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American Constitution Bicentennial

Address by
Ambassador Mike Mansfield
September 17, 1987
American Embassy, Tokyo

It is a pleasure to welcome you here and to share in the history present this day as we honor the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution. Today in 1787 marked the beginning of the greatest political experiment this modern world has witnessed -- our country's first step toward nationhood.

We should try to imagine the scene 200 years ago: the uncertainty, the suspicions, the divisions that came so close to tearing apart the Federal Convention; the heat and humidity that came so close to dissolving it; the intense discussions, acrimonious debates, and the hard-won compromises.....

And let's not forget the individual delegates, many not much older than some of us in this room: James Madison at 36, Alexander Hamilton at 30, Charles Pinckney at 29. And of course, Benjamin Franklin, the grand old man at 81.

But it is the youth of the delegates that is remarkable -- and the responsibilities they were given: to develop a set of principles and procedures by which to establish a new government -- and in only 16 weeks! Think about it.....Think about their doubts, their aspirations, their goals.....Think about the words they chose to begin their vision with:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

It is difficult to imagine anyone quarreling with such goals, and yet the Federal Convention was the scene of many debates in which patriot was pitted against patriot. In the lobbying for and against ratification of the Constitution there was the already legendary George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and a future president, James Madison. On the other side were "give me liberty or give me death" Patrick Henry, revolutionary leaders Richard Henry Lee and Samuel Adams, and another future president, James Monroe.

What were the great issues of their day? Representation in the new Congress -- how would that be decided? What kind of system would guarantee that the larger, more populous states wouldn't just roll over the smaller ones?

The three branches of government -- which should reign supreme?

The Constitution itself -- was this to be its final form? Could it be amended? Was it specific enough in protecting the rights of the citizens it would govern?

I think we know the answers to these questions. We have two houses of Congress, one whose number of members is determined by population and one whose number of members is fixed at two per state, large or small. We have a system of checks and balances that keep our executive, legislative, and judicial branches working together as partners. We have a peaceful process for amending the Constitution, a process that has been used more than a dozen times.

There have been criticisms about the Constitution throughout our history. True, the Constitution was, and probably still is, imperfect. In an Age of Enlightenment, our forefathers were torn between the pragmatic and the ideal, between the knowledge that man was easily corruptible and the hope that man could rise above petty self-interest. This is all reflected in the records of Federal Convention debates and the written commentaries that appeared at the time.

One thing we must never forget is that these debates that went into the making of the American nation were about not just the institutions or governing principles, but also the capacity of humans to sustain them. Whatever specific disagreements there were at the Convention, the great overriding concern hanging over the entire assembly was whether "the people", "the common man" could understand what it meant to hold the ultimate power of society and what it would mean to share an ultimate destiny.

If I seem to have a particularly strong feeling for the Constitution, it is because for most of my life I have had a special relationship to it. In my teen-age years, when I first joined the Marines and came to the Pacific, the most important oath in my then-young life was the oath I took to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States. Since then, as a member of Congress and for ten years as Ambassador to Japan, I have renewed my commitment to this oath. It is the single oath that guides all of us in public service -- and that is as it should be.

To our Japanese colleagues, I say that we Americans appreciate the support you give us day in and day out. Your relationship to the Constitution is different from ours, but all of us are affected by how faithful the United States is to the principles this document stands for.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. The Constitution and its bicentennial may not be as flashy as the Statue of Liberty's centennial last year. But remember where we turn to in times of national anguish and national celebration. Remember where we turn to for redress of grievances, for restitution. Remember where we turn to for protection of our rights to freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, to trial and due process of the law.

We turn to the Constitution, its amendments, and the quest for a "more perfect Union."

Memorial Service under the Joint Auspices
of the Government and the Liberal Democratic Party

-- Proceedings --

- 13:45 All participants take their seats.
- 13:50 The outline of the procedures of the Memorial Service is explained to the participants by Mr. Akira Fukida, Member of the Memorial Service Committee.
- 13:57 The hearse carrying the ashes of the deceased arrives at the front entrance of the Hall of Nippon Budokan and is received by Mr. Yasuhiro Nakasone, Prime Minister and Chairman of the Memorial Service Committee, and Mr. Shin Kanamaru, Mr. Noboru Takeshita, Mr. Yoshiro Mori, and Mr. Masayoshi Ito, Vice Chairmen of the Memorial Service Committee.
- The urn of the ashes, carried by Mr Nobukazu Kishi, the Chief Mourner is taken to the altar down the center aisle.
- 14:00 All participants rise from their seats.
- The urn is placed on the altar by members of the Guards of Honour.
- 14:06 T.I.H. Crown Prince and Crown Princess, T.I.H. Prince and Princess Hitachi, and H.I.H. Prince Takamado enter the Hall and take their seats escorted by Mr. Shoichi Fujimori, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary.
- 14:07 Chamberlain Naoru Tanaka, Envoy of T.M. The Emperor and The Empress enters the Hall and takes his seat, escorted by Mr. Hideo Watanabe, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary.
- 14:08 All participants take their seats.
- Opening of the Memorial Service is announced by Mr. Masaharu Gotoda, Chief Cabinet Secretary and Vice-Chairman of the Memorial Service Committee.

- 14:09 The Guards of Honour enter the Hall.
All participants rise from their seats.
- 14:10 One minute's silent prayer is offered.
All participants take their seats
- 14:11 The Guards of Honour leave the Hall.
- 14:12 A film of Mr. Kishi in life is shown on the screen.
Eulogies are offered by following people:
- 14:16 Mr. Yasuhiro Nakasone, Prime Minister
- 14:26 Mr. Kenzaburo Hara, Speaker of the House of the Representatives
- 14:29 Mr. Masaaki Fujita, President of the House of Councillors
- 14:32 Mr. Koichi Yaguchi, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
- 14:35 Mr. Masaharu Doi on behalf of the friends of the late Mr. Kishi
- 14:45 The Envoy of T.M. The Emperor and The Empress proceeds to the altar, pays homage to the late Mr. Kish and leaves the Hall, escorted by Mr. Hideo Watanabe, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary.
All participants rise from their seats
Flowers are laid by the following members of the Imperial family:
- 14:47 T.I.H. The Crown Prince and Crown Princess
T.I.H. Prince and Princess Hitachi
H.I.H. Prince Takamado
All participants take their seats
Flowers are offered in the following order:

- 14:50 Mr. Yasuhiro Nakasone, Chairman of the Memorial Service Committee
- 14:51 Mr. Nobukazu Kishi, the chief mourner
- 14:52 Mrs. Nakako Kishi
Mr. Nobuo Kishi
- 14:53 Mr. and Mrs. Shintaro Abe
- 14:54 Mrs. Sachiko Abe
Mr. and Mrs. Shinzo Abe
- 14:55 Mr. Shintaro Sato

Offerings of flowers continue in the following order. Participants proceed to the exit immediately after offering flowers.

- 14:56 Mr. Kenzaburo Hara, Speaker of the House of Representatives
- 14:57 Mr. Masaaki Fujita, President of the House of Councillors
- 14:58 Mr. Koichi Yaguchi, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
- 14:59 Representatives of other political parties
- 15:07 Mr. Masaharu Doi, on behalf of the friends of the late Mr. Kishi
- 15:08 Mr. Ryugen Hosokawa
- 15:09 Mr. and Mrs. Koichi Miyoshi
- 15:10 Former Prime Ministers
Mr. Takeo Fukuda
Mr. Zenko Suzuki
- 15:15 Vice Chairmen of the Memorial Service Committee
- 15:21 Special Envoys from foreign countries, the diplomatic corps in Tokyo, and other foreign representatives.

- 15:47 Relatives of the deceased, members of the Memorial Service Committee, and those in the arena seats.
- Offering of flowers by those seated on the first and second floors continue.
- 16:30 The hearse carrying the ashes leaves Nippon Budokan for the Kishi Residence, seen off at the front entrance by the Chairman and the Vice Chairmen of the Memorial Service Committee.
- 16:40 Offering of flowers by other participants starts.
- 17:30 Offering of flowers by other participants ends.