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Dinner in Honor of Senator Lister Hill

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ADDRESS BY SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

Before the

Dinner in Honor of Senator Lister Hill

Jefferson Davis Hotel

Montgomery, Alabama

Friday, November 14, 1969

LISTER HILL - AN APPRECIATION

I am most appreciative of this invitation to come to Montgomery. It would be a pleasure to visit here in any circumstances. It is a privilege to join with the friends and admirers of Lister Hill in the place of his birth. You have accurately counted me as one of you in doing honor to him tonight.

Whatever I might say this evening could not begin to measure the depth or the breadth of this distinguished citizen of Alabama and of the United States. His achievements are outstanding. His attributes of character and intelligence are sterling. I will not list them. I could not. They are too many. Yet I must touch upon them because they are part of the story of this man who has brought us, from many places, to Montgomery out of a shared respect and affection for him.

It is said that we enter this world with nothing and can take nothing out of it when we leave. What counts is a man's accomplishments in his lifetime and that which he leaves behind in inspiration. The record of Senator Hill is still far from complete but it is already heavy with constructive achievements.

We need to look to the beginnings of Lister Hill to sense why he has become what he is---an adornment of this state and the nation and a living legend of the Senate. He is named, as you know, after one of the founders of modern surgery. That is not surprising since his father was a doctor and an enthusiastic one. Nor is it surprising that a number of the Hill family entered the profession of medicine. Equally, it is not surprising that Lister Hill did not.

It is understandable that he had an avid interest in matters of health from an early age. Nevertheless, he chose then as he has been doing ever since---he chose his own way, in his own way. He did not latch on to the medical branch of the family tree. He chose instead to hang his shingle on a legal branch. To put it with the clarity of the contemporary idiom---he was determined to do his own thing.

In due course, he became a national legislator, joining first the House of Representatives and then the Senate, even as his family-inspired interest in medicine and health remained steadfast.

In due course, Lister the lawyer found himself, not with a legal practice and much less with a medical practice. Rather, he had a political practice extending from one end of Alabama to the other---a long way to go on a night call. And before he ended his legislative service, Lister's problem on that score was multiplied a thousand-fold. His constituency was being drawn from all over the nation, and, from the entire world.

Who were these multitudes from everywhere who turned to Lister Hill in admiration and hope and for the inspiration of his leadership. They were those who suffered ills of body and mind and those who believed there exists a human responsibility and a social responsibility---to help in alleviating that suffering.

Lister Hill is a man who saw and understood at an early age the plight of those born with ills or who, sooner or later, became victims of devastating diseases. He never forgot it. He saw human suffering and sensed from his family background how the ever-widening horizons of science, good sense and a human concern might be brought to bear upon it. In short, by the time he was in a position to act, two comprehensions---the anguish of illness and what to do about it---merged within him in what amounted to a magnificent obsession with the well-being of humanity.

Over the years, there has come within the scope of Lister Hill's vision, the nation's need for comprehensive health research, for additional hospital facilities and services and for more and better trained medical personnel. This man of compassion and insight has devoted a major portion of his lifetime to the practical legislative work essential to meeting the expanding health needs of the nation.

If you are familiar with hospitals, you know the term "Hill-Burton." It is a reference to a law which was co-sponsored by Senator Hill, almost a quarter of a century ago. This law has had an immense impact on the availability of hospitals and health centers throughout the nation. Its effect continues to be felt today. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the extent of the chaos which would surely exist in the medical world without the great contribution of the Hill-Burton Act. The stimulus afforded by this legislation has been a major factor in keeping hospital facilities at least within hailing distance of the nation's needs.

Nor did Lister Hill think it was enough just to build hospitals and health centers. He was determined that what was done in them would reflect the best of our scientific understanding and capability. So, during the years of his Senate service he made great efforts to increase research into the causes and cures of such devastating menaces as cancer and heart disease.

His sponsorship and consistent support of the National Institutes of Health is renowned. Out of these great centers have come a continuing flow of encouragement to health and medical research throughout the nation, advances in the understanding of health problems and in the capacity to deal with them.

Under the leadership of Lister Hill, the Senate was also able to focus on the nation's long neglected and now most significant health problem---that of the needs of the mentally retarded and the mentally ill. He has championed the cause of Americans who had suffered a long night of neglect because of ignorance, prejudice, indifference and fear. He provided us, in the Hill-Harris Act of 1963, with a legislative vehicle to move actively and constructively on this costly and difficult frontier of the nation's health problems.

Lister Hill was among the first to recognize a serious gap between the need and the supply of competent medical personnel---doctors, nurses, technicians, public health officials, and other essential medical workers. Besides sponsoring legislation to expand and improve training, he was a prime mover in providing scholarships and loans for those seeking to enter the health professions.

Lister Hill has been a strong supporter of the concepts of preventive medicine. He has been a leader in developing means of helping the disabled and the handicapped to lead productive lives.

In sum, Lister Hill's efforts for the improvement of medical and related services have served to benefit the people of Alabama and the other 49 states, and people throughout the world. Modern hospitals and medical schools are among his monuments in stone. Countless illnesses prevented, cures achieved through scientific research, and human suffering alleviated---all these and more are among the etchings of his spirit on our times. His work in Congress is the work of a man of decency, feeling and wisdom. It is just as surely a part of the extraordinary achievements of modern medicine as is the complex hospital in which it is administered or the hand of the skilled practitioner. By any measure, it is accurate to refer to Lister Hill as a medical marvel of our century.

Senator Hill has been most widely proclaimed for his outstanding legislative and other leadership in the field of health. Nevertheless, his efforts in other aspects of human welfare have also been of great significance. Many of the nation's most impressive educational measures, for example, clearly bear his imprint---his own inimitable touch. Far more often than not, the Hill hallmark on a bill was sufficient in itself to commend a measure to the Senate as just and thoughtful.

In a personal vein, I should like to make reference to the relationship which I was fortunate enough to have with Lister Hill during the years in which we served together in the Senate of the United States.

Senator Hill is a warm friend, a man of decency, integrity, and diligence and he was, in the Senate, a colleague with a deep and selfless devotion to the nation. From the people of Alabama, I know, Lister Hill gained much strength. I know, too, that he constantly had their concerns and needs in mind and responded faithfully to them. He saw those needs of his state, not in narrow isolation but in the mirror of the larger unity of which Alabama is a part---the United States of America. His actions in the Senate were invariably designed to bring the needs of the one into harmony with the essential realities of the other, ultimately, to the common advantage of both.

After I was elected Senate Majority Leader, a decade ago, I depended heavily on Senator Hill's constant and unfailing cooperation. He was a source of immense strength to me. His advice and assistance were invaluable. His inspiration and strength permeated the entire Democratic leadership, of which, as a Committee chairman and as a participant in the deliberations of the Majority Policy Committee, he was a highly respected member. Outstanding---from the viewpoint of any Democratic Majority Leader---was his highly competent legislative skill in guiding major bills through the Senate.

This distinguished Senator endeared himself to me and to all of his colleagues---both Democrats and Republicans---with his personal attributes of modesty, good humor, and kindliness. He made the day of many a tourist visiting the Capitol in Washington, or a staff aide, or a colleague, with his smile, his hello, and his effusion of human warmth.

I am going to add one final comment which, I believe, is the highest tribute that I can pay to Lister Hill and to this state of Alabama which sent him to Washington so many years ago. In the Nation's Capitol when some Members of Congress depart from its halls, they are found to have contracted a case of Potomac fever. The only known cure is by remaining in one capacity or another in Washington, D. C. Notwithstanding his exposure of over 45 years to the environment in which Potomac fever is endemic, there is no trace of the ailment in Lister Hill. He returned undefeated and in the best of health to his beloved Alabama where his roots were and will always be, where his heart is and will ever remain.