6-10-1970

Congressional Record S. 8711-2 - Mansfield of Montana

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mansfield_speeches

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mansfield_speeches/877
MANSFIELD OF MONTANA

Mr. PROXMIKE, Mr. President, last Sunday, there appeared in newspapers throughout the United States an article by Saul Pett of the Associated Press entitled "Mansfield, Montana." It captures in a highly accurate way what those of us who serve with him know about the majority leader.

In an atmosphere of public relations exploits, image-mongering, and media spectaculars, MIKE MANSFIELD of Montana is a rare man. He occupies one of the most powerful positions in the Government of the United States, yet he constantly eschews both the trappings and perquisites of power.

In an age of cant and phoniness, MIKE MANSFIELD is a man of strong character, simple tastes, and fierce honesty. Would that we had many, many more like him.

And combined with this strong sense of personal integrity Sen. MANSFIELD OF MONTANA is well read, deeply philosophical, and holds strong convictions developed from a foundation of fact and information.

"The most decent man I've ever met," the Democratic majority leader in the Senate calls the Majority Leader "the most decent man I've ever met."

And why? For a reason he writes: "My task, circles. In old-fashioned business, he fidgets or wanders among the richly finished mirrors, and precisely on schedule. In the Senate calls the Majority Leader at the bronzed clock on the wall as though time were a personal affair.

"The wise man is unable to judge the inner worth of a man who may be, on first inspection, a transient. Who, perhaps, the last of the low profiles, a man so singularly uncolorful and so indifferent to personal charisma that he is these days, singularly colorful."

May I add one other word. Under the leadership of the Senator from Montana, the Senate is a pleasant and happy place to serve. It mirrors to an amazing degree the personality of its leader. It is an institution where issues are hammered out, dissent and minority views are hammered out, dissent and minority views are aired, equal handed fairness is dispensed. Meanwhile, the Senate retains its essential civility and humanity.

Because of MIKE MANSFIELD, the Senate is a place where democracy works. It is not run as a benevolent dictatorship or as the province of a modern rhetorical buccaneer. Instead it is a place where arguments and ideas have an opportunity to be accepted and provided on provided only that they can survive the clash of debate.

"The most decent man I've ever met in public life," says Hugh Scott, Republican minority leader, of the Democratic majority leader, "the most decent man I've ever met."

And why? For a reason he writes: "In an age of cant and phoniness, MIKE MANSFIELD is a man of strong character, simple tastes, and fierce honesty. Would that we had many, many more like him."

MANSFIELD OF MONTANA

(by Saul Pett)

June 10, 1970

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD — SENATE

S8711

Northern Democratic liberals, Southern Democratic conservatives, moderate Republicans, conservative Republic­tans: there are no anti-Mansfield walls which have not been breached in these days. Some have complained mildly in the past that he could be more effective in national policy by being more personally aggressive. Others, apparently a large majority, insist that this ex-miner and ex-Marine is effective by being one of the least combative men in the Senate. In any case, says a member of the Senate staff, Mike Mansfield, at 67, in his ninth year as majority leader and his 18th as senator from Montana, "has now grown into a kind of untouchable—nobody dares really sing him.

"The original tell-it-like-it-is man, bland, straight-out, completely devoid of frills, fanfare or phraseology," says an admiring Hubert Humphrey, "I've met many, many leaders, but Mike is how to be clever, Mike has something more remarkable. He knows how to be sensible."

"Mike," said a man who was there, "simply would keep his firm jaw up tight, puff on his pipe, pause deliberately, pausing deliberately and precisely that Mansfield would be back. He is the Democratic majority leader, president of the enemy general across the floor of the Senate and committed what he called "political heresy." He hoped publicly that Mansfield would be back. He praised Mansfield for his words and not for his force of character and gentility, not through drive. Dirksen said he would go anywhere to campaign for Mansfield, even to the moon, but please, not Montana.

"To Mike, who knows when to stay and when to go."

Mike Mansfield Papers, Series 21, Box 46, Folder 32, Mansfield Library, University of Montana.
June 10, 1970

In 1964, when President Johnson seemed to be shopping around elaborately for a vice president, James Rowe, a friend and Demo­cratic strategist, said: "Any feelers from the White House?"

"No," said the man from Montana, "and they never will be."  

Recently a staff assistant asked the maj­ority leader when he was going to have his portrait done. 'I told him to wait until I'm in the Capitol with those of past leaders."

"What for?" asked Mansfield.

"In history's sake,"

"When I'm gone, I want to be forgotten."

Period.

Mansfield's interest in material things or the trappings of power is low. The only things he personally acquires are pocket mysteries and Dixieland jazz records. He and his wife, Maureen, bought their first and only house in 1953 without his seeing it; he thought any choice of hers would be fine with him. His clothes suggest an underpaid college pro­fessor of the '30s, which he was, and even when they aren't there actually, one imagines these clothes on his elbows. He took him years to get comfortable in the big black Cadillac that goes with the job of leading the Senate, saying about himself: "I'm a limousine liberal." He chose a modest office as leader instead of the huge "(Ta) Mahall" occupied by the minority leader, which is remarkable in a man who has known much poverty in his life. ...

Born of Irish immigrant parents in Man­hattan where he served as a police officer, mother died early ... Carted off to Montana to live with relatives. Kerzenlempa, no inside plumbing or baths in a wash tub where water heated on the stove ... Fibbling about his age at 14, joined Navy in first world war, then the Army, later the Marines, making him rare alumnus of all three services ... Worked eight years in Montana copper mines $2.85 feet down for $4.35 a day in the De­pression ... At urging of wife, who cashed in her life insurance, completed education, getting his high school credit and BA from Montana State almost simultaneously, at 30 ... Came home one day with proud purchase of four pounds of hamburger for 50 cents. Wife cried. "I guess she felt I squan­dered the money. We had no icebox and the winter weather helped in price."

It is also said that one of the most im­passioned speeches of his Senate career was delivered in successful opposition to the threat of closing a Veterans hospital in Miles City.

But nothing is apt to make Mike Mans­field flare quicker than any reflection on his independence. In the years of the Johnson presidency, he was constantly and stonily reminding reporters he was not the presi­dent's majority leader but the Senate's. At a dinner party once, the lady on his right made the mistake of asking, "And what are your people in Montana telling you to do on this issue, senator?"

"None," said the man from Montana, "my people don't tell me what to do. They sent me here. I do the voting."

In 1964, James Rowe and others, the Mansfield comes as close to the tradition of Edmund Burke, the 18th century British statesman they know Burke told the voters of Bristol, in a classic statement of the legislator's role: "Your representative owes allegiance only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion."

The leader, which is not mentioned in either the Constitution or The Rules of the Senate, is what tradition and the leader make of it. Lyndon Baines John­son made the most of it. He drove with a bull whip, wheedled, pressured, arm-twisted, jugular-squeezed, threatened, dispersed or withheld favors to influence legislation. He was a one-man decathlon.

Mansfield works almost as though from a civics class: "I'm asking for patience, accommodation and understanding." He clings to the notion that all senators are equal and each should have a man of consequence who should be free to exercise his own judgment. He encourages committee chairmen to make their own bills on the simple logic that they know most about them. He encourages young senators to speak up because they value their "currency." He rarely votes for votes and then only to the extent of saying: "If you can see your way clear to go with me on this, I'd appreciate it." "Some senators like to be shoved around and told what to do," says William Fulbright of Arkansas. "But Mike rarely even tells you how he'll vote unless you ask him. Which is proper. It's all right for other senators to lobby senators but not the leader." 

Hugh Scott says, "There is no cuteness or devi­ciousness in him." Which means Repub­licans like him. His answers to reporters about "the limousine liberal" are not nervous about leaving town for fear the majority leader might suddenly re­ject the calendar to flip through a last­minute amendment.

With an absence of cuteness, an abundance of trust and understanding, Mansfield steered the levathan bulk of Great Society legislation through the Senate. He had, of course, the spoons on the bridge and in the boiler room, from the big mover and shaker in the White House.

Since the Johnson days, he has been per­sonally credited with revitalizing the Demo­cratic policy committee in the Senate, pull­ing together such disparate forces as Richard Rus­sell of Georgia and Edmund Muskie of Maine, Robert Byrd of West Virginia and John Pastore of Rhode Island. It was Mansfield who reportedly led the committee and ultimately the Democratic-controlled senate to adoption of a tax reform bill, an amendment that would give 10% of the tax revenue to a resolution calling for troop withdrawals in Europe and another warning the president he could make these changes by no binding resolution outside Congress without the approval of Congress.

His greatest frustration in public life, Mansfield says, has been his inability to affect recent presidential thinking about South­east Asia. A recognized expert on the Far East, he made speeches for the six presidents, including Johnson and Nixon. Nonetheless, he was unable to dissuade John­son from escalation in Vietnam or Nixon from incursion into Cambodia, which he visited last year at the president's behest.

Aides say Mansfield agonizes before oppos­ing any president, such is his respect for the office and his compassion for the burdened senator. He, himself, says of the Johnson days:

"It's not easy to be the only one to say no to the Oval office, where he is sur­rounded by all his advisers and chiefs of staff. I guess I had to do that a dozen times." 

Until Cambodia. Mansfield said he thought the Nixon policy in Vietnam was in the right direc­tion—out—but hoped troop withdrawals would be speeded up. He was quick to ac­knowledge agreement with the President when he thought he was right. When Nixon briefed Congressional leaders on his plans for the strategic arms limitation talks, the Democratic leader was the first to respond to the Republican president, saying, "I think you've made the best choice. I will support you." Then came Cambodia, about which Mans­field and other congressional leaders were briefed briefly by the president after the operation had started. That night the major­ity leader had trouble sleeping. He put pil­lows over the phones in his house and tried to sort out his thoughts. The next morning he looked like he had been kicked in the stomach. He had, he explained to a reporter, been thinking of the spreading war, the problems and divisiveness at home. "I've never been so down in the dumps in my lifetime," said the man from Montana who almost never says never.

On the floor of the Senate, he said several times how much he regretted differing with the president but spoke out against Cambod­ia and warned that it was going to be Em­barrass. Off the floor, he won agreement from Scott to seek all relevant Senate com­mittee chairmen to give top priority to any­thing dealing with Cambodia and Vietnam.

He also saw to it, says an aide, that the various attempts to limit the presidents war­making powers be brought up one week as a "building-block" operation in a rising de­bate over the constitutional issue between President and Congress.

In his office, Mansfield spoke quietly with a reporter about the country's profound problems at home and abroad, or the deep trauma in the land. He drew slowly on his pipe, pausing deliberately between thoughts.

"We can't give up," he said. "This country is too young to die. We'll have to work our way through our problems and find a greater matur­ity. We've been lucky for too many decades. Now our luck is running out and we have to do some thinking."

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

Mr. PROXMIRE. I yield.

Mr. CHURCH, Mr. President, I associ­ated myself with the aide of the distinguished Senator from Wisconsin. I thank the Senator for having this excep­tional article printed in the Record. I read it with the same sense of appreci­ation that the Senator has mentioned in the course of his remarks.

We have a majority leader who is a com­pletely unassuming and utterly uncom­promising man. And in this age of image making, particularly in the field of politics, that is a rare quality that commends our majority leader most highly, and re­flects great credit upon the Senate and upon the whole political profession.