

Maureen and Mike

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Interviewee: Ronald Reagan
Interviewer: Jim Caron
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Jim Caron: We found in our research that the young people of Montana really don't know a lot about him [Mike Mansfield], so we think that's a shame, and we're going to try to spread the word through a documentary film and some live presentations in the schools. So we prepared some questions and wondered if you'd just say a few words about Mike too.

Ronald Reagan: Fine. Yes.

JC: All right, are we rolling over there? And if you don't mind, sir, Geoff [Sutton] will just take some photographs as we go.

RR: All right.

JC: This is Geoffrey Sutton, by the way, our photographer and this is my wife, Nancy. You'd like that name I'm sure. [Laughter]

RR: Gee, I've heard that before. [Laughter]

JC: Are we ready?

Unknown Speaker: Could you give me a quick test on that.

JC: Just talk for a second.

RR: What?

JC: Just test. Count to 10.

RR: Oh alright one, two, three, four and I'll add another four and that's eight.

JC: All right sir, Mike Mansfield of course was a Democrat.

RR: Yes.

JC: And when you came into office you asked him to stay on as ambassador to Japan. What was your motivation there in taking a Democrat?

RR: Well, I had an opportunity to see him at work before I was a president. As a matter of fact, back when I was a governor. And my first time, first visit to Japan, there at that time was a Democratic president, and I could feel that maybe it might be a little embarrassing for the ambassador to entertain me there and yet he did. And it was a meeting in which the very top business leadership of Japan were guests at this little kind of reception on my behalf. I had an opportunity to visit with them and all that and to see him and his relationship with them, and I discovered that Mike Mansfield was a very popular man in Japan with the Japanese, and yet at the same time he never faltered in his proper representation of the United States. And when I got to Washington there is a room there in the Capitol where, well, for president, for example, to say be invited to lunch with a group of senators or a committee of some kind, in this room it didn't surprise me at all that the one big picture in the room was of Mike Mansfield. And so it was just—I just knew that we couldn't do any better with regard of an ambassador and his relationship with the government of the country where he was. You couldn't make, do any better than Mike Mansfield.

JC: Great, thank you. The next question, I think you just answered, is asking you to comment on his effectiveness as an ambassador during your administration. Was there any incidents or anything that he had to handle while you were president?

RR: Well, we had relations with Japan, and we were dealing with them on things that we thought needed to be corrected, such as, well, their voluntary limit on the automobiles that they would send in here. You know when I became president we were in an economic recession, and there were a great many things that needed to be done, and this came about in which they volunteered, the Japanese, to set a voluntary quota on the number of automobiles that they would ship to America. And this prevented us from probably taking some unfriendly actions in restricting them or something, and again, I had to know that that was the hand of Mike Mansfield. Very evident.

JC: That's good. That's a great story. You obviously, during your administration, did amazing things in Europe and the relationship with Russia and so on. Did Mansfield allow you to concentrate on other parts of the world? Did you have that kind of confidence in him in Japan?

RR: Oh yes, the relationship was such in his handling of his position there was such that I never had a worry about the pressure that was put on me and the time that was required with some of the relationships that you've just mentioned. And I don't think I could have been as free to move in those other areas if it hadn't been for an ambassador of his quality there in Japan.

JC: That is amazing. Any comments regarding the legacy that he may have left, or how the regard you found for him in Washington?

RR: Well, as I said, I've told you about that venture in that Senate office building and all, and I know just from my contact over the years with the senators that he really rated top among

them. He was, regardless of party, he was a greatly respected man, and so that was a great help also.

JC: The regardless of party is what we keep hearing over and over from everyone we've talked to, that it didn't matter, he was an American.

RR: That's right, yes.

JC: And finally, any personal remembrances you may have or anecdotes or humorous stories about him or anything like that.

RR: Oh, I wish I could come up with something, but there were then repeated visits there before I became a president, when I was still governor of—and then when Richard Nixon was president. He asked me to make some visits for him and contact with heads of state in several other countries, so that when I became president I walked into office having met with the heads of state and visited in 18 different countries. And there in Japan it was just the same thing in spite of the change, and I won. I won't use names here, but one little thing at which he had introduced me, Mike had introduced me to one of the high ranking officials there in a dinner that was given that my dinner partner beside me was the wife of this official, and to develop that she her great hobby was gardening and she was a great gardener and visited with this and everything else and raising all kinds of fruits and things. And I happen to mention dates. Well she didn't know anything about dates, and you know if you try to describe a fruit to someone who doesn't know about that food or has never seen it or anything that's a pretty difficult thing. What do you do? You can't compare it to anything, and so when I came back, for this country, I went down to the desert and they put up those wonderful baskets of dates in which the seed is taken out. They are stuffed dates, they are sugared, and they're beautiful and so forth. They make great Christmas gifts and all of this and I bought one of those and sent it to this official and his wife. I never heard a word back, and I wondered and worried, did something happen that they didn't get it? And then came a trip over there, and there I was in his company, not hers but his again, and so I took advantage of that and told him about this that I'd sent and I said, "Did you get it?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Well how did you—" "Well," he said, "we planted them and none of them came up."

JC: [Laughter]

RR: But that had been arranged, the meeting had been arranged by Mike.

JC: That's very funny. Well, that's great. You've covered all my questions, and do we want to maybe ask President Reagan to stand for a picture or two if that's all right, sir.

RR: Well sure, fine. Well, I could go on just talking about him. I admire Mike greatly.

JC: We have spent the last year of our lives really concentrating on his career and he is an amazing fellow. We had about an hour and a half with him in Washington and he is just remarkable. He has very, very high regard for you and sends his regards.

[End of interview]