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New York City March of Dimes Dinner

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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November 15, 1970

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

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This is one occasion on which there will be no reference to the way Jack Valenti sleeps at night. The fact is that I am not much of a sleeper myself. So whenever I hear of a remedy, I don't knock it. I ask for the prescription.

The best that has come to my attention of late is the recent election. It worked as a soporific for both parties. On election eve, Democrats cried themselves to sleep over the poverty of the party. Republicans fell asleep counting Senate seats like the rest of us count sheep. Both somehow managed to wake up refreshed the following morning. For myself, I must say that, ever since the election, I have, indeed, slept better, knowing that there is still a Democratic Majority in the Senate.

But I am not here to discuss the election. I am here, rather, to participate with you in this most worthwhile occasion on behalf of the "March of Dimes." In particular, I am here out of a deep regard for a dear friend and a highly esteemed American, the honorable Chairman of the Dinner, Jack Valenti.

Jack Valenti is a bridge builder, a forger of links among people. His has been a distinguished service ever since he was persuaded to come to Washington several years ago. In advising the then President of the United States, he established excellent communications between the White House and the Congress. Jack Valenti has continued to perform that kind of function for the Motion Picture Association. As its spokesman, he has brought about a high degree of mutual understanding between the motion-picture industry, the government and the public.

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In this connection, I would note, especially, a significant development by the Motion Picture Association under his Presidency. You may be familiar with that simplified alphabet of X, R, GP, and G. That is not a listing of new blood-types or some kind of eye chart. It is, rather, the voluntary Motion Picture Code and Rating Program or, to put it another way, a modern guide to epidermal motion pictures. The code is intended for parental guidance. However, parents, as I understand it, frequently have to ask their children the meaning of the letters. An easier way to avoid confusion and an inadvertent exposure of children to the wrong picture, I suppose, would be to forget the ratings and take what might be termed the absolute approach: Forbid your children to go to any movie. I do not know whether that alternative has yet been proposed by any politician but, then, the 1972 election campaign is just getting underway.

Barring such a drastic solution, however, it seems to me that the code-rating is a significant development. The Motion Picture Association has done more than wring its hands at this most difficult problem. It has made a beginning in trying to find a point of voluntary reconciliation between freedom and public mores. It has done so, moreover, with the restraint and good sense which is characteristic of Jack Valenti.

So I am delighted and honored to be with you in the company of the distinguished President of the Motion Picture Association and our honored guest. I hope that this gathering will give great impetus to the March-of-Dimes, the worthy purpose which brings us together tonight.