, alienation, and bitterness tears at a great segment of the nation's people. There are, indeed, just causes for discontent in these cores of concentrated human inequity and social ills. On the other hand, we are distracted from dealing with these causes by the violence and rioting which has occurred in many of the nation's cities in recent years and which seems once again to be rising to a new summer of simmering discontent.

Abroad, our institutions are tested, too, by the inadequately understood commitments which have been assumed, notably in Viet Nam. We are in a war--deeply in a war--which seems without end or exit. Its persistence generates a grave sense of national frustration and leads to a polarization of positions in which the alternatives which are advocated seem

to call for the total destruction of Vietnamese society in the name of saving it or, virtually, the overnight withdrawal of American forces from the conflict.

A Senator of the United States must try to come to grips with the many specific questions which arise out of these great issues and, of course, the many lesser problems of government. How, together with other elected officials, he forms his answers to these questions are the stuff of public policy. In the aggregate, his answers contribute significantly to the determination of the direction and quality of our national life.

A Senator does not respond to issues in a vacuum. Rather he functions under the constant pressure of conflicting interests. There is, for example, the fundamental conflict of personal affairs and public responsibility. It is not easy to draw a fine line between the right of all Americans, including Senators and other public officials, to the privacy of their

personal concerns and the right of the people to have the nation's business conducted with full consideration of their interests. In a free society, personal affairs are thought to be just that: personal. Even income tax returns are filed in strictest confidence, with their improper disclosures made a criminal offense. Holding one's self open to public scrutiny is not a practice which is appreciated by Americans.

Nor do groups of Americans relish the necessity of being singled out to submit to special codes of conduct. Nevertheless, there are special codes for special situations and, however reluctantly, groups of Americans do submit to them. Lawyers, for example, recognized long ago that the special trust granted them required special canons to guide their behavior in dealings with clients. So it is in the contact between doctor and patient. In a similar vein, the Senate is now trying to come to grips with this problem as it

involves the special relationship of Senator to public. What is being sought are ethical standards which would make precise the distinction between public interest and private financial concerns.

A Special Committee of Senators has done extensive work on this question. On that basis, I am hopeful that the Senate will soon be able to act to adopt an adequate measure. An effective code of financial ethics to guide Senators and staffs should be helpful not only to the Senate but may also point the way to the establishment of uniform public standards for all federal officials--elected and appointed--in all branches. The problem of possible conflicts in financial interests, after all, can present itself not only in the Senate, but also in the other branches of the government.

In my judgment, the achievement of a uniform standard of ethics in this connection would serve to strengthen the institutions of government and public confidence in them.

It would provide a yardstick for helping to assure that in a free society, public office remains a public trust, to be met by a special commitment of all incumbents to the public interest.

The establishment of a uniform standard should also help to curb public cynicism respecting government which is all too prevalent, especially among the young people of the nation. May I say that that is not a new state of affairs. Throughout the history of the nation, a public notion has persisted--on occasion, not without cause--that the policies and actions of the government, in one or more of its branches, are not always formed on merit, within a framework of the over-all national interest. There has been suspicion that public decisions are sometimes produced by private pressures, particularly by pressures which may be generated by substantial contributors to political campaigns.

An accurate system for disclosing the sources of campaign financing, therefore, is closely related to the problem

of establishing an effective standard of ethics in government. If it can be devised, and the Senate last year passed a sweeping bill for that purpose, an effective disclosure procedure could go a long way to remove the notion that the financial generosity of campaign contributors is a significant determinant of the policies of government.

As a practical matter, however, I think it must be recognized that political campaigns are an integral element in the free political life of this nation and that the cost of such campaigns has skyrocketed, especially with the ever-wider usage of television. The costs of campaigning must be met in some way. It is met now in some instances by candidates of wealth out of personal wealth. It is met, too, by the private contribution whether in the form of a five-dollar or five-thousand dollar donation; whether by a one-hundred-dollar-a-plate political dinner, or a one-thousand-dollar-a-head political gathering. Each

party searches constantly for new fund-raising enterprises in order to meet the mounting costs of political activity.

In my judgment, the present methods of political financing are clearly inadequate and unsatisfactory but they remain the only methods which are available. They pose a problem which must be faced and faced soon, as an aspect of the over-all problem of the ethical conduct of government. Unless it is faced, entry into the highest elected offices of the nation is likely to be more and more shut off, as a practical matter, from broad public control. The needs of the nation, in my view, require equitable opportunities for citizens to participate in the entire electoral process, from beginning to end, not merely in the final casting of ballots.

The only visible answer to this problem, so far as I am aware, is some form of direct or indirect public financing of at least major election costs, coupled with strict and enforceable maximums for all expenditures in election campaigns.

Stating a solution, however, is far easier than devising a workable formula. The problem is immensely complicated. I regret to say in this connection that the Senate spent many weeks last year in trying without success to create a practical system of public campaign financing. That we were unsuccessful, however, makes the need no less imperative. The effort must be continued, and it will be continued.

In addition to conflicts involving financial matters, elected officials are under the constant stress of what might be termed the conflicts of constituencies. A Senator is a Senator from a particular state. As such, he owes a primary political allegiance to that group of Americans who inhabit his state. He is elected to speak for them--for those who voted against him as well as for those who voted for him. He is also, however, a Senator of the United States. His oath of office encompasses the nation as a whole and is addressed to the national interest.

The problem of reconciliation of these two responsibilities is difficult, notably when questions of immediate and specific state and sectional interests arise. In the long run, however, the problem tends to take care of itself because in this day and age, it is doubtful that any Member of the Senate can serve his state's interests adequately without also serving the nation's interests effectively. More and more, the issues encompass the entire nation.

For a Majority Leader, there is a further complication. He is not the President's Majority Leader, but rather the Senate's leader, elected by the majority of the Senate and serving at its pleasure. Nevertheless, the Majority Leader also has a responsibility respecting the policies of an incumbent administration. To his personal estimates of the interests of his state and the nation, therefore, he must add a sympathetic consideration of the administration's programs and

he must do what he can to bring them before the Senate for decision.

I am frank to say that the difficulty of carrying water on each shoulder as a Senator of a state and as a Senator of the United States is greatly heightened when this third bucket is set on the top of one's head. Nevertheless, I have performed this function under the Administration of the late President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and that of President Johnson. Far more often than not, I have found myself in agreement with the policies of both Presidents. Occasionally, however, there have been disagreements. I do not think it is any secret, for example, that I have had my individual convictions respecting the Vietnamese problem. As a Senator of Montana, I have expressed these convictions many times. Nevertheless, as Majority Leader, I have sought to interpret to the Administration the sentiments of the Senate, as a whole, as they

have developed with respect to this issue and, to the Senate, I have on many occasions tried to interpret the President's position.

There is for a Senator one other stress to which I should like to make reference before concluding. It arises from a conflict of conscience. "Your representative," said Edmund Burke in the British Parliament two centuries ago, "owes you not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion."

Arthur Watkins, as a Senator of this State of Utah, clearly understood this conflict. In an era of fear and apprehension which bordered upon panic, he responded to the dictates of his conscience. He carried out faithfully what has always been one of the most distasteful responsibilities that the Senate can place upon a member--the judgment of the acts of another member. His contribution, as I recall, was not

a popular one at the time, but the Senate followed his leadership and history has adjudged the rightness of his course. His was an act of the highest integrity which did much to safeguard the demeanor of the Senate and the processes of orderly government in the United States. His was a decisive contribution to the direction and quality of our national life at a most critical moment.

I conclude now by accepting this award, recognizing that there are those associated with me in the Senate who are far more deserving of this singular honor. I accept it, therefore, not for myself personally, but as a kind of agent of those Americans of courage, integrity, and wisdom who, elected to serve this nation and its people in the Senate, have tried to serve to the best of their abilities.