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Congressional Record - 'Washington Window' - Vietnam

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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WASHINGTON WINDOW

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record a transcript of a radio interview with the United Press International Network in which the participants were George Marder and Steve Gerstel, both reporters for UPI. William Greenwood of UPI Audio Network was in charge of the program.

There being no objection, the transcript was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

WASHINGTON WINDOW

Guest: Sen. Mike Mansfield, Democrat of Mont., Senate Majority Leader and ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
Panel: George Marder, Steve Gerstel.

Q. Senator, the new Senate Republican leader Hugh Scott has asked for a sixty day moratorium on criticism of President Nixon's conduct of the war. How do you react to this?

A. I don't think that a moratorium of a lesser or greater amount of time would have any effect, as a matter of fact it might well be counterproductive. The question of criticism is one which is guaranteed to all Americans under the constitution. Certainly it is one of the inherent rights of a Senator to express his views as he sees fit on questions which affect the welfare, the security of the country. So I don't think too much of that particular proposal because I don't see what could be accomplished within sixty days.

Q. Do you think there should be some kind of coordination between members of the Congress and the people sponsoring the moratorium day on October 16th?

A. No, I do not. We have our responsibilities; we should face up to being Senators, attend to the Senate's business, and, what we have to say, say on the floor, and say on the basis of our own right but not the result of tying up with some other group.

Q. Then you would oppose the suggestion that has been put forth that Congress recess for that day.

A. I would. The business of the Senate will be conducted as usual on that day.

Q. But how do you feel about the demonstrations themselves?

A. People have the right to demonstrate, to criticize, to oppose, to make their views known. As I've said earlier, that is one of the rights guaranteed under the constitution. I would only hope it would be constructive and worthwhile.

Q. Do you intend to participate in these protest demonstrations in any way? Sympathize with them? Encourage them?

A. I do not.

Q. I wonder Senator what you mean by counterproductive—that if Senators exercise restraint now in criticizing the war it might be counterproductive? What did you have in mind in that?

A. That there's no objective in mind as to what could be achieved within sixty days. By making such proposals, I think you create more opposition rather than more unity.

Q. How do you feel about these resolutions that are going to be introduced on October 8th by Republican and Democratic Senators calling for withdrawal of troops from Vietnam?

A. That is their prerogative, their right; they have that privilege, any time they see fit. I'm sure that any resolutions of that nature will be given the appropriate consideration by the appropriate committees.

Q. Are you joining in any of these resolutions?

A. No, I am not.

Q. Are you joining in any of the criticism of the President's conduct of the war?

A. Well, I'm trying to understand the President's position because I ask myself what would I do if I were in his shoes. And it's kind of hard to answer because he has the final responsibility, I think we ought to recognize that point and be aware of the fact that if anything is to be done in Vietnam, it's going to be done by him because of his Constitutional authority and responsibility. I think he's been moving in the right direction through a reduction in troops, though not fast enough, through advocating a change in the draft, and in other ways. I do not think that he is too much more time to arrive at a decision concerning Vietnam because this is the burning question, the vital question, and it's tied to everything, directly or indirectly, which is occurring in this country today.

Q. When you say not too much more time, could you spell that out in terms of months and what you feel might happen at the end of this time period?

A. No, not in terms of months. But his time began to run out on the day that he took office. And the longer that time ran out on him, the fewer options and alternatives he had open to him. In other words, he could have done a great deal more in the first days of his Administration than he can do now and, in a sense, get away with it.

Q. Word has come through Republican leaders that one of the reasons he wants this moratorium is because leadership in Hanoi . . . that there is a need for some time to appraise this new leadership and what their reactions might be.
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A. Well, it's a reasonable, logical argument, but I think the one thing we should be doing is finding a way to stop the killing in Vietnam prior to the conclusion of the bombing strafing up there.

Q. How do you counter this military activity by the other side? What do we do about this?

A. That's a hard question to answer. I don't know the answer, but I do not think it's the time to sit down to talk seriously as a cease fire and stand fast. In other words, a fall back into the Gavins ending of the war, and do what we can by actions as well as by words to try and bring this dreadful and tragic war to a conclusion.

Q. The action that I have in mind is to the statement that we announce to the world and to Hanoi particularly that we ceasefire and we will not fire again unless fired upon?

A. That's right. If we're fired on we will, of course, fire in return. But we can and we cannot put into effect some sort of de facto termination of hostilities on that basis.

Q. And that we do it unilaterally . . . we do it ourselves?

A. That's right. Furthermore I would hope that as a move, a shift, from the dependence on the South Vietnamese government which is becoming more apparent every day, President Johnson can show that he is wagging the American body. I would like to see in South Vietnam a coalition government based on a negotiation which could take place within weeks or months rather than after the end of hostilities, so that a government is formed and not the people of South Vietnam, the Viet Cong, Mao Tsai, the Hua, the neutralist and all the others be established.

Q. Senator, could you talk about that there is a negotiated settlement to the war unless there is shared control of the government by both elements?

A. That is the main thesis, I think, on both sides. Insofar as Hanoi is concerned, they have said they would not treat with the present government. As far as we are concerned, we have stated that the one point we would not back down on was the right of the South Vietnamese to decide themselves what their own future will be.

Q. What can the United States do to force the Saigon regime into holding these kinds of elections so there is a government with total essential?

A. Speed up the withdrawals.

Q. You mean scare them into doing it?

A. That's right. Furthermore, I think the fact of life instead of kowtowing to them, think of our own people for a change instead of the people who are running things for the benefit of the Scotsmen in the United States.

Q. You feel that they would do that if we started withdrawing more troops?

A. They'd do it, or they'd fall.

Q. Senator, have you seen a similar de-escalation of the level of activity in Laos, or the level of our involvement in Laos as . . .

A. Quite the contrary.

Q. We have been increasing our involvement there.

A. That's right. I know of no combat troops on the ground, but the sorties into Laos number in the hundreds every day, and that is a measure of our increasing involvement.

Q. And you oppose these, do you not?

A. I do not oppose them, but I do think that the United States is allowing the American people in that there is a possibility of another Vietnam being created in Laos because of this involvement. Now, I must all over say that on the basis of the Geneva accords of 1962 by means of which all forces are supposed to leave Laos that we did so at that time. The North Vietnamese did not. As a matter of fact, they had increased the capacity of their forces to today it numbers somewhere in the neighborhood of 50,000. But there's no question about the stepped-up air activity in Laos and, in my understanding that more bombs are being dropped there than were being dropped in North Vietnam prior to the conclusion of the bombing strafing up there.

Q. How do we counter this military activity by the other side? What do we do about this?

A. That's a hard question to answer. I don't know the answer, but I do not think it's the time to sit down to talk seriously as a cease fire and stand fast. In other words, a fall back into the Gavins ending of the war, and do what we can by actions as well as by words to try and bring this dreadful and tragic war to a conclusion.

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Q. Senator, can you go back to the Vietnam issue for just a moment? The Democrats are seeking political advantage now because of the way the war is going. How do you react to that?

A. I think that's the worst thing we could do. This is not a partisan matter. As Democrats we cannot forget the history of the Vietnam War. After all, the President inherited this. He will get more and more blame, if he should do so, because the future, if I have indicated earlier, lies with him. But as far as it becoming a partisan political issue is concerned, I think that is the last thing that could happen. This is not a partisan or political issue. This is an all American issue.

Q. Well, do you see it as a tactical error then, for the Democrats to have met alone and for Senator Harris to come out and made some remarks about it that we ought to take off the gloves now on the Vietnam war, or should've this in the beginning been a bipartisan meeting and bringing some of the Republicans doves like Hatfield, and Case and Cooper?

A. I think the worst thing to do is to talk about the bill being introduced because I would like to see us get out before the end of 1970. And

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I was pleased to note that the President in response to a question concerning Sen. Goodell’s measure, indicated that he would like the Senate to consider the bill before the end of 1970, but he figures that setting a timetable . . . a time limit . . . would hamstring him, so to speak, in his foreign policy objectives.

Q. But by saying that he’d like to get out before that date, isn’t he setting a timetable himself?

A. Yes, but it’s an indefinite timetable rather than a put down, hard and fast timetable that Goodell has indicated.

Q. Wasn’t more of a hope that he expressed some time ago when former Defense Secretary Clark Clifford suggested getting 100,000 out by the end of this year?

A. That is correct, but then when President’s hope, it’s usually taken for something more substantive.

Q. I gather that you believe there should be a timetable set for withdrawal?

A. No. I’d like to see that timetable which is now, of course, open knowledge beaten by getting our people out before that time if at all possible.

Q. Wouldn’t an announced timetable put the pressure on the Saigon government that you were talking about before so that they would act?

A. An announced timetable with substantial withdrawals would put the pressure on the Saigon government.

Q. I’m sorry, I didn’t quite follow you when you said public knowledge of a withdrawal. Then Mr. President, you take your reference from Saigon to the President Ky mentioning a withdrawal of up to possibly 200,000 by the end of the year.

A. Yes. I think that has a decided effect because it’s spreading far beyond its former confines and taking in all aspects of the population. And I think that it played a part in the withdrawal of President Johnson from seeking re-election last year.

Q. Some people have said that if Mr. Nixon can’t end the war, substantially reduce our troops in Vietnam by the end of his first term, he won’t have a second.

A. Yes, I think that was a reason for his withdrawals and intense concern over the way things are going.

Q. No. I don’t think he’s considering the political consequences. I think that he is fed up with the war too, and he’s doing everything in his power which he can do responsibly, to bring this way to a conclusion.

Q. Senator, are there any other major presidential legislation beyond the tax reform bill that you see passing through Congress this year?

A. Well, there’s an education bill of consequence.

Q. Isn’t that stymied in the house?

A. No, it passed the House. It’s in the Senate Labor Committee. And then, of course, we have air and water pollution bills and other measures, aid to tax bills, all these are bits of legislation which are of tremendous significance.

Q. Some Republicans have been asking that President Nixon withdraw the nomination of Justice Haynsworth to the Supreme Court? Do you feel about that?

A. I haven’t read the record. I have read the press accounts. I would like to see just what the record of the hearings of the committee shows. Then I will make my own judgment. There are some questions which I have raised, and therefore I want to find some answers.

Q. Do you feel that this is an excellent appointment?

A. I will still have to read the record.

Q. Would you call up the nomination as long as the Committee reports it in light of the fact that court begins its term next week?

A. Not on that basis. I would call it up if it’s reported out by the committee at the first appropriate time because there’s other legislation we have to consider as well as individual nominations and I would look for a time when there could be extended debate because from what I read in the paper so far and heard my colleagues, it does appear that there may be some days of talking ahead.

Q. Senator, some people say there might be as many as 30 or 40 votes against Justice Haynsworth if the nomination reaches the floor. Doesn’t this . . . isn’t this really almost like sending a ship to war count with one arm tied?

A. Not necessarily. Those matters have happened before and on many occasions the justices turn out to be a pleasant surprise. I’m not saying this in the case of Haynsworth but on the question of previous justices against whom there was a great deal of opposition.

Q. Will there be a Democratic party meeting in the Senate on the Haynsworth nomination? Will there be a Democratic party position on it too?

A. No, there will not. Each Senator will have to make up his own mind.

Q. Will it be taken up at the policy committee?

A. It will not.

Q. Speaking of policy committee, George, let me mention the policy council also which the Democratic party has just formed. With the Presidencies lost for the time being, and the Democrats not able to use that as a forum, Sen. Mansfield, do you see this policy council as emerging as a viable force for directing Democrats in this country?

A. Yes, I think it could be helpful to the Democratic National Committee and to the Democratic Party nationally because we do have a platform from which we can operate. We can consider measures of transcendent importance and establish a party position and I think it’s a step in the right direction in making the policy committee a policy committee at last long.

Q. There’s been some concern over the representation on the policy council. Some democrat have been noticeably omitted, such as yourself. I believe.

A. Are we talking about the policy committee in the Senate or the . . .

Q. No, sir, we’re talking about the policy council.

A. Ah, I was talking about the policy committee in the Senate. As far as the policy committee in the council is concerned, I think it’s a good thing and frankly, I could have been on that council, had I desired. I didn’t desire to be on that council but that the Democratic policy council in the Senate can work with the council. Together we can do a good job in establishing Democratic party positions.

Q. Why do you prefer to stay off?

A. Well, I think we have enough to stay here in the Senate and besides, the policy committee is, as I have indicated, trying to set its own house in order.

Q. Senator, would you like to say what the changes of a tax reform bill passing this session are?

A. I would say good. As far as I am concerned personally, I intend to keep my word to the Senate and do everything I possibly can to pass a tax reform and tax relief bill.

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