1967

Speeches, In a Montana Mood

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mansfield_speeches

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mansfield_speeches/1399
REMARKS OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)
at the
University of Montana Foundation Washington Dinner
Sheraton-Park Hotel, Washington, D. C.
Thursday, August 24, 1967
7:30 p.m. (EDST)

IN A MONTANA MOOD

It has been said that the two great loves of my life are the University and the study of foreign affairs. I readily acknowledge a lasting liaison with the first and a deep absorption in the second.

The University and foreign affairs are indeed great loves. But, there is another which is greater and comes before both. That is the State of Montana and its people.

For a quarter of a century, Montanans have trusted me, as one of them, to represent their concerns, first in the House and then in the Senate of the United States. I have tried to...
sustain that trust by following the basic principle: If I do not forget the people of Montana, they will not forget me.

So for a quarter of a century, Montana's people, regardless of politics, position, power or profession, have come first with me. That is as it always has been. That is as it always will be.

That bond that ties me to Montana is woven of many strands. But before all else, it involves my personal feelings, as a citizen of the State, for its beauty, history, and people. For you who are not of Montana, let me try to tell you why the bond is inseparable, insofar as I am concerned. Let me try to explain to you why Montanans who are outside of Montana are always homesick for Montana.

To me, Montana is a symphony.

It is a symphony of color. It is painted by a thousand different plants and shrubs which set the hills ablaze--each with its own kind of inner fire--during spring and summer. Montana is the intense blue of the Big Sky reflected in the deep blue of
mountain lakes and the ice-blue of tumbling streams. It is the solid white of billowing clouds and the haze-white of snow on a hundred mountain peaks. It is the infinite themes of green in mile after mile of farm-rich valleys and in millions of acres of forests.

We, who are of Montana, know the color-harmony of a springtime of millions of wild flowers--the orange poppies, purple heather, yellow columbines, red Indian paintbrush, beargrass, and purple asters in the mountains; the tiger lilies, dogtooth violets, Mariposa lilies, bitterroot and kinnikinnick in the foothills; the shooting stars, daisies, larkspur, yellow bells, and sand lilies in the plains.

And in the long winter, we know the muted music of the snows which blanket the State. A theme of hope runs through these snows because they are the principal storehouse of the State's great natural resource of water. In one year the amount which will flow out of the mountains and rush down the hills is enough to fill Montana from boundary to boundary to a depth of six inches. And
bear in mind that Montana's 94 million acres make the State as large as the entire nation of Japan with its 100 million people.

Montana is a symphony. It is a symphony of color and it is a symphony of sounds. Listen to them for a moment, in the names of places. There are mountain ranges called the Beaverhead, the Sapphire, the Ruby, the Bear Paws, the Highwoods, the Snowies, the Beartooths, the Judiths, the Crazies, and the Big Belts. And, incidentally, there are also the Little Belts as well.

There are streams whose names sing: The Silver Bow, the Flathead, the Kootenai, and the Sun; the Jefferson, the Madison, the Gallatin and the Musselshell; the Milk, the Yellowstone, the Tongue, the Powder, the Blackfoot, and the Boulder.

And when the roll of Montana's cities and towns is called, you hear: Eureka, Chinook, Whitefish, Cut Bank; Circle, Hungry Horse, Absarokee, Butte, Wolf Point, and Great Falls. And you hear Lodge Grass, Lame Deer, Deer Lodge, Crow Agency, Big Fork, and Twodot.
These and a hundred others like them are strains in the history of the State. Each has a story and, together, they sing the story of Montana.

It began in a mist of time, with Indians—with the Crows, the Blackfeet, the Assiniboine, the Flatheads, the Chippewa-Crees, the Sioux, and the Northern Cheyennes. Then came Lewis and Clark and the great fur trading companies. When the boom in pelts died, the gold rush began. At Grasshopper Creek in 1862, the find was so rich, it was said that miners could pull up sage brush and shake a dollar's worth of dust out of the roots. The town of Confederate Gulch grew on gold. In six years, the population jumped from zero to ten thousand people. In the seventh, the gold was gone and only 64 lonely souls remained.

Indians, fur and gold echo in the overture to Montana's history and throughout, runs the beat of the famous and infamous, the hunted, the haunted, the violent and the pacific and the politic. There was, for example, the notorious Henry Plummer who, as Sheriff of Bannack, engineered the bushwhacking murders of 102 of the
citizens he was supposed to protect before he was hung by the Vigilantes. But there was also the Methodist minister Wesley Van Orsdel--Brother Van--who got off a steamer at Fort Benton in 1872 and went directly to the Four Deuces saloon to preach his first sermon; the saloon closed, respectfully, for one hour for the service. And there is Jeanette Rankin, a distinguished lady of Montana, the first woman member of Congress whose abhorrence of violence in every form was so deeply felt that she was compelled to vote her conscience against the nation's entry into World War I and World War II. And there were such political "greats" as Thomas J. Walsh, Burton K. Wheeler, James Murray, Joe Dixon, and others in the Congress.

Silver came after gold. It was struck rich in places like Argenta, Butte, Granite, Castle, Elkhorn, Monarch, and Neihart. But, when Congress discontinued the purchase of silver in 1892, the silver camps were added to the ghost towns which dotted the lonely gold trails.

Then it was copper's turn, at Butte and Anaconda in Western Montana. The struggle for copper was of such proportions
that it set off political and economic reverberations which are felt even today not only in the State, but in the nation, and throughout the world.

While some dug into Montana's earth for wealth, others sought it from what grew out of the earth. Stockmen filled the rolling grass-covered high plains of Central and Eastern Montana with cattle and sheep. In scarcely ten years, the cattle population rose from a few thousand to over a million. Then the cruel winter of 1886-87 froze 90 percent of them into grotesque ice sculptures on the plains and another Montana "boom" went "bust.

Beginning in the 19th century, railroads run through the symphony of Montana. Sledges in the gnarled hands of a hundred thousand immigrants pounded down the parallel steel ribbons, mile-upon-mile. The iron horses came rushing out across a continent. The Great Northern advertised free government land in a region of "milk and honey" to lure settlers to its line. They came in eager droves from Scandinavia, Germany, Poland, Yugoslavia, France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, Ireland and a
score of other countries. They made agriculture, mining and lumbering the State's chief industries. But the great drought of 1917 took away the milk and honey and left only a parched and stricken land and a hurt and wiser people.

Montanans drove, tumbled and stumbled into the 20th century. The State has picked itself up and started over again many times. Its history is of a people drawn from many sources, headed toward the glowing promise of the Western frontier. It is of a people who have known the collapse of hope and the renewal of hope. It is of a people who have lived in intimacy with fear as well as courage and with cruelty as well as compassion. It is of a people who have known not only the favor but the fury of a bountiful and brooding Nature. The history of Montana is the song of a people who, repeatedly shattered, have held together, persevered and, at last, taken enduring root.

Now the 20th century moves on towards the 21st and the ups and downs of the past yield to the more stable present. The State has grown out of a dependency upon a single extractive
industry. The old threat of spring flooding and summer drought grows dimmer as Yellowtail, Canyon Ferry, Hungry Horse and other dams—great and small, public and private—have risen to discipline the rushing waters. The cold temperatures—a reading of 70° below zero has been recorded at Rogers Pass—have yielded to modern heating. And the hot temperatures—it once reached 117° above in Glendive—are tempered in Montana as elsewhere by air conditioning to match its cool nights. Plane travel cuts the huge distances and the immense isolation. Indeed, the virtues of Montana’s space, clean air, and clean water, scenery and unparallel recreation opportunities are becoming better known and look ever more inviting to the rest of the nation.

Modern transition notwithstanding, something remains in the State that is durably unique and uniquely durable. It is to be found in the character of the people. Montanans are formed by the vastness of a State whose mountains rise to 12,000 feet in granite massives, piled one upon another as though by some giant hand. To drive across the State is to journey, in distance, from
Washington, D. C. north to Toronto, or south to Florida. In area, we can accommodate Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New York, and still have room for the District of Columbia.

Yet, in all this vastness, we are far less than a million people. In short, Montanans have room to live, to breathe and, above all, to think—to think with a breadth of view which goes to the far horizon and beyond. Vast and empty space and high mountains may isolate a population, but they open the minds of a people. The minds of Montanans dwell not only upon community and State, but upon the nation and the world and on the essential unity of all. And this sense of unity is buttressed by the harsh uncertainties of an all powerful environment which has taught us to draw together in a mutual concern for one another and to be hospitable to all who come from afar.

So in a sense, a lecture series on international relations which is proposed to be initiated at the University of Montana will be doing what comes naturally to Montanans, because it promises to open up new channels of understanding between us
and our unseen neighbors on this globe. The series will stimulate, I am sure, deeper insights and greater comprehension of the nation's relationships with the people who live on all of its horizons.

I need not tell you that the realization that this process will be taking place under the aegis of my name fills my heart to the full. It is far more than I ever expected when I came to Washington to represent Montana in the Congress a quarter of a century ago. It is far more than I deserve.

Indeed, I should like this honor to go where it is most due—to the woman who set out with me from Butte so long ago and who has remained a wise counsellor and steadfast inspiration through all these years. Without her, I would not be in the Congress of the United States. Indeed, I should not have reached the University of Montana or for that matter even received a high school certificate. A more appropriate title for the lecture series, therefore, would be "The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Lectures."
May I suggest, too, that if the response to the effort on which you have embarked is a good one, a modest maximum should be established for the capital of the Fund for the lectures on international affairs. If any additional monies should become available beyond that maximum, I should like to see the excess go into scholarships for the children of Montanans—and the nation's—first Americans who have not always had benefit in equal measure with the rest of us from Montana's development and the nation's progress. I refer to my friends—the Northern Cheyennes, the Crows, the Flatheads, the Assiniboines, the Blackfeet, the Chippewa-Crees, the Landless and all the others who live with us in Montana.

I suggest this procedure because the Lecture series by its very nature turns our attention to the world beyond our borders and to the promise of a fruitful future for Montanans and all Americans. It is good that our attention is so directed provided we are also prepared to look inward and backward and so,
remember what it is that we are building upon; and so, try to fill the gaps and to heal the hurts which may have been opened in the process of arriving at where we are. In that way, we shall better tie the past into the present and open wider the horizons of the future. In that way, we shall better bind together, into a greater nation, all who live in a great State and in a blessed land.