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Vietnam - 'Senator Mansfield Answers Questions of Montanans'

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the moratorium and my answer was to quote from the Bill of Rights, the first amendment to the Constitution. That amendment reads as follows:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

I said that as far as I was concerned, this constitutional right applied to all our citizens, to those who favored a moratorium and to those who indicated that they might want to assemble in opposition to a moratorium. I emphasized the use of the word “peaceable” in the first amendment and stated that it was my hope that any assemblies or demonstrations would be conducted with dignity and decorum and would be within the law.

I stated that I did not believe in violence or license or destruction or assault upon persons because all these were contrary to the law and those who indulged themselves in such a manner should be and would be subject to law.

The question was raised as to what should be done if one did not believe in the law, and my answer was that there were many laws passed by Congress and many decisions laid down by the Supreme Court to which I was opposed and did not approve; but once a law was passed by Congress and signed by the President and once a decision was made by the Supreme Court, regardless of my personal feelings, I felt it my duty, my obligation, and my responsibility to obey that law and to accept those decisions as long as they were in existence. Otherwise, I pointed out, a democracy such as ours would disintegrate and fall.

I was queried as to my views on the situation in Vietnam. I told my fellow Montanans that it seemed to me that the President was doing all that he could do on the basis of the best advice he had available to bring about a responsible settlement. I stated further that, in my opinion, there were elements which were encouraging and which might lead toward a possible settlement.

I pointed out that in the 7-month period since last March, the total number of North Vietnamese infiltrates numbered approximately 20,000 compared with an annual rate of infiltration last year between 7,000 and 13,000 a month; I pointed out that there had been a lull in the fighting, that the casualties had been reduced though, in my opinion, they were still too high; I pointed out that the President had ordered the withdrawal of 60,000 troops by the end of this calendar year and that this was a decided shift away from escalation to-
ward deescalation; I pointed out that a new militancy of “protective reaction” had replaced the strategy of “maximum pressure” which had been followed in the previous administration and during the first months of this administration.

I stated further that it was my understanding that the orders for this shift had gone to General Abrams last July. To me, a strategy of “protective reaction” meant that we have moved a long distance in the direction of a cease fire and stand fast policy because, as I interpret it, the search and destroy missions are a thing of the past, and under the new policy, we will fire only when there is a threat that our forces will be fired on even while remaining prepared to undertake necessary action should any attack be in the offing.

I said to the people of Montana that I thought the President was moving in the right direction, that, from our point of view, progress was being made toward a settlement. The missing factor, as I saw it, was the need for an all-South Vietnam—southern Vietnamese—procedure in which all the various groups in South Vietnam, religious, political and otherwise, would participate. I expressed the hope that that procedure would be undertaken in a matter of weeks or months and that the South Vietnamese people themselves would decide what kind of a government they wanted and what their future would be.

I said that the one point on which the President had stated he would not budge was the right of self-determination of the people of South Vietnam and that in response to questions he had also stated that he would accept the results of such an election, regardless of the coloration of the government which it produced.

Mr. President, I found the people of Montana concerned about the situation in Vietnam, concerned about our domestic problems. I found them dignified, courteous, and attentive in discussing how these difficulties should be met. Talking with them gave me renewed confidence in the American process. It added a dimension to my understanding of the situation. It unfolded to me the thinking of Montanans about the issues of the day and what they thought should be done.

I endeavored to reply to their questions to the best of my ability, with a full realization that I did not know all the answers. In so doing, I became more aware of their attitudes, their feelings, and their anxieties. I was the beneficiary of Montana. It is my hope that, on the basis of my talking to the folks, I have come to understand better their current concerns and that I will be able thereby to represent them better in the Senate of the United States.

Mr. AIKEN. Mr. President, as usual the Senate from Montana has given a very clear exposition of our position in Southeast Asia as this time. The fact that the Senator from Montana speaks as he does not only represents a pillar of strength for our own Government, and to the President, also the remarks of the distinguished majority leader in-