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Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS OF SENATORS

PROFILE OF MIKE MANSFIELD, SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

Mr. METCALF. Mr. President, the current issue of Washingtonian magazine includes a profile of our majority leader, the distinguished senior Senator from Montana Mr. MANSFIELD.

In "MIKE MANSFIELD: Straight Shooter in the Senate," editor Julius Duscha gives

his impressions of one of the most powerful men in the free world. It is with pleasure that I call it to the attention of the Senate. I ask unanimous consent that excerpts from the article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the excerpts were ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

MIKE MANSFIELD: STRAIGHT SHOOTER IN THE SENATE

(By Julius Duscha)

The sky behind the Capitol dome was turning from pink to blue when I arrived at the Old Senate Office Building shortly before seven to spend the day with Mike Mansfield, the Senate majority leader who has become the most important Democratic officeholder in the United States.

A sleepy policeman hardly noticed me as I entered the building and walked down a deserted first floor corridor to Mansfield's offices. When I tried the door, I found it locked. Light came through the transom; so I knocked, softly, I thought, but the noise echoed in the empty hall. A moment later Mansfield, dressed in a baggy black sportcoat and blue trousers, opened the door and let me in.

He was alone, as he is so much of the time. He invited me into his private office, motioned me to a chair, and without another word sat down and resumed signing the letters piled on his desk.

An early riser since his days as a young copper miner in Montana, Mansfield is generally the first Senator on Capitol Hill every morning. He had been at work half an hour by the time I arrived.

As I looked around the plainly furnished office with its Charles Russell sketches of Montana frontier life, I thought of the stories I had heard about Mansfield's stoicism. Like the time he sat on an airplane next to a staff member of the Foreign Relations Committee he knows well and said nothing for five hours as they flew across the Pacific. He just smoked his pipe and looked out the window.

Mansfield is the quiet man of the Senate. An Irish Catholic, he is reputed to have a dry wit, but none of his aides or friends can remember any Mansfied witticisms. "You see him really laugh maybe once or twice a month," an aide said.

Like so many quiet men—Ed Muskie for one—Mansfield has a temper, and when he loses it he is the talk of the Senate.

When Mansfield speaks out calmly, he is generally just as forthright and honest as he is when he gets mad. And above all he is a gentleman, a quality highly prized in that most exclusive gentleman's club on Capitol Hill.

"The only criticism you really hear of this guy," said one of Mansfield's aides, "is that he isn't enough of a bastard."

Perhaps, but he isn't a saint, either. Since President Nixon has been in the White House, Mansfield has emerged as an adroit politician and a surprisingly effective legislative tactician.

Now in his tenth year as majority leader, Mansfield acts as if he was liberated when Johnson returned to Texas. From 1955 to 1961, Mansfield was assistant Democratic leader when Johnson was majority leader, but Johnson ran the Senate himself and seldom had Mansfield do anything. When Johnson became Vice President in 1961 and Mansfield moved up to the Senate leadership, Johnson's influence in the Senate was still enormous. And when Johnson became President in 1963, Mansfield was relegated to a subordinate role, with Johnson making Democratic policy.

Mansfield also has benefited from a distinct lack of competition from other would-be Democratic leaders.

Mansfield also is cashing in on almost a decade of quiet Senate leadership. "Mansfield has complete respectability," a Senator told me, "and that's why he can get things done in the Senate.

Mansfield—whose political instincts are those of a 1930's liberal—forced a Democratic tax-reform bill through the Senate last year; insisted that an increase in social security benefits be voted in 1969 so that Nixon could not take credit for an increase he was planning to propose in 1970; and pushed through the Senate a resolution declaring that the United States should not take on national commitments like the war in Vietnam without Congressional approval.

This year Mansfield almost singlehandedly attached the eighteen-year-old-vote provision to the voting rights act, and he has led the Democratic attack on Nixon's economic policies.

Mansfield opposed the President's decision to invade Cambodia and was one of the leaders of the long Senate debate over Cambodia which ended in Senate approval of the Cooper-Church amendment limiting Presidential war-making power in Southeast Asia.

Tough and partisan as Mansfield has been on many issues, he has generally supported Nixon on Vietnam. An opponent of American intervention from the beginning, he nevertheless has backed Nixon's carefully phased withdrawal because he feels the President is moving in the right direction and should be given a chance.

However much the liberals in the Senate respect Mansfield, some feel that by failing to criticize the President's slow withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, Mansfield has lost a good deal of the moral authority he had built up on the Vietnam issue. These critics argue that Mansfield may think he is acting like a statesman but that in fact he has quieted his persuasive voice at a time when Nixon would seem to need more prodding than support from those who want to see us bite the bullet and get out of Vietnam.

Sitting in his office that morning, however, Mansfield resembled neither a leader nor a statesman. Although sixty-seven years old and a Capitol Hill veteran with ten years of service in the House of Representatives and seventeen in the Senate, he reminded me more of a freshman Senator diligently attending to his mail. Mansfield is up for reelection this year, but his political base is solid in Montana, where he was an Asian history professor at the state university for a decade before being elected to the House in 1942.

Six feet tall and trim at 173 pounds, Mansfield looks like a man straight out of the old West. His face is open and weathered, his features are clean cut, his eyes are clear, and he speaks with the deliberateness of a western sheriff. His black hair is greying at the temples, but he still looks like he could spend the day riding the range.

By 7:30, two of Mansfield's principal aides, Peggy DiMichele and Ray Dockstader, had arrived. Without so much as a "Good morning" from the Senator, they started bringing in the day's mail from Montana.

Mansfield got up from his desk and turned on a radio to catch the morning news. When he switched off the radio, I asked him why he spent so much time with the day's mail. Mrs. DiMichele had told me, "If there's anything number one in this office, it's the mail." She said Mansfield is probably the only Senator who does not use robotypewriters for form letters that are then signed by automatic signature machines.

"I never intend to forget the people who put me here and keep me here," Mansfield said. "If a man takes the time to write me, I think he deserves a real answer. I see all the mail from the state, and I read and sign every letter that goes out of this office to Montana."

By 8:00 Mansfield finished signing the mail left on his desk the evening before, and it was time for the most famous breakfast in Washington. Each morning at 8:00, Mansfield and George Aiken of Vermont, the senior Republican of the Senate, go through the cafeteria line in the New Senate Office Building and sit down together for breakfast. The breakfasts began in 1953 on Mansfield's first day in the Senate, when Aiken ran into him in the cafeteria and they ate together.

"They're just like two old buddies sitting around a potbellied stove in a country store every morning," a friend of Mansfield's said.

Aiken, a short, white-haired man in his seventies with the granite look of New England, is, like aMnsfield, a man of few words, and they only spend fifteen minutes or so together at breakfast. Aiken is probably the most respected Republican member of the Senate, and he is quite protective of Mansfield among his colleagues. Aiken serves as a valuable antenna for Mansfield, picking up rumblings among Senators and passing them on to Mansfield.

Back in his office by 8:20, Mansfield looked over more Montana mail and then called in a secretary to dictate answers. His letters are chatty—"Dear Folks. . . . Must close now, but again thanking you for your good letter."

His letters are as candid as most of his speeches. When a schoolgirl wrote to ask whether he was concerned about the effects of DDT on plant and animal life, Mansfield replied, "Yes, but I have not been concerned enough."

By 9:30, when most Senators and Representatives are just arriving on Capitol Hill, Mansfield has signed 150 letters; read his mail, a couple of newspapers, and the Congressional Record; dictated some letters; turned other letters over to his staff; conferred with Mrs. DiMichele, his principal secretary, and Dockstader, his administrative assistant.

"Let's go over to the other joint," he said to me as he picked up a bundle of papers from his desk. He quickly walked downstairs, where a Capitol policeman pressed a buzzer three times to call a Senate subway car. As we rode to the Capitol, I asked Mansfield if he ever tired. "Oh, yes," he replied, "I find I don't have the vim and vigor I used to have."

When he arrived at the basement of the Capitol, Mansfield gave a crisp, "Good morning, men," to the college students who serve as elevator operators. One took us to the second floor, where Mansfield walked a few steps to the office right off the Senate chamber which he occupies as majority leader.

The office, presided over by Mrs. Salpee Sahagian, is one of those marvelous Capitol Hill suites redolent of the nineteenth century, with crystal chandeliers and a marble fireplace topped by a huge mirror trimmed in gold.

The three room suite includes a conference room which Capitol Hill reporters call "Mike's Jackie Kennedy room." Mansfield was close to John F. Kennedy and greatly admired both President and Mrs. Kennedy. Kennedy used the conference room as his Capitol office from when he was nominated for President in July 1960 until his inauguration in January 1961, and Mansfield still has three portraits of Kennedy as well as a picture of Mrs. Onassis in prominent places on the walls of the room.

The Senate was meeting early that day, at 10:30 rather than noon, and a few minutes before the session was to begin Mansfield left his office and walked into the Senate chamber where page boys were bustling about, straightening chairs and putting papers on desks.

As Mansfield entered from the rear, he saw a group of reporters clustered around Hugh Scott, the Senate Republican leader. Scott was standing at his desk, at the front of the

chamber and across the center aisle from Mansfield's.

Mansfield went over to a side aisle to walk to the front of the chamber to avoid disturbing Scott. As soon as the reporters saw Mansfield, however, they broke off their questioning of Scott and went over to Mansfield to ask him about the effect of amendments to the education bill scheduled to be debated that day. Mansfield parried most of the questions.

A buzzer sounded, the reporters scurried, Mansfield said a few words to Scott, and the two of them bowed their heads as another Senate session started with a prayer.

"The majority leader has very little power," Mansfield told me later when we talked about his role in the Senate, "and what authority you have is on sufferance from your colleagues. I operate on the basis that I treat my colleagues, regardless of seniority or political differences, the way I would like to be treated. I don't desire power as such. I'd like to get away from it. I like to get by on cooperation, understanding, and mutual trust. I have no desire to be in a position where I can crack a whip. I don't want to tell people what to do.

"Senators are mature," Mansfield continued. "They can arrive at a judgment. I sometimes say to a man: 'If you're in doubt, give your leader the benefit of the doubt.' But I have rarely specifically asked a man to vote a certain way."

Mansfield does have several levers of power, however. In addition to being chairman of the Democratic Policy Committee, he also heads the other two Senate bodies which represent Democratic interests: The Senate Democratic Steering Committee, which assigns Democratic Senators to committees, and the Senate Democratic Conference, which includes all Democratic Senators but which meets infrequently.

Of these institutional bases of power, the Steering Committee is the most important, and there is grumbling among younger Democrats over Mansfield's failure to try to defuse the power still exercised by the southern oligarchs on the committee. Mansfield has enlarged the committee, but it is still dominated by southern and western conservatives.

"The Steering Committee is the key to power in the Senate," a liberal Democratic Senator told me. "The committee has in its hands the modest matter of a Senator's career. It decides whether you're going to be on the Appropriations Committee or the Sioux Uprising Centennial Committee. The southern power structure still has altogether too much power there, and the South is sanctimonious about seniority only as long as it works for them.

As morning turned into afternoon, I could see from the gallery that Mansfield was becoming impatient with the progress being made on the bill under debate. He would leave the floor, go to the Democratic cloakroom for a few minutes, walk down the hall to his office, and then be back in the chamber, talking with Charles Ferris, counsel to the Policy Committee; Frank Valco, the secretary of the Senate; and Stanley Kimmett, who is secretary to the Democratic majority. Ferris, Valco, and Kimmett try to act as eyes and ears for Mansfield, and they also keep track of which Senators want to speak or offer amendments.

While debate continued to drone on, Mansfield moved around the Senate chamber. He spoke with Scott and the two most important southern oligarchs, Richard Russell of Georgia and John Stennis of Mississippi. As usual, Mansfield managed to get a consensus, and he soon was asking, and obtaining, unanimous consent for an agreement limiting debate on each amendment to twenty minutes.

Although the influence of the South has declined in the Senate during the last ten to fifteen years, southern senators still have more seniority than Senators from other parts of the country. Russell is chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Stennis is chairman of Armed Services, and Russell Long of Louisiana is chairman of Finance—the three most powerful Senate committees. Mansfield's relations with the southerners are good, even though his policy of letting a hundred flowers bloom in the Senate has tended to dilute southern senatorial power.

In midafternoon Mansfield went back to his office to sign some more mail, glance at the afternoon newspapers, and have lunch, by himself, at the end of his conference table. He quickly ate his usual lunch of well-done roast beef and sliced tomatoes. A bad day in the Senate? "Oh, so-so," he replied with some resignation, "but what the hell!"

His spirits seemed to revive later when a constituent dropped by for a visit. He turned out to be an old friend, Eugene Etchart of Glasgow, Montana, a cattleman who was in Washington for a meeting of the Public Land Review Commission. Mansfield greeted him warmly and ushered him into his conference room for a cup of coffee.

After asking Etchart about the weather back home, Mansfield started talking about two of his favorite topics—crime in Washington and the lack of it in Montana. Two Montanans have been killed in Washington street crimes during the last two years, and their deaths have led Mansfield to make several Senate speeches about the need for more policemen and other efforts to control crime.

"We don't know how lucky we are, Gene," Mansfield said, "Montana is an oasis in this world today. Watch your coffee, Gene, don't let it get cold."

Just then buzzers sounded in Mansfield's office, indicating another vote in the Senate, and after instructing one of his secretaries to take Etchart up to the Family Gallery to watch the vote, Mansfield was on his way back to the Senate chamber.

As Mansfield hurried off, it occurred to me that he had not been on the telephone all day, and that not once had I seen him surrounded by aides as he walked down Senate corridors. His staff is in fact unusually small, and he does not even have a press secretary.

Talking with Mansfield later in the afternoon in the conference room of his Capitol office, I asked him about his relations with President Nixon. Mansfield sat back in a leather chair and said: "He calls me very often, on legislative matters and situations, on Asia. Sometimes he asks for my views, sometimes I just give him the benefit of my views. I've had twelve or thirteen breakfasts alone with him. He seemed particularly interested in the follow-up trip to Asia and Rumania that I undertook for him last year and seemed to be appreciative of the private report I gave him on the trip. We're not intimate friends, but we have a decent and tolerant understanding of each other.

"My feelings about Vietnam," Mansfield explained to me, "came largely from the French defeat there. I always thought that if the French could not win there, what should make us think we could? I always thought the analogy with Korea was false, too. But very few people agreed with me. I warned President Johnson against going into Vietnam; Dick Russell warned him, too. But I can see the President's point of view. He had a lot of experts around him who thought we should go in."

His early warnings against American involvement in Vietnam have made Mansfield popular among students. He receives many invitations to speak on college and university campuses.

"I think the young people are great," Mansfield told me. "They're more intelligent and their eyes are open. We should not find fault with them. If they have faults, they are probably attributable to their parents. What we should do is encourage them to put their energies into useful channels. Both political parties, for example, need them. They'll learn through experience, and basically their intent is sound."

I had been talking with Mansfield for more than an hour, and he was becoming restless and obviously wanted to get back to the Senate chamber. When I thanked him and he started to excuse himself, he said, "That was a long one." Mansfield has a well-deserved reputation for giving unusually succinct answers for a politician. Whenever he is on a Sunday television interview program, his questioners are ready with twice as many topics as usual. He has answered sixty questions in a thirty-minute television program.

Mansfield's directness and the careful way he husbands his time are both strengths and weaknesses. Those who work closely with him say that often he trends to take a position on an issue before he thinks it through, but when he realizes he has made up his mind too quickly he sometimes will reverse himself. As for the husbanding of his time, this leads occasionally to his aides telling him what they think he wants to hear rather than presenting both sides of a question.

But by being direct and not wasting time, Mansfield manages to keep on top of one of the most difficult jobs in politics. And one has the feeling that he is still trying to make up for the time he lost as a youth and young man.

Born in Greenwich Village of Irish Catholic parents, Mansfield grew up in Great Falls, Montana. At fourteen, before he finished the eighth grade, Mansfield left home and joined the Navy. He was discharged when World War I ended in 1918, but he then enlisted in the Army for a year and, to make his tour of the services of that pre-Air Force time complete, finally enlisted in the Marines for two years. While in the Marines he served in China, and this was the beginning of his lifetime interest in Asia.

Returning to Montana in 1922, Mansfield settled in Butte, got a job in the copper mines, and married a school teacher. His wife encouraged him to take high-school equivalency tests which would make it possible for him to go to college. Mansfield attended the Montana School of Mines in Butte in the late 1920's while he was still working in the mines and then went on to the University of Montana in Missoula, where he got both a bachelor's and a master's degree. Upon graduation he took a job teaching Far Eastern and Latin American history at the university. Spurred on by his wife again, Mansfield became interested in politics. "There's a little bit of political blood in all the Irish," he says.

And even though it was now late in the afternoon, Mansfield hurried off to the Senate chamber to see whether his goal for the day—the passage of an education bill—would be met. And it was.

By the time the Senate had finished its final vote, it was getting on toward 6:30, and Mansfield had been on Capitol Hill for almost twelve hours. But it was not yet time to go home. Making one final check with Mrs. Sahagian in his Capitol office, Mansfield hurried off to catch an elevator and take the quick Senate subway ride back to his other office in the Old Senate Office Building to see what news the rest of the day's mail and telephone calls had brought from Montana before going home for a quiet dinner with his wife in his modest home off Foxhall Road.