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Congressional Record

January 24, 1974 pp. 408-9

REMARKS OF SENATOR MANSFIELD AT THE SENATE DEMOCRATIC CONFERENCE

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD certain remarks I made at the meeting of the Democratic Conference today.

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

REMARKS OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD

First, I want to welcome the Senator from Ohio, Mr. Metzenbaum, to the Democratic Conference and to state, in his behalf, how happy he was that he had the unanimous support of the Democrats on Monday last.

Second, I would like to report that the Democratic Policy Committee met yesterday with Dr. Walter Heller, one of the great economists of the nation, and we were very much impressed with what he had to say and his thesis that, if conditions continued as they are, we would face the possibility of a recession. It was interesting to note that speaking economically, the United States had an 8.8 percent rate of inflation last year, while wages increased by only 7.3 percent. Another interesting factor Dr. Heller brought to our attention was that there has now been a 38 percent decline in auto production.

Twelve months ago the Majority Conference met at the opening of the 93d Congress. The Conference convened in the aftermath of a sweeping victory for a Republican President in the 1972 elections. From the same elections, there also came an increase in the Democratic Majority in the Senate. Some chose to note the first event and to ignore the second.

While recognizing the President's electoral mandate, this Conference concluded that there was also a mandate to the Congress. It was a mandate to exercise fully our separate constitutional role in the government of the United States. As we saw it, the people had continued the President in office but, at the same time, the people had rejected government by one party or one branch.

On that premise, we moved to reinforce the nation's system of checks and balances which had been eroded by an accumulation of power, administration after administration, in the Executive Branch. As it confronted us last year, the problem was to contain this long-time trend toward Executive unilateralism in regard to the policies, programs and priorities of the Federal government. In my judgment, that trend was checked in the year 1973. It was checked by a concerted effort of the Senate and the House.

To the excessive curtailment of public information, to the arbitrary impoundment of

appropriated funds, and to the pre-emption of authority over spending priorities and budget appraisals, legislative objectives and institutional changes—to these evidences of Executive unilateralism, this Conference and its Policy Committee and the Senate as a whole reacted with a high degree of unity. Before the 1st Session of the 93d Congress was out, the Senate Majority had adopted 18 resolutions as Leadership positions on various constitutional and public issues. Before the session was out, the impact of virtually all of these resolutions was felt in policy and legislation.

Of the highest priority last January was the extrication of this nation forthwith from Vietnam. The urgency was to translate years of pious words into effective action to restore the nation's peace. That was done in 1973 and, in so doing, the Senate provided a major contribution to national policy and the nation's welfare. In the end, the withdrawal of our military forces was achieved and the gate to reinvolvement was closed by legislation.

That the bitter and tragic lesson of Vietnam might not be lost, moreover, the Senate moved to curb future arbitrary use of U.S. Forces abroad by the Executive Branch. The Congress acted to condition any military intrusions into other nations—and, hopefully, we have seen the last of them—on the express consent of Congress as prescribed in the War Powers Act.

On this point, if I may digress for a moment, it is to express the gravest concern over what can only be described as certain off-hand, widely publicized comments which were made recently by the Secretary of Defense. These comments suggested the possibility of U.S. military incursions into the Middle East to bring out the oil and a reinvolvement of our forces in the still unsettled conflict of Vietnam.

It seems to me that appointed officers of this government, especially those with responsibilities for the management of the nation's enormous military power, ought to mark their public words carefully—most carefully—with regard to highly volatile international situations. What this nation may or may not find it necessary to do abroad is a question best left for the consideration of the President with his Secretary of State and with the elected representatives of the people in the Congress. The Secretary of Defense would do well to concentrate his concern on holding down the costs of his Department which place an enormous tax burden on the people of the nation and on keeping the armed forces in a state of sufficient readiness to respond to the lawful directions of the President and the Congress. Off-hand comments on questions of foreign policy are not in the compass of that responsibility and I would suggest, most respectfully, therefore, that the Senate's Armed Services Committee which has oversight of the Defense Department should examine into any tendencies to stray beyond that compass.

In reviewing the work of the first session, I would note, not only the role of the Senate in curbing our military involvement in Indochina and the war powers resolution but also major farm legislation, a Social Security benefits increase, the Alaska pipeline, mandatory fuel allocation, flood disaster protection, vocational rehabilitation, Federal aid to highways, mass transit, reorganization of the railroads, veterans' health care and benefits increase, campaign financing and private pension reform. Some of these measures were suggested by the President. Others had their origins in Congress and were co-opted readily by the President. Still others were advanced by the Congress notwithstanding the reluctances of the Executive Branch. In any event, the entire session in my judgment was an expression of a vigorous, cooperative and creative independence on the part of the Senate and the House. Every member of the Senate—Republican and Democrat alike—has reason to be gratified personally for having been a part of it.

This session begins, then, on that base. It is my hope and expectation that the Congress will maintain the tempo of the past year and move deliberately and steadily through such major issues as national health insurance, housing aid, private pension reform, no-fault insurance, Congressional budget control, adjustments in the tax structure and any other matters of importance and urgency which may arise.

Looking ahead, I would also note that the Senate and the House, ten months from now, will face the people in an election. We should not dread that prospect. We should look forward to it. We should look forward to it not only on the basis of the record but as an affirmation of the democratic process. I say that, notwithstanding the widespread public cynicism, pessimism and doubt which the Watergate syndrome has sown with regard to all government. Before the coming election, it seems to me that there is time to rebuild the Federal electoral structure in a manner which will again engage the public trust.

The people have a right to an electoral system capable of yielding honest, responsible and responsive government, open to all and shaped to meet the needs of all. In my judgment, existing political campaign laws grope toward that goal but are some distance from it. Indeed, in some ways, they act to discourage general and modest participation in the process. Revisions are necessary and should be forthcoming in this session.

It is not the transitory political lives of each of us that are at stake. It is the political life of the nation that is at stake. To excuse Watergate and what it implies from our political life before it becomes fatal to freedom is a fundamental responsibility of the elected officials of this government.

Even as the people did not ask for government by a single party or a single branch in the last election, neither did they ask for government by the will or whim of the richest or the most powerful and influential. That is the nub of the problem. To foreclose an excessive intrusion of great wealth, whether of corporations, unions, individuals or whatever into the electoral process, is a solemn obligation, an urgent obligation.

Thirteen years ago, almost to the day, I made this statement on the floor of the Senate:

"I do not think that it serves the interests of the entire nation when elections can be influenced significantly or even decided by the question of which candidate can raise the most money. I do not think it serves the national interest when the expenses for those who campaign to serve all the people must be financed by a relative handful of people and organizations which make large contributions directly or indirectly. I do not think it adds to the dignity and vitality of the nation's political life when a major source of political finance is the patently unsatisfactory practice of selling two-dollar steaks at one-hundred-dollar-a-plate dinners."

The price of the steak has gone up to five dollars and the dinners to five hundred or more. Except for this factor of inflation, however, I see no reason to alter the observations.

In my judgment, we shall not come finally to grips with the problem except as we are prepared to pay for the public business of elections largely with public funds. I would hope, therefore, that this is the Congress in which proposals along these lines advocated over the years by Senators Long, Scott, Kennedy, Mondale, Cranston, Mathias and others, finally see the light of day. If it was in 1972 that Watergate arose, and in 1973 that it was revealed and investigated, may it be said it was in 1974 that it was finally resolved in a new system of open elections openly paid for.

What Watergate did to public confidence with regard to the nation's electoral process, the energy crisis has done in the realm of the nation's economy. Grave uncertainties have arisen, as the ramifications of the petroleum shortage have suddenly been seen to extend beyond the gas tank into every other aspect of our society.

It is no wonder that the supply and price of fuel has dominated national discussion during the past ten weeks. Even at this late date there are more questions than answers. All that we have really learned is that we were not equipped to understand the problem, let alone to deal with it. To be sure, shortages had been forecast for years. Yet, somehow the message was apparently never received or merely ignored in the responsible Executive agencies.

The consumption of ever-increasing amounts of energy and, in particular, of petroleum-derived energy was stimulated as basic to our culture. Now, we have shifted gears and the watchword is curtailment of consumption. May I say that the people of the nation, as usual, in their wisdom have recognized the need and have displayed a remarkable degree of self-discipline in meeting the problem. That has been the single most important element in preventing a national catastrophe.

The agreement between Egypt and Israel is also of significance in this connection. The President and Secretary of State, Mr. Kissinger, are to be commended for the part which they have played in that situation. Indeed, they have understood and acted with great astuteness on the interplay of the Middle East conflict and other aspects of the

international situation and the energy question. While I am on this subject, I would like to commend the peripatetic Secretary of State, Mr. Kissinger, not merely for his achievements in regard to the Middle East but elsewhere in the world, notably in the improvement of relationships with China and the Soviet Union.

Mr. Kissinger has the confidence of the Senate, as indicated by the overwhelming vote for his confirmation last year. It would be my hope that the rapport between the Secretary and the Senate will grow closer in the months ahead. Under the strains of the energy shortage which affects other nations far more drastically than our own, and the stress of other economic difficulties, there is the danger of the crumbling of international cooperation, notably as it involves our relations with Western Europe and Japan. That, indeed, would be the final straw. The consequences of a devil-take-the-hindmost division would be disastrous to all concerned. It must be avoided at all costs. In this connection, I am delighted that the President expects to meet next month with the representatives of several European nations and Japan.

To return to the matter of the energy crisis at home, it is clear that plentiful cheap energy is not again on the horizons of life in the United States. We cannot undo what has been done, nor do what has not been done. The principal responsibilities of government, now, are to see to it that the impact of this crisis does not devastate the economy and that the price of past neglect and indifference is borne equitably by all Americans. To that end, it is no longer acceptable that the facts on the production and distribution of energy be cloistered in the executive offices of private corporations, which, wherever they may operate, are chartered in this country and receive the benefits and protection extended by the government of the United States. It is essential that the facts—all the facts—be uncovered and laid before the nation. We must be fair in the process.

I would expect, therefore, that the inquiries which have already begun in committees of the Senate will proceed rapidly but deliberately. We do not need scapegoats. We need a foundation of fact on which to build an effective national policy on energy and a whole range of related questions. We have got to know far more than we know now if we are to meet the threat to the nation's well-being which is inherent in the petroleum situation—the threat of widespread business shutdowns, transportation paralysis, vast unemployment, runaway inflation, culminating, to say the least, in a severe recession. If there are those who still doubt the seriousness of the threat, I would suggest an examination of the appalling situation now confronting the United Kingdom.

The energy crisis has shocked this nation. In so doing, it has also illuminated suddenly the precarious manner in which our national economic life has come to be organized. Shortages of petroleum have admonished us to note that there are other essential resources which are also not available in limitless supply inside our national borders. As Senator Muskie has pointed out, in our sudden concern over the exhaustibility of petroleum, we ought not to forget that pure air and water are also exhaustible resources. What of aluminum, nickel, tin, iron and copper, and many other materials? Where will the supplies of these and other essentials come from in the years ahead? What of food?

To say that we have been extravagant, even profligate, is to put it mildly. We spend nearly \$3 billion a year on air-conditioning and less than \$150 million on air pollution control. We throw away 60 billion beverage containers a year, yet spend only \$5 million to research recycling techniques. Pollution is building dead seas off the coast of New York and New Jersey and elsewhere. Yet, during the recent recess the President chose to impound \$3 billion that had been appropriated for the treatment of waste.

It would be my hope, therefore, that we will go beyond the energy crisis in the coming session of Congress. The need is to take a careful look not only at the immediate flashing of this or that danger signal but at the whole integrated switchboard of our national existence. It may be that it is time to consider setting up some organization for coordinating our thinking as to what is more important and what is less important to the nation and its future, for delineating the durable needs of a decent national survival. Perhaps, some new and continuing machinery which brings together the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch for this purpose and couples both with a cross-section of industry and labor and other areas of our life will enable us to see the forest and not merely the trees. Perhaps, the juxtaposition of ideas and interests from these sources might help us to learn to curb the ingrained tendencies of government to spend vast sums out of force of habit or force exotic and wasteful endeavors—whether military or civilian. Perhaps, then, the budget can be better framed to meet the over-all requirements of the nation for today and tomorrow.

I do not anticipate we shall make a great dent in this question. Nevertheless, I would hope that, notwithstanding our preoccupation with the energy crisis and its impact on the economy, the appropriate committees would find some time to look beyond it. The responsibilities of elected incumbents—whether the President or Members of Congress—are not confined to the immediate. We owe the nation not only a decent present but the preservation of a viable hope for a decent future. I expect that in the session, the Senate will do its part fully in meeting responsibility.