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Statement of Mike Mansfield for The Georgetown Voice

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA) FOR THE GEORGETOWN VOICE

The daily press depicts clashes of student against institution, student against teacher, student against academic administration, and even students against each other. This continued emphasis has nurtured a public impression of general student irresponsibility which, in my judgment, is not accurate. To be sure, our institutions of learning in recent months have felt the ravages of unrest. In some places, seizing buildings, destroying property, disrupting classes have become the order of the day. That is not, however, the whole story.

In spite of these outbursts of violence and destruction, I, for one, think the great preponderance of this generation of college students has been involved constructively in the political and social processes of the nation.

I refer, not to super-activists whose voice may be the loudest and whose actions the most extreme but to the great majority of students. I think they have demonstrated in less heralded ways a deep interest in the great problems of today. One need only look around—to last year's political campaigns for example—to see young college students in the forefront—working, listening, talking and above all, asking questions. From this interest has come a fresh perspective of the contemporary world—a perspective not warped by past prejudices and panaceas.

As we enter the final year of this decade, the influence of young people can be measured, not by scattered tendencies to run amok, but by the new perspective that they have brought even to the most complex issues.
Their probing has extended to institutions and premises that have been long accepted and built upon, to the barriers of poverty and of misunderstanding which divide one segment of our society from another and to policies which have determined this nation's relationships abroad.

For me, then, the significance of the attitudes of young people is not to be found in any given incident or activity. Rather it lies in the dialogue that has emerged from the fresh outlook and the probing questions. It would be tragic indeed if the involvement, the genuine concern, of today's students should be eclipsed by the actions of the irresponsible few. If that were to happen, I fear that what has been termed the generation gap would open into a vast and unbridgeable gulf.