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Mansfield at the Democratic Dinner

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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I welcome this opportunity to honor an outstanding American. By way of introduction I should first relate, however, the basis for my appearance here in Des Moines this evening.

Recently, a note appeared on my desk to the following effect: "H. Hughes to be honored; you are invited to speak." As an ex-miner from Montana, I had always wanted to meet the world's richest man. So I accepted, not fully realizing that I would be shaking hands, not with a billionaire, but with an ex-truckdriver from Iowa.

In reality, it was perhaps this common identification with such a background that converted me long ago into a devoted friend, loyal fan and willing follower of Harold Everett Hughes of Iowa. It is about him, I think, that the philosopher wrote: "Purity of the heart is to will one thing." That quotation refers to the special qualities by which certain people in this world are
set apart—qualities that infect the lives of those whose actions here on earth actually do make a difference.

Such are the qualities of Harold Hughes. He is a big man and that physical size is reflected in a voice, a heart and a character to match. Drive, dedication, compassion, hard work—to the United States Senate more than four years ago these were some of the qualities he brought. Tonight we begin the process that will assure his return to the Senate less than two years from now.

Returning with him will be the towering humanity and capacity to establish instant rapport with Americans of every endeavor that have marked all of his years of public service.

The wheat rancher in Montana, the corn grower here in Iowa, the iron worker in Pennsylvania, the miner of West Virginia, suburbanite and urban-dweller alike; even the inner-city drug addict, all are the constituents of Harold Hughes. He knows it and they do, too. The record speaks for itself.

Before Harold Hughes entered the Senate in 1969, there did not exist a Senate Committee on Drug Abuse. Identifying drugs and alcohol addiction as among the most severe problems that plague this nation, Harold Hughes was quick to recognize the deficiency and to see to it that such a Committee was established. It was under the Chairmanship of Senator Hughes that there soon followed the first steps ever taken at the federal level to combat drug abuse effectively and to treat alcoholics responsibly.
But it was with regard to the war in Vietnam, perhaps, that Harold Hughes exhibited his keenest perception and deepest understanding of America, of her problems and needs and of her position in the world today.

Senator Hughes recognized early the futile tragedy of that war and appraised quickly its cost, not only in terms of men and money, but in the way it diverted the nation's attention away from the countless priorities here at home, matters that were compelled to stand aside while this nation pursued this tragic involvement abroad.

Drug abuse and Vietnam—in the past decade, no more compelling issues existed. In human waste alone their toll has been immeasurable. Harold Hughes knew that and did something about it.

We honor tonight a man, however, whose interests and contributions extend well beyond the issues of drugs and warfare, however critical has been their effect. We honor a man who knows about unemployment because he has been without a job and with a family to support.

We honor a man who knows about labor. He has worked construction jobs; he drove cream trucks, livestock trucks and wheeled those big semis across the nation. He knows, too, about health care, the aged and infirm, and he knows poverty.

In short, we honor tonight a man who has been in the midst of it all, who has recognized that need and suffering do exist and who refuses to accept such matters as they are.
National—even global—is his perspective and concern. Yet it is to return here to Iowa, to the heartland of America, that I know Harold Hughes yearns most. It was here after all that he launched a career devoted exclusively to helping people. As Commerce Commissioner and later Governor of this great State, he commanded attention and first exhibited his interest in problems of national and international scope. Iowa sent him to the United States Senate to address those problems and he responded magnificently. This year, I might say, in Dick Clark, Iowa sent to the Senate another man of extraordinary talents and dedication, an ideal partner for Harold Hughes; together, they give you the best possible state representation in the U. S. Senate.

It says a great deal for this State and it is no wonder that it is back here in Iowa, among the people of his great State, that the heart of Harold Hughes has remained.

In fighting for a sound and fair farm policy he is fighting the battles of his own people. For a tax code that provides more equity for the middle income taxpayer and an employment program that puts Americans on the work rolls and takes them off the welfare rolls—these are the issues to which Harold Hughes has responded. An implacable foe of wasteful defense spending, he works relentlessly in the Committee on Armed Services to pare the fat and preserve the muscle in America’s military capacity. It was there in Armed Services, too, that he exposed the breakdown in our military command system and got the Air Force
to adopt strict procedures that will henceforth preclude massive bombing and destruction anywhere by this nation unless specifically ordered by the Commander-in-Chief.

In the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, he applies the same effective advocacy in behalf of proposals to alleviate poverty, to meet health needs and to wipe away discrimination.

Not long ago when confronted with the question of building schools in foreign lands with U. S. dollars, it was Senator Hughes who asked the Democratic Policy Committee why it was that foreign school construction should prevail over schools needed right here in Des Moines, or over in Davenport or in Sioux City, or in Ida Grove.

And it was also Harold Hughes who through his reform Committee fought to establish Democratic procedures for the Democratic party.

To be sure recognition for his achievements has been duly and amply bestowed upon Harold Everett Hughes. Just as clear, however, is the fact that such accolades were not sought, nor would they be.

For the man whom we honor tonight is at ease more in the quiet of a forest than at the helm of a Senate Committee. He is more comfortable sitting with his family by a bubbling stream than receiving high honor for his political success.

In short, he is a man at peace with himself. It is a secure peace founded upon an indestructible spiritual construction.
As we are compelled more and more to experience life through computers, form letters, mass media and other manifestations of this technologically "advanced" society, Harold Hughes stands out today as one unwilling to pay lip service to superficial slogans or to remain within the comfortable confines of complacency. Such a brand of leadership must be preserved. It is essential if we are to answer at all the plea of the young demonstrator whose placard proclaims: "I am a human being--do not fold, bend, spindle or mutilate."

That is Harold Hughes; the man who cares and the man who contributes so much in public life but who, in terms of humility, life style and human understanding, remains very much the man who hails from Ida Grove, Iowa, and is proud to say it.