3-22-1968

Lowering the Voting Age

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Mr. DIRKSEN. Mr. President, I had hoped that committees would not seek the opportunity to meet during the session, because I believe it is imperative that we dispose of the pending resolution, and Senators should not be encumbered with committee meetings. I am terribly reluctant to object, but I think I should, in the interest of expedition of the work here.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. Bayh in the chair). Objection is heard.

LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, the New Hampshire primary was an event of real significance, not because of who won or who lost in what party but because, to a large degree, it bridged the generation gap and brought about a constructive participation of our younger citizens, many of whom, because they are not old enough to vote, do not take the democratic process seriously. I hope and expect that this participation will spread to all 50 States in the weeks and months ahead.

These younger Americans showed a personal and vital interest in the affairs of Government marked in this instance by the overriding issue of Vietnam. They raised their voices, lifted their arms, and expressed their hopes. They proved that their generation is interested in the affairs of Government, and they worked hard to make that apparent. The one factor missing was that—even though they were most personally concerned—many did not have the right to express their personal choice through the exercise of the franchise because of their age. Our younger citizens know they are vulnerable; they know that they can be called on to serve. They know they are up front, and they are prepared to carry out their constitutional responsibilities under the Constitution. They know that if they are called to serve, it will be because of policy made and laid down by their elders. The intense interest shown by our younger citizens in the New Hampshire primary, as understandable as it is, is exemplary and encouraging. If other States will not follow the lead of Georgia, Alaska, Hawaii, and Kentucky in lowering the voting age, it seems to me that it is up to the Federal Government, through Congress, to assume that responsibility and to give prompt consideration to Senate Joint Resolution 8, which would allow 18-year-olds the right to vote through an amendment to the Constitution. Therefore, I most urgently request the Senate Judiciary Committee to start hearings as soon as possible on Senate Joint Resolution 8, to report it, and then to give the Senate, and eventually the House, the opportunity to debate it and to make its judgment known—a judgment which I would hope would be in the affirmative.

Mr. DIRKSEN. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. MANSFIELD. I yield.

Mr. DIRKSEN. Mr. President, years ago, I became interested in this subject and pursued it with some diligence, and then introduced a resolution for a constitutional amendment. However, no ac-