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Commencement Address - Morris Harvey College in Charleston, West Virginia

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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

AT

MORRIS HARVEY COLLEGE
CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA

SUNDAY, MAY 11, 1975

2:30 P. M.

It is a good place to be, today, here in this city and at this College and to participate in this commencement.

There are young people here and old. Whatever the differences in our years, we are brought face-to-face by these graduates. While chronological gaps between the generations are inevitable, credibility gaps are not pre-ordained. I shall try my best to avoid one in what I have to say to the class of 1975.

My remarks will be directed to what we have in common. Whatever we may not have, we have the United States in common and at a most difficult moment in history. Clearly, we are not passing through the best of times.

I do not, however, condemn an older generation for the present state of affairs. Nor do I blame the nation's plight on the young. Young people did not make the situation in which, together, we find ourselves; they have not yet had that opportunity. As for older generations, it is to be noted only that they have had time to add to the mistakes which they inherited when they were younger.

It is not without some reticence that I choose to address you on the subject of Congressional leadership. As someone has recently pointed out, the trouble with being a political leader these days is that you cannot be sure whether people are following you or chasing you. Whether it is called a "message" or a "signal," some sort of shock has definitely been sent by the people to Washington. At a minimum, it causes a painful ringing in the ears. It can, in more serious cases, portend sudden political death. It is even rumored to be the only known cure for Potomac fever.

However, that may be, it is obvious that the public impression of the Federal government, at this time, is not a happy one. The Presidency and the Congress have had their ups and downs, as we all know. What our respective standings are now is open to question, but I fear they are low indeed.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether such feeling is warranted, the fact remains that what is being expressed is, in part, a deep sense of public dissatisfaction and concern with the Federal government. Our people are caught between the jaws of inflation and recession. The effects of this painful pressure were intensified by the Indo-China war, the oil crisis and a growing awareness of an inequitable tax structure. To cap the situation are the shocking blows against the nation's political institutions which have been delivered by the tragedies of Watergate and related matters.

Whatever the sense of frustration, I hasten to add that I do not think that the nation is at the end of the road. To the bumper sticker which commands, "America: Love it or

leave it," the response is simple: whatever the current irritants, who is leaving and who doesn't love it?

You understand the reasons for that sentiment. Your college at its best is a symbol of this country. It is energy and growth. It is fresh ideas, competition, progress, service, a faith in the future of the people of the nation. Qualities such as these go with the United States. They have enabled us to withstand the gravest adversity in the past. They provide the binders which hold the nation together, even at a time of government disarray.

Out of these qualities will come the source of tomorrow's renewal of the nation's spirit. It is in this context--in the context of renewal--that I would like to discuss the Congress of the United States, its role and the leadership it is trying to contribute to the nation in this time of trial.

Notwithstanding my role in the Senate, I can assure you that there exists a close working relationship with the leadership of the other party. To be sure, Senator Hugh Scott

of Pennsylvania, the Minority Leader, and I have our differences. Most of all, however, we share common problems. A Senate in continual partisan conflict is an ineffectual Senate. The Senates of the past few years have had their faults but, measured by any responsible yardstick, they have been effective. They have been active, innovative, careful, cooperative, and they have been made up of Americans with a sense of decency, integrity and fair play.

In Congress' relation with the Executive Branch, a sense of balance is being restored and, in my judgment, the erosion of the system of checks and balances--going back through many Administrations--has been halted. It has not been easy. A President can make decisions as one person and, in a moment, if he chooses to do so. In Congress, a majority of the 100 Senators and of the 435 House Members not only have to agree on a goal, but on what course to take to reach it. Then, if a Presidential veto stands in the way of that course, we have to begin again

and reshape a new one which will gain the adherence of two-thirds of the Members.

If the country is not in the best of shape today, we might well ponder what the situation might have been if there had not been an independent Congress of dedicated Members-- Republicans and Democrats. The fact is that there has been a more constructive Congressional input into National Leadership in the past two years than at any other time in many years. While it may be too early for this change to be felt or even to be widely perceived, it is, nevertheless, a change of great significance.

I would like to state in my remarks today that even as we give our attention increasingly to domestic problems, we cannot turn away from the international underpinning of these problems. The interrelationship of foreign and domestic developments, of course, has long been recognized. I would go further, however, and suggest that our involvement in what goes

on outside the United States is greater than is commonly realized. What has happened abroad and how we have responded, in my judgment, has done much to delineate the situation which now confronts us at home.

I do not propose to try to answer the question of whether this is as it should be. What I should like to do in these brief remarks is to examine some recent examples of ways in which certain foreign policies have affected our life here in the United States.

There is, first of all, to repeat, the tremendous impact of two decades of U. S. activity in Southeast Asia which culminated in one of the most tragic wars in modern history. The circumstances and the attitudes which led us into the deep involvement in that remote part of the world have already receded into the past--or have they? What ought to remain fresh in our minds, lest we forget, is the price we have paid and will continue to pay for that involvement.

In much the same fashion, a general line of foreign policy which has consisted of providing military equipment and supplies to just about any nation willing to take it has also distorted the domestic situation of the nation. In fiscal year 1974, even after Congressionally imposed retrenchment had been legislated, we still manage to sell, give, or otherwise make available equipment and supplies to seventy-eight countries.

That this great outflow of devastation has had a profound effect on some recipient nations is obvious, even a few artillery pieces can sometimes make a difference in the precipitation of coups and in the outcome of power struggles in new or unstable nations. What is not nearly so obvious, however, is that an export of such an amount of military equipment is also not without deep effect on this nation's inner affairs. In the first place, a massive outpouring of military equipment, year in and year out, feeds domestic inflation. It draws down stockpiles of strategic materials. It depletes supplies of finite raw materials. It diverts large amounts

of inventive genius and engineering skill to the production of military equipment which lives a short and not very useful life and then goes into obsolescence. It directs a flow of Federal resources from areas of urgent domestic need into a vast and largely useless overseas drain.

As I contemplate that while we are turning out ever more refined military equipment, other nations are doing better at producing electronic equipment, pollution-free automobiles, and are buying U. S. resources for manufacture and re-sale to the United States.

Another aspect of our foreign relations, which, inter-related with our domestic situation is the maintaining of large U. S. military garrisons in bases abroad. This practice has been going on ever since World War II. Its effect is not unlike the give-away of billions of dollars of military equipment and supplies. Even now, we have over 300 major bases overseas and more than a thousand minor ones.

The financial drain of these deployments is readily apparent. What is only beginning to become clear, however, is that we can no longer afford to use Federal funds and exchange resources for extravagances of this kind. There has been a severe shrinkage in the large margin for error which this nation possessed a quarter of a century ago. Years of attrition have weakened the value of the dollar abroad. Years of deficits are doing the same thing at home.

Overseas deployments and military exports constitute only a part of the sum of the current military enterprises of Federal government. Total expenditures for the Defense Department have become so astronomical that they are now a key element in the general economic condition of the nation. This fiscal year's military budget request of \$85.8 billion is the largest in our history, surpassing even the \$81.6 billion we spent in 1945, the last year of World War II. At the height of the Indochinese war, the military budget was \$20 billion less than the amount

requested for this fiscal year. The amount for fiscal '76 will be even higher than this year's, almost \$94 billion.

An area of foreign policy which will have a continuing impact on our domestic situation is the nature of our relations with nations controlling significant sources of energy and industrial raw materials. We have come to a shocking realization of the precariousness of our situation in this connection. I do not profess to know whether any U. S. policy towards the states of the Middle East might have avoided the Arab cut-off of oil exports. I do know that we have done little until recently to pursue a policy which might lead to an acceptable stability in that region.

Without reflecting on the men and women who have struggled with the problems of the region for many years, the fact is that the Middle East has scarcely been a pre-occupation of our principal policy makers except when the blood of war begins to flow.

We must also face the fact that a decent future for the people of the United States cannot be found by shutting a non-existent door. We need the rest of the world even as it needs us. In short, the challenge is to look outward with new perceptions, even as we turn inward to build anew at home.

While there is reason for pessimism, there is also reason for optimism in regard to a renewal in foreign affairs. It will be of little avail, however, unless there is also a restoration of confidence in government and in the nation's political institutions at home. It is not just a question of Watergate or forgetting it or pretending that it never happened. It is the whole cloth of government which has become tattered with doubt, distrust, and dissatisfaction. It would, indeed, be convenient were it possible to exorcise in a moment all the inertia, neglects, and abuses that have gone into creating this climate. That cannot be. What can be done is to use the chief instruments of government--the Courts, the Congress, and the Executive Branch--to dissolve these abuses before they ever again

become fatal to liberty. That is a fundamental responsibility of public leadership--in Congress, no less than in the Presidency.

Before all else, the people have a right to an electoral system free of doubts and capable of yielding honest, responsible and responsive government open to all and shaped to meet the needs of all. It is incumbent on us to foreclose an excessive intrusion of great wealth, whether corporate, labor, personal or whatever, into the electoral process. That is a solemn and urgent obligation and, in my judgment, it will not be met except as we are prepared, in the end, to pay for the public business of elections largely with public funds. We are moving in that direction.

It is up to the Congress, too, to do something about other government abuses.---Quite apart from Watergate, for example, there have been invasions into the most intimate workings of our lives, into the privacy of all Americans, by ill-coordinated, bureaucratic activity. There have been misinterpretations and maladministrations of laws, sometimes to the extent that they

bear little or no resemblance to what Congress intended in the enactment. Representative government have yet to deal effectively with the problem of how to keep bureaucracies responsive to the public need, especially when they grow large, inert, cumbersome, and as in our times, more and more, automated and impersonal. In my judgment, Congress spends enough time writing laws--in some instances, too much. It may be that it is time, now, for Congress to devote itself more to looking to the manner of execution of these laws.

What all these factors and, often, a distant bureaucracy have done to public confidence with regard to the Federal government, the energy crisis has done in the realm of the nation's economy.

The immediate responsibility is to make certain that oil shortages do not devastate the economy again and that the price of past neglect is borne equitably by all Americans. We should fit our needs to our resources and we can if we will.

Beyond the immediate, what we must have is a foundation of facts on which to build a national policy on energy. We have to know far more than we know now if we are to meet what otherwise promises to be a recurrent threat to the nation's well-being. It is a threat of widespread business shutdowns, of transportation paralysis and of a permanent inflation which can only culminate in recession, unemployment and appalling human hardship. That, the people of this nation will not tolerate. That, the Congress of the United States no less than the Executive Branch must do all in its power to prevent. The need will not change even if the OPEC nations turn the valves wide-open. I hope that the ball of blame, therefore, will not be passed between the two branches for failure to meet the problem; I hope that we will be able to work together to resolve it. I am sure that with President Ford that will be the case.

The energy crisis has shocked the nation. In so doing, it has also shown us in a sudden flash the precarious manner in which our entire national economic life has come to

be organized. It is all well and good to be concerned at this time with the shortage of petroleum. But what of bauxite, nickel, tin, iron and copper and many other materials? What of wood and concrete? Where will the supplies of these and other essentials come from in the years ahead? Indeed, what of food, with the kind of disjointed policies in which exports of wheat in 1972 are stimulated one year only to compel high-priced imports the next?

To say that we have been extravagant with our resources is to put it mildly. In the earliest years of this nation, the first President, George Washington, spoke of raising "a standard to which the wisest and honest can repair." Do we meet such a standard when one day we are obsessed with the threats to our environment and the next, in our concern over the drying up of petroleum supplies, we all but forget that pure air and water are also exhaustible resources? To meet the Washingtonian standard--that is, the President's, not the city's--will take

courage, courage to change, courage to innovate, courage to learn, and courage to renew.

It is my hope that the concern of the President and the Congress will not stop with the energy crisis. The need is to learn from a bad dream before it becomes a nightmare again. The need is to begin, now, to take a careful look at not only the flashing of isolated warning lights but at the whole integrated switchboard of our national economic existence.

It is not enough, for example, for the Federal government to dole out tens of millions of dollars in a rescue operation to keep bankrupt Penn Central Railroad on the tracks. We need to know where an action of this kind fits into a national rail policy; where that policy, in turn, fits into the overall transportation requirements and the availability of fuels and other essentials in meeting them, not only today, but for the next decade or more. In short, we need to think ahead and to think in an integrated fashion. We need to begin to make the hard choices between what is more important to the nation and

what is less; between what is enduring and what is transitory. That is the full scale by which government intervention in the nation's economy, if and when it must take place, should be measured. Unless we begin soon to develop that scale, the right hand of government will tend more and more to undo what the left hand has done.

Let me close by saying that there is a great deal that is right in this nation. We are a generous country with a strong, decent, industrious, and compassionate people. There is ample intelligence and inventiveness and an immense experience and vitality in our midst. If, working together, today, we will put these attributes to use for the benefit of all, there need be no fear for the nation's tomorrow.

To move beyond Viet Nam into a future of peace will devolve heavily on you. To open a new era of constructive cooperation with the rest of the human race, to act with compassion and with high purpose, that is your opportunity. It is your life which lies ahead. It is your nation. It is your world. May you make the most of them all.